

# PARABEEK

PARADOXICAL-SECULAR FANZINE OF SFERA SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY **No. 127**



GREAT **APRIL 2015 TOUR: EASTERCON • EUROCON • PYRKON**

# Lessons to learn, stories to read and Finns to support!

Welcome to another English edition of Parsek, the oldest SF fanzine in former Yugoslavia! Croatian fandom is still large, vibrant and well, thank you so much for asking! Spurred on by the awesome positive feedback we've had to our Loncon3/Shamrokon issue in English, we've decided to reach out some more. Spring is after all a great time for new beginnings - so here's an English issue for Dysprosium, Pyrkon and Eurocon in St. Petersburg. We want more European readers for Croatian writers! So, in this issue there's a cross section of Croatian authors from different generations, who come from different backgrounds, be it in science fiction, be it in Croatian geography.

Another very positive thing that has happened since our Loncon3/Shamrokon issue is the fact that we have been receiving a number of non-Croatian stories for publication in the Croatian edition of Parsek. We are thrilled! Yes, we are open to international stories and we will translate them into Croatian for you, but alas, we are not a paying market. Currently, we are only able to

provide translation from English and Italian, but we are hoping to be able to translate from other European languages into Croatian in the future.

And while we're at it - reaping the benefits traveling to international cons has brought us - we decided to place two more things in this issue. First, an overview of TransFerzala, a newly launched local project designed to get Croatian fans traveling between cons more. We also plan to use its lovely design, pretty colours and awesome awards to get more people who've never done so before to come to conventions. (It seems two Croatian girls appeared at Locon3 and by sheer chance ended up registering with one of the Croatian volunteers to whom they expressed severe regret that manifestations of this kind were unavailable in their home country. The volunteer, who happens to be an active fan who's also been a con-runner for more than a decade, was rendered speechless by shock. a rare occurrence.)

In order not to loose the buzz last summer's Worldcon has definitely brought to Europe, in addition to

making history with more than 10 000 members, we are featuring an article explaining how you - and we are looking at YOU, Pyrkon and Eurocon members! - can help

Helsinki win the bid for Worldcon in 2017!  
Hope you enjoy the read! Should you hate us, love us or despise us, do let us know! In detail! :)

Mihaela Marija Perković  
Zagreb, March 30th, 2015.

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**Editors:** Mihaela Marija Perković, Mirko Karas. **Design:** Zrinka Denić

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**Cover:** Ana Frković (Citizn999) *Tarot VI - The Lovers*

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Citizn999/380987682056723>

PARSEK has been awarded as the best european SF fanzine on Eurocon 2011 in Stockholm

Parsek on web: [parsek.sfera.hr](http://parsek.sfera.hr)

Contact: [parsek@sfera.hr](mailto:parsek@sfera.hr)

Ana Frković (Citizn999) is an artist from Rijeka, the most famous port in Northern Croatia over which many European giants fought. Ana was born an artist, taking up painting at an early age. As a young woman, she found herself interested in fantasy, surrealism and magic. Her artistic range is wide - she creates her pieces in both traditional and digital tools, but most of all she prefers oil based paints and black ink. She has had solo exhibitions at the Klub mladih Rijeka (Youth Club Rijeka) and at the Myth and Legends of Istria & Kvarner Festival as well as at the Croatian SF conventions such as Liburnikon, Istrakon and Rikon. She is the author of the cover of this issues of Parsek.

Igor Rendić is a Croatian genre writer, a huge SF fan and a con-runner who earns his living as a freelance translator. He's been into speculative fiction for as long as he can remember, enjoying it in every shape, form and medium. He's won several Croatian awards for his genre writing. He's also a master procrastinator. This time next year he hopes to be one step closer to his dream of being a full-time writer. You can find his story "Ayelen" in the STEAMPUNK: The Other Worlds Anthology and you can find him on Twitter as @IgorR1985

# Cave by the sea

by IGOR RENDIĆ

He brought me flowers today, just like he does every day. Every morning they're laid out on his pillow, minute yellow petals like flecks of gold under the morning sun. He says the flowers grow all over the coast, in tiny patches of dirt between the rocks and that there's always seven of them. So he will take six and leave the one so another six may grow.

I will never understand how he does it. How does he scale the cliffs and traverse the rocks, always so sure on his feet? Sighted men would break their neck a hundred times over, shatter their bodies in a thousand places around our cave. To the north, east and west there is naught but razor sharp rocks. An endless grey sea to the south. Yet every morning he crosses the rocks, glides over them as if they were glass, almost as if he can see.

My kind does not expect to be loved. We bear a curse from the ancient times, a curse for a crime none remember anymore. We live apart from man but also from one another; we bring man pain and suffering and expect naught but hatred and contempt in return.

When we draw our final breath, no one mourns us. Hundreds celebrate.

I have always been different. I had to be, or I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be me. They told me, others of my kind, that there always had been and always would be those like me: every few generations one is born with a desire to change her life. Perhaps that is also a punishment from gods, because despite the greatest effort I cannot truly change what I am.

I cannot recall how he came here or what his first words to me have been. All I know is that he arrived and is with me still, here on this desolate shore. I never asked about his life before here. I never asked how or why he came to me. I simply try to accept it. He loves me and that is all I need.

He is always out when I rise, fishing or collecting bird eggs. His eyes do not see but his hands, his ears and his nose guide him through life better than a hundred eyes.

Our clothes are simple. I need no jewels nor gold nor silks to adorn my body. Just a simple dress and my cap. My cap, almost a helmet,

fits my skull perfectly. It covers my head from forehead to nape, from pate to the ears. It is metal, thin and hard. Perfect. It covers what needs be covered and does not let it grow. I can recall the night I received it. It was smooth under my fingers and gleamed darkly under the light of the oil lamp as the old blacksmith handed it to me. It was also the night I took a life for the last time. Then I took a knife and started cutting. It took a long time and the pain was great but when I'd finished and cleaned the blood from my now smooth head I put on the helmet, pressed it down hard and left it there. For as long as I live it will not be removed.

I rise and dress myself. I already know how the day will end though it has but started. As the sun sets we will lie in our bed and make love, then fall asleep in a gentle embrace, spent but sated and happy.

"I wish I could see, even for a moment," he will say, as he always does.

"You do not need eyes to see me," will be my reply, snug in his embrace, in the darkness

of the cave. "I know. I know," he will whisper gently and I will know that he is smiling. I will say nothing more but kiss him and listen to him breathe and fall asleep.

Then I will exit the cave into the night, look up into the starry sky and cry. I will cry for the fortune I have been given, I who have brought only pain and suffering. Cry for the hope I have been given, I who have brought only despair. Cry mostly for fear that it will not last forever. Fear that the gods, cruel and capricious, will grant his wish. Then I will wipe the tears away, call myself a fool and tell myself to return between the sheets and feel his gentle warmth on my skin.

But one thought will trouble me still. My eyes. I would have rid myself of them long ago were it not impossible, for they will - after I die and the rest of me turns to dust - still take life if allowed. There never was nor will there ever be a creature that could look into my eyes and see anything but its doom.

Every part of me may be beautiful. Except for my eyes. Thus it is with every Gorgon.



Milena Benini is an award-winning Croatian speculative fiction author who writes short stories, serialized novels and very interesting theoretical essays on SF genre, feminism and vampires. She lives in Zagreb with a husband, two daughters and lots of pets. Her novel "Priestess of the Moon" is available from Amazon. Find her on Twitter as @milerama

# Singularity of Cerberus

by MILENA BENINI

Deep and -er, fast and -er. I slide through warm darkness, my body following traces caught on the edge of the consciousness. Under my lids, half-formed images slip over my brain, soundless, barely registering: supposedly customized porn, but actually bland, bland, bland: I am here anonymously.

I follow the glowing green line that flickers just beyond my reach. My bots have been here before; they've marked the path for me. I swivel and open my eyes as the green light grows stronger. I've arrived.

My destination is a private account that wants me to identify myself. The keeper of the gate is a three-headed dog – indicating a certain lack of imagination on the part of the owner, it's the default skin – but I caress its huge heads with my weightless hands and feet, and let it lick me without flinching. It's stupid enough to think I like it. It lets me pass.

Once inside the account, I call up my work-routines. I am no longer flowing, but a thing of squares and angles, slipping seamlessly into the holes of the index, becoming one with its behind-the-scene crunchers. They tickle me as I extrude feelers, get the sense of the shape and flow of the thing. It's dormant right

now, but my touches waken it. Convinced of my mastery, the crunchers slobber up my angled and multiplied limbs, eager for my command.

Behind my work-routines, my brain gets into gear. Up until now, it was all a matter of dataware. Now is where my bioware gets into play. Creativity.

Whirling through the infogel, I grab a wisp of this, suck in a strand of that, pull them together. Apart, but different now, re-connected. This goes here, and that no longer belongs there, it should be in that other orifice. High and -er, down and left, right, in, out. Poetry in virtual motion. Pure art.

In case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm an ambindexer. I am the monster from your dreams, the one who breaks into your backups and lifebases and fucks up your data, so you wake up with a unicorn's head and a debt to society, or with your aunt Jemima forever lost to humanity, or simply with a tear in your eye that you can't explain. It depends on two things only: who pays me, and how much.

I'll tell you a secret: I don't do it for the pay. I



do it for the kicks.

Oh, yes, there is pleasure to be had in fucking the brains out of data. Everybody knows it. Everybody does it. Don't tell me you never messed around your own ini, that you never pushed a hand down your config.

Of course you did.

Only, unlike most of you, I know exactly what I'm doing. Officially, I'm a rendexer. Once you screw up your files, I fix them. I hold an MA in indexation. While I was working on it, I lived off ambindexing, and I just never stopped. Ironies of life.

I kept the last piece inside me a moment longer, took a deep breath, concentrated, and let it out as a tear-shaped blob that almost – but not quite – fit to the place where it came from. The blob was still warm from my workout, and it was easy to push it in so that it filled all the nooks and crannies, adapt to its former place, looking exactly as if it hadn't changed a bit.

I turned to go and patted the cerberus on the head when one of its jaws closed over my wrist. Soft enough not to hurt me, but firm enough that I couldn't tear away.

"Baby," it said, in a deep voice next to which the air momentarily glittered with the James Earl Jones Foundation banner.

Cerberi don't talk, at least not the ones directly off the boards used as the default skin. Someone had tweaked him.

"Yes?" I said carefully.

"I need you, baby." With that JEJF-voice, he sounded... almost challenging. With the accent on almost. I'm a pro.

Slowly, I pulled my hand from its jaws. "Some other time, throggy. I don't have the time right now."

A second set of jaws closed around my ankle, this time a smidgen stronger. "Make time," said the third head. It smiled. "Don't worry, it

will be worth it. You're a pro, aren't you?"

Oh. So, a doggy with a human mind behind it. Or at least a program much better than the original.

Whatever it was, I was on its turf, and I didn't like it one bit. "You think this is a good place for business talks, throggy?" I said and, before he could react, I ran, leaving behind only a link token.

The exit was a little rougher than I like it, but I had to hurry to make time. To think. I was certain Cerberus wasn't my victim. No two people treat their data in the same manner; after a while, you develop a sense for those things. So, it had to be a new customer, and obviously not the legal kind. Fine.

I hooked into the link I had shot him. Sexende. From the outside, it's a small backwater of a wog, with the logged-in tag of studying the role of gendersexed people in the Ostende Spring. There are probably around six people in the world interested in that part of history, and maybe a dozen more who might blunder in by accident, looking for thesis material. They had a bot with a slightly irregular timer that would populate the wog with mediocre materials compiled from ridiculously accessible sources, and a few scripts that occasionally answered. If everything was all dead, that would have been suspicious. Like this, there was just enough traffic not to attract the cleaners, but never enough to dig it up.

But, if you jumped a few slashes, Sexende became a much more interesting place. They gathered peeps interested in alternative forms of sex: virtualists, fantasist, all kinds of –ists. They even had a corner reserved for the gendersexed. I passed through the appropriately dim lights of the front bar, waved to Perry at the bar to bring me a drink, and went straight into one of the many back rooms. Perry will know my token and will send me the bringer.

Yes, I spend a lot of time there. And no, it's none of yours which kind of –ists are mine.

I had expected to have the time for at least

one of Perry's martinis before my customer showed up. I was sure he would try to rescript the access, maybe even trace me through the token. Of course, it would be of no use. Did I mention I'm good?

But I didn't expect my customer to be that good. Even before my drink had arrived, one wall of the room melted into pixels, and then I was facing Cerberus. The wall closed politely behind him, again with a tiny pixelworks display. Glittering particles dropped to the floor and whirled there, rising like a wave and climbing up Cerberus' legs, over the wide dog shoulders, until all three heads disappeared in them. The ball of pixels exploded with a soft pop, and in its place was standing another avatar, with a soft smile on his lips and two martinis in his hands.

And it would all have been totally 2.0 if the avatar hadn't been my work. Based on several PD-profiles and some tiny matrices picked off the boards, it was tweaked exactly to my wishes.

Except that my frankenstein was not yet finished, while this one was. Cerberus hadn't just traced me by my token; he'd given me a complete workover.

Absolutely impossible. I'd said I was good. Not the best, maybe, but I do know what people can and cannot do to me. I was facing a stalker.

"I am not a stalker," he said, sitting down across from me. "I'm just really good. Martini?"

It hadn't been all that hard to figure out what I must have been thinking. His voice was perfect, the movement with which he offered me the glass too perfect. Nobody is that good. This took months of work. And the only way to learn a little more about him was to accept the game – at least for now.

I took the glass and looked at it. Perry's brand twinkled on the edge of the stem. I took a sip.

"What do you want?" I asked. "And who are you?"

A button saying Cerberus appeared next to his head. "It will do just fine for now."

"I can see I don't have to introduce myself."

He touched the edge of the glass with his lower lip and smiled. "Oh, no." Took a sip, never moving his eyes off me. "I am your biggest fan."

His seduction routines were not the freshest. But, somehow, regardless, they still worked. All right, the fact that he'd stolen my design helped a lot. But I had to admit there was something in his performance as well.

"You still haven't answered my first question." Before that perfect smile, I had to protect myself somehow. "What do you want from me?"

He put his glass on the table. "What you do best, baby. Ambindexing."

"I didn't think you wanted your family photos organized. Who, what, where? And how much?"

He looked aside, bit his lower lip for a heartbeat.

I could have thought as much. He'd had enough time to finish up my frankenstein – he might have been following me a year, or two – but that didn't mean he could afford my services. Maybe he even had hopes that a little flirting would make me forget my professionalism.

I finished my martini and stood up. "I hope you're at least good for the drinks," I said, and started towards the door.

His hand around my lower arm was just as precisely soft and inevitable as the cerberus' teeth had been. He'd skipped, so we now stood close to each other, so close that I felt his breath on my neck when he sighed. Oh, God. He even smelled of sandalwood.

"This is just an advance. There will be a bonus, too."



At that moment, my byfeed flashed with six new registered thanks.

In principle, six thanks are not beyond reach: I can get as much in two weeks of regular work. Pretending I didn't feel his forefinger sliding down my back, I checked them.

And coughed in surprise. They were not just any thanks. Two were registered on big blortals, where a well-positioned thanks is worth pure gold. The other four were in smaller places, but with a lot of specialized traffic, chosen so smart as to give me the largest coverage possible. I couldn't make that much in two years.

Counting the inevitable domino effect of such thanks with affiliations, I couldn't make it in ten. I am good, yes. But I'm no fucking Elvis, I know that. Cerberus wanted something very naughty.

My throat was dry. I stepped forward to give myself room to breathe. He let me get away from his hands, but I could feel his look ping me relentlessly.

"Someone needs to be completely fucked up," I said, trying not to look at him.

He was right behind me again, without touching, but close enough for his avatar to warm mine.

"Oh, yes," he said to my neck.

A token with an address appeared before my hands. I took it and opened it.

I hadn't been expecting it would be a small private index. But this was big. This thing ran half the media of RegEurope. Ninety-eight countries, sixteen autonomous units, four different economic systems and fucking postnukes. The second power of the world, right after Africa. Population registries alone must be taking up more space than anything I'd worked before. If such a base were ambindexed, half of RegEurope would see a dry tsunami. Someone agile enough could use it to get indecently rich, or to change the political situation completely. The Fifth

International, the fight club, who knows.

Cerberus' fingers dropped to my shoulders, slid down my arms, softly, softly. Stopped at the middle of my back, pulled back a little. His thumbs were softly circling just under my shoulder blades. Promising. The transfer was perfect: considering what the Sexende does, they have to have it. I felt the hairs on my neck stand up, my nipples grow firm.

One part of my brain was sorry that I had met him in Sexende; it would have been so much easier to say no. The other part was not sorry at all.

Fine, that's not called brain. In my defense: it was a challenge that doesn't come twice in a lifetime. I told you already that payment is not my main reason.

"What kind of protection should I expect?" I asked softly.

Cerberus' breath licked my back.

"No protection. Just naked data."

"That's... impossible."

"I'll take care of it. Don't worry." Without those thanks, I wouldn't be likely to swallow that. But it was just on the edge of possible.

"Are there any... special demands?"

He shook his head. "I leave that to you," he said into my hair. "You... are a natural."

"You think?"

"I know." He bent closer. "Trust me, baby. I know."

The tip of his tongue flickered against the sensitive skin behind my ear. And then I was alone, in one of Perry's back rooms, with a half-empty glass of virsim martini, more thanks on my account than ever in my life, and horribly tempted to use up at least part of them right away, here at Perry's.

I resisted the temptation. First, I felt I had

used up my day's quota of stupid moves. And second, I knew, whatever I ordered, whomever I picked up, that wouldn't be it. My perfect frankenstein had gone.

I left the room and sat at the bar. "Another martini, Perry," I said.

"Another? I haven't sent you the first one yet. You're really nervous today."

Not only did he break into the middle of one of Perry's back rooms. Cerberus had put us to a separate time loop with a slowed-down tick – without either Perry or me noticing.

That was the first time when I really believed he might deliver on that promise of naked data. Only then did I remember we hadn't even mentioned the bonus. There would be other opportunities, I comforted myself.

I know, I know. Not brains.

\* \* \*

Regardless of Cerberus' words and whatever trust I might have put in them, I prepared for the operation like never before. There was always the possibility that he considered me merely as disposable goods, that I was needed as diversion for something larger and more evil – or maybe smaller and more evil.

More than anything, I was troubled by the fact that I couldn't trace him. Perry, my thanks – even my previous victims' cerberus had no idea who had used it so utterly. As if Cerberus didn't even exist. If it weren't for my buttons whenever I opened a blortal, I'd have thought it had all been a dream. But I had no intention of giving up, at least until I tried.

Which didn't mean I would skimp on protection. On the way to my destination, I passed so many twists and turns not even my own matrix could ping me. I had put on as many layers as I could carry: my secondary and tertiary avatars had avatars they weren't even aware of. As main fuel, I used a fictive company with the seat in Andalusia, braided it with off-the-shelf plugs from Neonippon, and then passed them through underwater

servers in Floating Zealand. By the time the whole thing returned to me, not even I could tell where it was coming from: every individual part was headed by a bot with the password that put it to the right place, and only re-joined once they gained a central code, letting me know who they were. All of it naked, with no bus whatsoever. I felt safe like some twentieth-century knight from a dungeon starting the search for a dragon.

I started.

Low and –er, deep and –er. I slid through warm darkness, my body following traces caught on the edge of the consciousness. They are strangely empty, clean like fresh white sheets. Around and down and up, through those strangely clear passages, with the greenish light of my scouting bot. Here and there I find signs of life, a banner, a thanks, a porn, but they all look metaphorically through me, as if I was wearing a cloak of invisibility. Cerberus? A thought tried to appear in my head, but I don't let it stay. Not now. That is why I travel with my eyes open. As soon as I close them, the passage gets a reddish shimmer, the walls I occasionally touch become soft and warm. Not. Now.

The way is long, the passage becoming narrower and darker. After a while, the visualization metaphor is no longer of help. I can almost smell the sandalwood, even though I haven't even given the metaphor of scent to this avatar.

No, it's no illusion. I really can smell sandalwood. My bot flashes and bursts, and I find myself before a half-open door.

There is no room to float; I must move bent down to pass at all. I put my palm on the door and push.

Behind them is a cerberus. Not Cerberus: just an ordinary, mindless beast, although larger than any board or package model. Seeing me, it wags its tail, all three heads offering themselves to be touched. I scratch one behind the ears, another under the chin, rub the forehead of the third.

And go in.

I am surrounded by blinding white, so strong that I must cover my eyes with my hands. Under my closed eyelids, for a moment, a dance of sparks that may be drawing Cerberus' image. I take a deep breath, call my routines.

My body lifts off the floor. The space is a ball, huge, endless in its whiteness. As soon as I leave the floor behind, the atmosphere in it grows denser, turns into gel. The gel is only half opaque; turning my head, I can tell what the functions are for which part. Multidimensional matrix, and the only sensible metaphor that we could come up with so far to allow ordinary human beings to follow it.

I elongate my hands into tentacles, ooze new limbs. But there's nothing to catch. Infogel accepts me, embraces me, caresses me. The longer I am in it, it becomes warmer, achieves the temperature of my body. The huge index lying in its center wakes up slowly. I can feel it in the way in which background processes slip through my fingers. As if they were daring me, like the accidental touch of a fish in the sea. Whenever I think I've got it, caught it, a new glimmer appears to take me down another way.

In slow, careful movements, I try to reach the center. Like a labyrinth constantly changing, the links overlap. Whenever I think I've come somewhere, I discover the infogel around me had wriggled. As if I were trying to grasp an oiled body in my hands. Indexes are usually passive; they let me examine them, consider them, pat them down. This one, for some reason, doesn't. Or maybe it's just me failing to understand it. I wrestle with its shape, and can't discern it. Only parts, as if I have turned into a group of blind men patting an elephant. I cannot grasp it. And I want to. I want.

I realize I won't be able to work with my complicated armor. Slowly, unwillingly, I discard the first layer. Faraway regularities that had flickered on the edge of moiré suddenly sharpen up to a picture. The infogel squeezes more strongly around me. That's good. If I make it go solid, I'll be able to deal

with it.

I throw away another layer of protection, and another. The metaphor is stupidly simple. Around my multiplied limbs, pieces of metal armor, spacesuit, clothes roll aside. I throw it all away, and remain floating, completely naked. Infogel, by now with the texture of a tense muscle, slides around me. Hugs me around the waist, passes between the limbs, presses against my breasts. Slides up my neck, touches my cheeks. Stops, as if hesitating, on my lips.

I close my eyes. I open my mouth. And I suck.

We whirl through the ball, the firming of the gel firmly wrapped around me. Some parts are almost too firm by now: I can feel squeezing, rubbing, here, here, and here. The part that entered my thought, on the other hand, seems to be melting, sliding down me, like a living tongue in my insides. I could also melt, join it...

No. That's not why I came. Abruptly, I turn into a thing of angles and corners, here, and here. On the end of my tentacles, I develop strong square blocks that pass through gel. Surprised, the gel backs away for a moment, turns around, but it's too late. I have caught it, leaned down here, hooked up over there. Slowly, gradually, I close my mouth, biting on what's in it.

I am answered by mass transformation in the gel. It's all of blocks now, different sizes, but perfectly fitting with mine. We remain like that for a moment, clinched, unable to move. I can feel the foreign blocks among my own, standing, pulsing, softly, distantly, waiting.

I turn soft suddenly, letting the imagined gravity drop me on the blocks, around them. I suck the part inside me, and I grasp it. Bioware and creativity. The blocks return to gel, firm but soft enough for me to move through it, and its data are mine. I play with them, touch them randomly, slide through some, only relink others. This and this suddenly make something completely different, and what had passed through me will never be the same again. High and —er,

low and –er, and left, and right, and in, and out.

I reach the middle, which now looks like a golden ball, the yolk of some giant egg. I throw myself in it head first, my mouth open, my limbs spread, ready for anything. The golden softness surrounds me from all sides, elastic, strong, enters me of its own desire and mine, leaves and returns, changed, the same. At one point, it seems to me as if we had switched places, and I am now the huge, impossible golden egg, my index a tiny sliver that managed, through tenacity and agility, to push deep inside me. And maybe it was just something breaking in the metaphor; who knows. In the moment when I no longer know who is who, and who is doing what to whom, a tiny bulb flashes in my head. I know that touch. Know that smell.

And then I know nothing at all, and can only grunt like one of Circe's animals, or howl like Odysseus listening to the sirens' song. But it's comforting that the index is no better.

When it all comes to an end, I remain lying on the floor of the now empty hall, and it seems to me that I will never again have enough strength to get up. And then someone covers me with a blanket and sits next to me. Takes out a cigarette. Lights it. Blows away smoke mixed with the smell of sandalwood.

"Wow," he said softly, a little out of breath. "I knew it would be good... but not that good."

I didn't want to look at him. I didn't want to see him.

He leaned over me and lowered his cigarette hand before my lips. His fingers were slightly shaky. "Want a puff?"

I did, and I took it.

"You," I said, because I couldn't say nothing.

"Yes. Me."

OK. That was stupid. Maybe. But, if you think for a moment, there is no reason there should be no engine singularity. The moment when

an index, or any other software entity, reaches self-awareness through complexity. Starts making its own decisions. Software. Bioware. It's already hard to tell them apart.

There were two possibilities. Either my guess was correct. Or not. That's the trouble with binary systems. No middle ground.

And I only had one way to check it.

"How did you manage to pull yourself back together so quickly?" I asked, and took the cigarette from his hand, but I still wouldn't turn around. If he had no idea what I was talking about, I would feel better if he couldn't see my face.

But he only laughed softly. "Who says I did? I just have enough resources to appear – here, in my metaphorical bed – even when my data is still fucked all over."

I took a puff. True, even the cigarette didn't taste so well as soon as it was out of its hand. I turned to my back and looked at it.

"Why, forchrissake?" I asked. "Why would any data index, even self-aware, want someone to totally screw up all of its data? Why, for all that's softwarey, did you want me to fuck you so completely?"

He laughed. "Because you do it so well, baby." He took the cigarette from my hand, took a puff, gave it back to me. "I've been watching you for a while now, and I wanted to... feel it on my own tables."

Well behind him, the faraway walls of his internal ball started re-filling with infogel blocks. He was putting himself back together, astoundingly fast, automatically. He must have tucked an independent routine somewhere, one that remembered it all and was now putting back into place. Smart guy.

"So, there is no conspiracy? Nobody wanted to rearrange the political map of the world? There is no fight club? RegEurope has not stopped?"

He shook his head. "Right now it's running on

backup. And I just wanted a fuck.”

I covered my eyes with my hands. “So you got yourself a whore.”

He leaned over me, caught my wrists, made me move my hands away. “What could I have done?” he asked. “Pinged you and said, Hi, I’m the largest local data index, and I’d like to take you out to dinner? Would you have said yes?”

It wouldn’t be honest to say I would have, but I was not prepared to admit it. So I kept silent and closed my eyes.

Stupid move. Under my lids, I was instantly awash in images of Cerberus wrapped around me, deep inside me in places where no one had ever been. Anyone with a trace of self-esteem would now have just run, and spent the next few centuries trying to forget the craziest, most impossible, fucking best sex ever.

Something touched my lips. Not his hand; something softer. Something that smelled like a rose.

I opened my eyes. Cerberus was still sitting next to me, a rose in his hand.

“What’s that?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Your bonus?” He slid the rose over my chin, to my neck. Lowered it between my breasts. A slight, cat-like smile appeared on his face.

“I can stop if you want,” he whispered.

My head shook on its own. It may not be brains, but sometimes it just takes over.

The rose slipped lower. “I’m glad,” he said, following the petals with his lips. “And afterwards, I’ll take you to dinner.”

“Oh, yes,” I answered. “Oh, yes!”



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The award winning author Zoran Krušvar is one of Croatia's finest when it comes to writing speculative fiction. When not writing, he dabbles in video-taking, game-making, literary workshop-running and all kinds of creative, fun stuff. Hailing from the wet, grey city of Rijeka, he is hell bent on improving its cultural development by taking part in different projects designed for young people. He tweets as @zorankrusvar.

# RENTALS

by ZORAN KRUŠVAR

Translated from Croatian to English by Tanja Štajduhar

I'm ten years old.

Mom's crying.

Dad's sitting under the shower, water spraying on him, sliding off his skin in tiny streams.

He's shaking and sobbing like my little brother Marko when he's ill. The shower curtain's torn.

Everywhere I look there's rust, and the ceiling is covered by those dark damp stains. Some

of the tiles are cracked, but it's not my fault, they were already like that when we moved in.

It's not my fault mom and Dad are crying,

either, but I think maybe Marko is to blame because he's sick. He's in mom's arms, crying

along with her. Or maybe it's Nikola Tesla's fault, though I don't know who he is. Dad is

squealing with his head between his hands.

As he pulls his skin tight, a thin pale line starts showing on his forehead – it's a surgery scar.

You can't normally see it, the doctors made it so that it wouldn't show because they can do

that, but when the skin is pulled really tight, then it starts showing. A thin white line, like a

sewing thread. I guess those doctors didn't think my Dad would be stretching out his skin

under the shower. I still don't know what it's all for. I know they opened up my Dad's head so

they could put that thing in, that device made of plastic and wire that shows under his hair,

there in the back where his neck ends and his head begins.

He needs it for work.

When he's asked about his job, Dad says he's not working. I asked him if that was a lie, but

he told me it wasn't one 'cause he was really out of work since machines took over his old

job. It's just that he sometimes has to go,

'cause we need the money, and then he does some different job. But that's only once every

ten days. That's what he told me. Mom is always sad and nervous when my Dad goes

out to work. I can see that she doesn't like that thing either, that device the doctors had to

open up my Dad's head for. I asked her why he doesn't take it out then, but she told me it's

not just that little thing sticking out of his head, that it's in his whole head and the doctors

would have to open it up again to take it out.

That's really expensive and we have no money. And Dad is the one bringing home the

money when he comes back from work, and to do that he needs that... ..whatever the

doctors put in his head. I've also heard mom saying it was all the fault of some man who

died more than a hundred years ago, but she didn't say that to me, and I knew she didn't

want me to hear it. So I didn't wanna ask;



"What's that Nikola Tesla's fault? And who was he, anyway?"

My brother Marko is often sick. That's why he cries that much. Then mom is sad, too, because the drugs Marko has to take cost a lot, and we have no money. Then Dad goes out to work and she gets even sadder and cries along with Marko. I practice not to cry 'cause I want to be brave, but sometimes I don't make it and I start crying, too.

Dad came back from work today and I could see he had a bad day. So now he's sitting under the shower, naked and trembling.

Maybe he's trembling 'cause he's cold? The boiler's dead and we have no warm water, but Dad brought money today, and mom's gonna call the repairman to fix it tomorrow. And she's gonna cook a special lunch for us, and buy the drugs for Marko, and I'm gonna get new shoes and clothes. Everything's gonna be better tomorrow. And today they're crying.

Dad, and mom, and Marko. I'm the only one not crying, because I'm practicing being brave. I'm standing in the bathroom looking at my Dad, how he's trembling, how the water is running off him in streams, how a thin red line is welling out underneath him, making its way toward the drain just like a brush leaves a trail of paint when you drag it through the water.

I'm practicing being brave.

I'm seventeen.

My old lady's crying.

A man in a black suit is opening the little see-through plastic door and inserting an urn into the suitable opening. The urn holds my old man's ash. The man in the black suit closes the door, locks them, hands the key to my old lady and leaves us to say a final dignified goodbye to the deceased. Thank you, oh, man in the black suit, but can you bring back what our dear departed sold a long long time ago? There's another door right beside the plastic final resting place of my father. The door the key to which is dangling around my old lady's neck. "Maybe Marko and Dad are together now?", she asks. "I'm sure they are", I respond calmly, in a voice that perishes the

thought that I could be uncertain of what I'm proclaiming. I'm not crying today. I never cry. The law says I won't be a grown-up for another year, but I feel I already am.

Everything is clear to me. All the things I once didn't understand have cleared like the water going through a filter. I don't wanna think about my old man, but I cannot escape it.

They had to take the device out of his head before he was cremated. The device. "Tesla CT 3.01" Cerebral Telecommunicator. They named the factory after Nikola Tesla, the scientist who invented remote control and the wireless transfer of electricity. Now I know well enough how my old man earned money and I know well enough why he and my old lady were crying.

But I'm not crying.

I am brave.

I'm twenty.

Mother is crying.

I'm in a hospital bed. I'm not feeling very bad.

The food is good here, better than in the shelter Mother and I sleep and live in. And it's clean. Not decrepit like that other hospital, the one Mother will have to go to. Her health has become much worse lately. She should've already received treatment, but we still have no money to pay for it. Now we don't, but we soon will. I'm sorry they had to shave my head, but my hair will grow back. I will keep it long and you won't be able to see a single piece of plastic and wire I can now feel under the bandages, in the back of my head where my skull connects to my neck. Mother is silent, tears flowing down her cheeks. Her hair laced with grays is falling untamed over her face marred by wrinkles and dark circles under her eyes. She has grown old much too soon. Will I follow in her footsteps? I know she didn't want her child to make money this way, but what else is to be done? I can't find work and I don't know how to steal. Should I turn tricks? How much could I earn? All too little.

She tried. Never told me, but I know she did. I found out. Of course I didn't tell her, it would've killed her. Will this kill her? Will she

be able to get better when she knows how I earned the money to pay for her treatment? She won't say anything. She can't. She knows I'm doing it all for her, just like she knows signing that contract was not easy for me. The kind man explained it all to me, although I knew it all to begin with.

"Thoughts, emotions, sensations... When reduced to the basics, they're nothing but tiny electric impulses. You smell something nice – zing, a tiny spark of electricity goes from your nose to the olfactory centers in the brain. You wish to see what that nice smelling thing is, and another spark goes from your brain to your eyes and they turn in that direction. You gaze upon a flower and you think you saw a pretty picture, but it's really a current of electricity flowing from your eyes to the centers of sight in your brain. The brain is filled with electric activity. And Mr. Nikola Tesla revealed to us the hidden secrets of electricity a long, long time ago!" He tapped my head with his index finger. I said nothing as he continued with his explanation:

"We'll put a network of little nano-electrodes into your head. They will neither hurt nor disrupt your life in any way. You won't even know they're there. Here, behind your head," he touched the very place out of which Tesla CT 4.03 device is now sticking out of my head, "here is where the transmitter is going to be. It will send data of what you see, hear, smell, feel, etc. Some parts of your brain will not be encompassed, so we won't have your thoughts, memories and the like. The data sent by the transmitter will fly through the air all the way to our headquarters and the room where the client will be situated. He, or she, will have a similar device on his or her head. Considerably bigger and more complicated, not to mention much, much more expensive. We don't drill their head, that would be completely unnecessary since they have no need for a portable device – they lie with their body immobilized, with a load of machinery hanging around their head. The client will see everything you see, hear everything you hear

and feel everything you feel. He or she will have a complete impression of being inside you, but will their own memories, wishes, and every other vital part of their personality. Do you understand?" he asked like I was some stupid little girl, and I just nodded my head as every good little stupid girl would have done. He continued:

"The client may want to say something, but their body being chemically immobilized, it won't be able to move an inch. But nevertheless, a little brain current will start flowing toward the jaw and tongue muscles, a current the device around the client's head will register, and it will send a signal your receiver will in turn catch. Then the nano-electrodes will send corresponding impulses to the corresponding parts of your brain, and your mouth will open for the client's words to come out. You will feel your mouth opening and your tongue moving, and you will hear your voice uttering words that are not your own. Then the client will want to take a walk, and your feet will be the ones doing the walking. He will feel the emptiness of your stomach and head for a restaurant for a meal. You might be a vegetarian, but the client craves roast pork, so roast pork is what you two will have. You will both feel grease dripping down your chin, but only the client will be able to take a napkin and wipe it off. Maybe you won't like it, but you won't be able to do anything about it. Once the client plugs in, he gains full control over the body of the rental." At this point I shivered. He noticed that and merely stretched the corners of his mouth a bit more towards the ears.

"This is not a job for everybody. Our clients come in two varieties: the first one are mostly disabled old-timers who want to find themselves in a young body one last time. To dance, have fun, run... make love." I KNOW it all already and there is absolutely no need for me to listen to him, but I don't interrupt his flow of consciousness as he speaks on:

"Now the other variety of clients is a bit more tricky. We charge them extra since they often

damage our rentals. Those are adrenaline addicted people, but they choose to act upon their addiction from the security of a rental body. If someone like that happens to come your way, you will go sky-diving, race-driving and bar-fighting, you'll walk on embers and so on. Everything the client would like to do himself but is afraid of damaging his own body. That kind of people will introduce all kinds of heavy drugs into your organism and drink until you pass out. And I will not lie to you...", he put his hand on my shoulder, "...when those people start craving sex, and very often that is exactly what it's all about, you can expect all kinds of hard-core perversions." I remembered my father crying under the shower, and the trail of blood crawling towards the sink, slithering like snakes and dragons embroidered on some lavish silken japanese kimono. I moved my shoulder away from his hand and asked to sign the contract.

He gave me the contract.

And told me I was brave.

I'm twenty-one.

I'm crying.

Mom needs another surgery, but they can't promise me they'll save her. We need money. I'm heading off to work, and she doesn't oppose it in any way because she's unconscious of everything that's happening around her. The whole process is managed so we would never meet our clients. But I did meet them. Maybe they were never my clients, those two young guys in fancy clothes, but while I was passing them on the street, overhearing those words, I could feel them inside me. Both of them.

"...fuckin' great, you wouldn't believe it!"

"I'm gonna have to try it next time..."

"You have to try it, it's crazy, I'm tellin' you, I was in some broad and screwing a fuckin' HORSE!!!"

"Does it hurt?"

"Like hell. I was covered with blood all the way to my... tits! Ha ha ha... screw it! But the feeling is unique, you have to try it!!! It was crazier tan that one time I..."

I'm stumbling.

I don't hear them any longer, but my brain is offering all-to-familiar scenarios that could finish that sentence:

"...ate shit."

"...shoved a beer bottle... and..."

"...took six different kinds of drugs and got thirty-three piercings."

"...gave myself consecutively..."

I can't take it anymore. I'm collapsing to the floor sobbing. I'm crying. People pass by me, but the piece of plastic and wire jutting out my hair makes me contaminated and invisible to their eyes. All my scars ache and all my late father's scars ache. My dead brother and my bedridden Mother ache. All the electrodes in my brain and the laughter and all the who-gives-a-fuck's ache. I'm vomiting, on all fours, on the sidewalk of a busy street, in broad daylight. I'm not embarrassed. What's that for me? For a rental? I continue crying for another moment and then try to get myself up. Both my knees and my hands are shaking, I'm walking like my legs are those crystal glass stems, so familiar to my champagne-loving clients. I keep walking. As I walk, my shivering hand wipes the tears and vomit around my mouth. I hold myself against a wall not to collapse again, but I keep walking. Another job is waiting for me.

I'm not brave.

I am miserable and desperate.

Iva Šakić Ristić was born in Zagreb on the outskirts of which she is currently raising two small children and one not so small husband. In the breaks between writing stories and novels. Šakić Ristić studied sociology and philosophy in her home town but has never gotten around to working in anything but the fiction writing field. She fell in love with making up people and their stories when she was a little girl and she has since published both SF and mainstream stories as well as poetry in numerous Croatian magazines. Her fantasy novel is forthcoming from the SFera Society Press. She tweets as @ivashakris and blogs at [www.risanka.net](http://www.risanka.net)

# No shelter in death

by IVA ŠAKIĆ RISTIĆ

Prince Roberto of Earth stood on the bridge of the interstellar generation ship Crescent. After waking up in this new age he quickly got his bearings. He threw away old titles and took the whole Earth as his domain. The people that woke him approved of that, they craved extraordinary things and people. He was able to invent a whole new family tree for himself, stories of his heroism included. Everyone came to listen to him tell them. He always was a good storyteller, or liar as Isabela used to call him to his face.

Isabela was his unexpected prize in this age. As the journey to the distant star the Crescent was traveling to began, the leader of the mission showed him a picture of her. Roberto had asked him if someone like him would be there at their destination; he liked to evaluate his opponents prior to encountering them. But instead of a prudent opponent there she was, her stubborn and defying gaze looking straight at him from the photo. She wore strange robes, but it was definitely her. He stared at her so long, the leader asked if he knew her. Roberto just said they were linked through time. He hid the nature of their connection as new plans unraveled in his mind. She couldn't

escape him after all! Even death turned out to be poor shelter.

Preparing to see her again, Roberto used the long journey to make connections and become respected and influential. He adjusted his sleep-time to arrive a tad older than her; he liked the advantage that gave him. It was the miracle of the future, his own fairy-tale come true. Her work will keep her awake for just a few months of her journey, she'll still be young enough for him. She will have no other choice but to comply in that isolated, cold place with no uncles to call upon.

As Crescent's shuttle descended, he could barely contain his excitement. He enjoyed the thought of Isabela's confusion heightened by pure dread in the moment when she finally accepts that it could never be as she desired. As they disembarked the shuttle they were greeted by two smiling old women. This is simply wrong, thought Roberto, why would they send someone so old to space? He glanced at the leader, hoping the man would be able to make some sense of this. But all Roberto could see was a frown on his face. The old women stepped closer to greet them. "It's so nice to see you here, in our home,"

said the dark old woman. Roberto was shocked into silence by the fact that she was allowed to speak.

"Hopefully you'll build your home next to ours soon," added light skinned one with a broad smile. Roberto was squinting in an attempt to picture her as a maiden. The image eluded him. "But this was meant to be our home," Roberto stepped forward, annoyed as the leader remained quiet.

"There's too many of us," the dark woman said. He tried to ignore her but she kept on talking. "There's no room anymore, a new city is necessary."

"The instructions were clear," the leader finally got his bearings. "There shouldn't be more than a handful of you!"

"And you're much too old!" Roberto jumped in, suddenly worried about Isabela. Did she flee into death's arms once again?

"You think so, Sir Roberto?" the fair skinned old woman spoke up turning her gaze to him. Roberto finally recognized her.

"Isabela?" he said with fear in his voice. She was too old to be desired!

"Yes, Sir Roberto. We skipped sleeping on

our voyage. When we arrived it seemed such a waste of time to sleep while machines work. We worked beside them and made all this," she pointed behind her, at big city that should have been so much smaller. "Sadly, there are so many of us now that there is no room for you. We did however leave plenty of land for you behind that mountain. More than enough to build your own city."

"Build?" the leader looked beyond the safety of the city dome to the untamed, threatening wilderness beyond.

"Don't worry, we left the machines in good repair," said the dark woman. "Come share a meal with us." Everyone followed her. Isabela didn't move.

They were alone, but it was not in the least as he had envisioned.

"Presidenta Bianca!" a voice called. "Hurry, please, presidenta Negra is waiting for you." Isabela's smile widened as she saw him realize that she had a good life here. She turned her back on him and in that moment he regretted that they took his dagger away. When he was alone he cursed the bones from which they had made him anew.

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Zoran Vlahović is an engineer who works with trains, a beer enthusiast who love to game and an SF writer who loves cons. He is also a SFera winner with with over fifty published stories, novels and miniatures. His story "Every Time We Say Goodbye" was awarded the SFERA Award but also won the Artefakt Award as well as an honorable mention for its English translation at the SF&FTA Award in 2013.

# Are the females really needed in SF?

by ZORAN VLAHOVIĆ

*This story was inspired by the eponymous talk given by SF writer and TV anchor Krešimir Mišak, during the presentation of his collected stories "Star riffs" at SFeraKon 2005 in Zagreb, Croatia...*

*...With a pretty different conclusion.*

Schtef<sup>1</sup> was a rock hard Man (rock intelligent too, some will say) and a fresh volunteer for *Earth Forces Marines, Best of the Best, Rockeaters that eat Fire, fart napalm & rip flesh from Bugs with their own teeth...* And right now, he was a quite confused one, throwing hidden and slightly disgusted looks towards the *chicks* down the line.

The male fifies which infiltrated even the bastions of EFM that you can't get rid of today because of some shit about equal rights and discrimination... Blaaaah! If you do not want to get beaten, don't go slumming in neighboring village. But those fifies he did not consider chicks. He thought of females to lick your chops over, even ones with too many muscles in wrong places, or the ones you roll around in the haystack with, as chicks.

Schtef had absolutely *nothing* against rolling around in the haystack (except you *never* really got all the hay out of your underwear), but what were *chicks* like *that* looking for in the Rockeaters?

He wanted to be a *Marine* since

childhood and the 3V premiere of "Starship Troopers XXII", and he wasted enough bugs in *Starkraft*<sup>®</sup> 12 - *The Last Battle* for several counts of genocide in The Hague. When humanity hit the Bugs in real life, he went to recruiting office at once... He camped in front of that office for an entire weekend to be the first! And now *chick*... here?!

Schtef had a deep reverence for the old mariner saying *chick=trouble on ship*. He seriously believed *they* would be the cause of more trouble than they were worth.

Goddamn, most probably same old *ER&D* shit. Whatever, *they* shall drop out during training, *zicher*<sup>2</sup>.

But through some miracle, *they* did not.

About half of the three hundreds male volunteers, some due to insufficient education (you do NOT place atomic accelerators in redneck hands!), some due to physical incompetence (some wussies can't even run five hundred meters up a steep hill with just ninety kilos of equipment in a seventy kilos of exoskeleton when the power is cut!), some



due psychological incompatibility (some weaklings couldn't shoot bugs covered by simulations of their comrades or civilians, even if the survival of the platoon depended on it... Really! *Chicks* didn't have problems with that). "Mountainman" Schtef had finished high-school and had learned a "fuck-the-neighbors" attitude as a child, so he didn't really care. He passed the training like he would a night in a tavern; a bit too loudly and with a headache in the morning, complete with leaving empty containers and broken inventory behind. The rest of the crew was quite formidable, he found several of them even meaner than himself.

Surprisingly, not a one *chick* dropped out of because of psychology... Well, that old saying about Woman-is-a-Devil was obviously on to something. And some of *them* were even meaner than "boyoes", as females called them.

Anyway...

Screaming with static scramblers, the *Jumpers* ripped through the black sky with avoidance maneuvers while marines caught cover according to luck and personal attitude among old and, considering the recent firefights, not-so old craters on the black&white airless surface of the overheated asteroid. They stuck to the to ancient logic: if you are in the black, nobody can see you; if not, *though luck*.

Schtef found a good hole, anchored himself in stone against recoil and from time to time, supplied with intel by *Carriers* in far orbit with direct laser link to inside of his cerasteel helmet, sent out some Intelligent Mines from the third barrel of his AP-48... Not too often, the Bugs (if you can call something the size of a *Sherman* tank from WWII a bug!) could not discover his position even through the false ballistics of IM's. He lost his hankering for a Starkraft® heroic stand while sweeping the Bugs with an accelerator on c/2 speeded shrapnels. Especially after he had seen what was left of Jack "The Rock" Berling, a teammate who did not develop such a healthy attitude.

The sleazy Bugs didn't need space suits.

In the microgravity of the asteroid they moved with almost supersonic speed, on their own propulsion.

The *Sherman* comparison was not about size only. But the fact is that the best and the toughest armor humanity developed *can't* protect you from pincers of belly (or back) claws if you find yourself in line of a Bug flight, even after you blasted its armored head off, didn't help... Bugs also used their corrosive-radioactive saliva with frightening precision as sniper ammo.

Schtef used his tightbeam for occasional listening to the wide-band, to catch a feeling for the situation, enough to notice if any *action* (for which, all at once, he did not feel any great attraction) came his way, checking for the best bolt holes in the retreat line, for when the call came.

- May Day! May Day! 736 over 24, 736 over 24. Second Platoon under heavy fire! We need retreat-covering fire!- "French" LePre was moaning, recognizable by his vowels even through with plasma strikes deteriorated link.

- *Fuck you!* - Schtef thought comradely.- *Like you would come for me!*

Plenty of them said it out loud and on air: "Fuck that", "I'm fine here" and "Retreat cover? WE need retreat cover!" supported his sentiment.

- May Day! May Day! 736 over 24, 736... He needed about two seconds to realize that second voice as *female*.

- *Megy! It's Megy in Second!*

Primordial instincts in him took over.

Before he even understood *what* exactly he was doing (as *EFM* psychologists knew he/they will), Schtef hit "release" on his anchor and pushed himself on his horse-kick jet-pack blasting out of the crater, screaming his war-cry while charging together with hundreds of his comrades.

<sup>1</sup> local peasant name from Zagorje, northern Croatia

<sup>2</sup> "for sure" in German & in Croatian slang

# TRANSFERZALA

by Mihaela Marija Perković

Most SF conventions I've been to outside Croatia have Dead Dog Parties, but in Croatia, I believe only SFeraKon does. On Sunday night SFeraKon, after programming ends at 20:00, we clean up while the chair tallies the numbers to tell us whether we are in the red or in the black. Once that's done, we break out the balloons, the cakes and the whiskey. And we party. With music, dancing and geeky games. Most people take the post-con Monday off work since the party tends to end at dawn.

Istrakon, a con held in the heart of Istria at the very beginning of spring, has a sunny Sunday morning Coffee with the Organizers, a combo of a feedback session that Worldcons do and Dead Dog Party.

Rikon, the Rijeka convention organized by 3. zmaj has a late Sunday afternoon Post-Con Lunch. Where the food is to die for. And the conversation both hilarious and constructive.

At one such lunch in 2013, we cooked up TransFferzala, a fun project designed in order to get more people to attend Croatian conventions.

Croatian fandom is not only young, it is also atypical in so much as its geeks are also quite outdoorsy. Among our numbers hides the Croatian World Bronze Medalist in Precise Orientation, the SFeraKon chair probably has more orienteering medals than cons under her belt, SFera has a skating outing every month in winter and I think 3. zmaj hikes. In addition to lovers (and coaches) of skiing, swimming and underwater hockey, there are avid hikers and mountaineers among us – our own version of Smofcon, ŠTRUMF, typically takes place on top of a mountain!

Thus, on a warm and sunny day in October, we named our project TransFferzala, after the long trails mountaineers take, looking for beautiful views and stamps which eventually get them a pin, should the reach all their destinations.

Our SF fandom version is not very different – one purchases a card, attends cons and SF related events, collects stamps and turns the card in at what we call “the end of the fandom year” to get a T-shirt and a badge. In addition to this, three lucky people, whose names will be drawn at Rikon,

receive free entry, in the following fandom year, to all the Croatian cons that took part in that year. Istrakon is the con that marks the beginning of the Croatian fandom year. TransFferzala was, two years after we started talking about it at Rikon's Post-Con Lunch, officially launched on Friday, March 27th, 2015 in Pazin. It has already sparked controversy on Facebook, which I can only be happy about – noise does make one visible, which is the point of the entire exercise.

Besides, we have all been getting along for so long, I've begun to miss the quarreling! The first TransFferzala already has 60 members and I can hardly wait to see where this trail will take us! The beautiful design, of both the card and the website, was done by the Croatian artist and 3. zmaj president, Nela Dunato, whose awesome prints will be available at the Dysprosium Fan Funds Auction on Sunday!

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# BRING A WORLDCON CLOSER TO HOME!

by Mihaela Marija Perković

Hey, Europeans, have you always dreamed of attending the con of all cons, where more than half the members are not just geeks like you but also your favorite authors come to take part in panels, sign books or just hang out? Have you ever imagined what you would say to a favorite author if you met them in a lift? I bet you have and the only thing that's stopped you is the mountain of cash needed to get to the USA, where most Worldcons are held. Well, that and, depending on where in Europe you're from, the likelihood of getting a visa.

You may have noticed in the past decade or so that Worldcons have stepped out into the world a bit. Japan, Canada, Australia and London last year. If anything proves that Worldcon needs to get out and play all over the planet more often, it's the **10 000 members Loncon3** gathered this summer, the biggest Worldcon in history. And I know that there are that many more in continental Europe for whom even London was out of reach. Also, however big Locon3 was, it still did not top **Pyrkon**, the largest Polish convention which gathered 15 000 members last year and may very

well gather even more this year.

Unlike London, any non-Anglophone convention that wants to grow up to be a Worldcon has a tough battle to win: the everlasting American fear of people not speaking English! Yeah, we all do. Still, they do not believe us. Finns speak excellent English, they are not tainted with having been a communist country, they have an enviably well-organized fandom, quite large annual conventions and lots of experienced people running them. And they have nearly won a Worldcon bid a few years ago! If European fandom wants to bring Worldcon into a non-English country, Finland is the way to go. This summer is the time to do it! The voting for **Helsinki in 2017** may be in the very far part of the US but you do not have to go there to cast your vote!

## Here's how in four easy steps!

First, **purchase a supporting membership to Sasquan**, the 2015 Worldcon. If you need incentive, this will give you the chance to vote for the Hugo Award. As part of the process of voting, some of the nominated works will be available

in electronic format for free! Yup, you read that right – free books!

Second, **pay the voting fee.** Yes, paying to vote on Worldcon site selection is normal. This may seem strange and expensive, but there is a catch and it's a lovely one: this fee turns into a Supporting membership of whichever bid wins. This is the **absolute cheapest way to become a Worldcon member!** So, if you vote for Helsinki in 2017 and they win, you will have a supporting membership at the best possible price! Also, the bid that wins is required to offer an upgrade fee for those who voted and want to change their membership from Supporting to Attending. Should you find yourself with a supporting membership that is not for Helsinki, no worries! Worldcon memberships can be easily transferred to someone else – this is an investment you can get back!

Third, **fill out the paper ballot.**

There has not been a site selection ballot that was available electronically, but perhaps 2015 will make history and introduce it! If not, a paid site selection fee means you will be able to download and fill out a paper copy. Then proceed to step four!

Fourth, **snail mail the filled out ballot to Sasquan!** Your ballot needs to be received well in advance of the con if you're mailing it, so be sure to check the website for deadlines on this! **Alternatively, you can send the ballot with someone you trust who is themselves attending Worldcon this summer.**

Ideally, you will be able to make these payments online. If you cannot, please contact your country's agent for Helsinki in 2017 for details. So, this is your chance – bring Worldcon closer to home!



# ASTRA, the LARP

by Ivana Delač and Vesna Kurilić

*Astra* was a twelve days long, pervasive live action roleplaying game which took place in Zagreb, Croatia, October 15 - 26, 2014. It was designed and run by two game masters - Ivana Delač and Vesna Kurilić, both accomplished Croatian genre authors with day jobs in the culture and public education field. Both have been active on the European LARPing scene since 2011 and have so far participated in designing and running three local LARPs in addition to *Astra*. These were: an intense chamber psychodrama LARP *The Cabin*, a prison LARP *Čuza* and a single-day sequel of *Astra*, held in the city of Rijeka under the name *Astra: Apokrifija*.

*Astra* was a pervasive game with elements of espionage and research on literature, with a playable plot relying heavily on the supernatural. It had a strong ARG (*alternate reality game*) aspect, which is uncommon in Croatian LARPs. Most of the story had been kept secret until the game started (and continued so well into the game), the characters were pre-written by the organizers and the full number of participants - 28 active players, 2 GMs and a larger number of outsiders as supporting cast and crew - were revealed only after the

end of the game. The main storyline revolved around the lives and works of three famous Croatian authors of the 20th century - novelist and journalist, Marija Jurić Zagorka, Croatian Nobel award nominee and famed children's author Ivana Brlić Mažuranić and acclaimed poet, Antun Branko Šimić.

## **What was it all about?**

All of the characters in *Astra* were ordinary people applying for an internship at the *Astra Agency*, a discreet service which offers information - for the right price. The Agency had been monitoring information in the public domain and had selected a few potential candidates who seemed right for the job. The testing the candidates was what remained and that was done in the form of daily tasks. Some were some based on codes and cyphers, while other required creative activity (writing, drawing, sculpting...): Others yet revolved around the exploration of Zagreb, both online and in the real, physical world. There were also a couple of flashmob-based group assignments, i.e. public readings from works of the three authors.

*Astra* lasted for 12 days straight



and 24 of the initial 28 players participated, in some way, until the very end. Loads of creative and informative material was produced: stories, poems, artwork, music, videos, research reports, statues, lanterns... All of it, as well as lovely ingame photos, are featured on the LARP's website, <http://astralarp.wordpress.com>.

For every successfully completed task, players received a piece of information, often hidden in another puzzle, and the main goal was for them to put it all together in order to discover the story of the LARP. That story included the ancient, magical crown of Croatian kings that could bring a horrible death to those who desire eternal life, and immortality to those who fully accept that everyone must die. That crown subsequently, much to the joy of every fan of Marija Jurić Zagorka, made Zagorka herself immortal (and gave her enough time to continue her work and, eventually, create *Astra*).

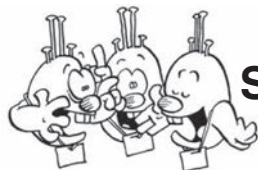
Furthermore, a couple of characters were secretly working for Zagorka's arch-nemesis, which brought on some interesting ingame situations and resulted in one character's murder, which in return raised the tension and distrust among players. The highlight of the game was a treasure hunt in which players found the crown and discovered that Zagorka actually was immortal, and the Director of the Astra Agency. The game ended by Zagorka (played by the popular Croatian genre author Milena Benini) awarding

the candidates with a job at Astra after which she left, with the crown, supposedly to end her over-long existence.

### ***Why so special?***

Although this game was not the first Croatian LARP based on the works of Croatian genre authors (that would be "Seekers of the Dawn", created by Ana Rajner and Božo Špoljarić in 2012 and based on Sanja Lovrenčić's *Snakes of Nikonimor* fantasy trilogy), it was the first longer and pervasive one. It included quite a few elements that were previously unseen in CroatianLARPs, such as numerous ingame video materials, "hard copy" casefiles (given to every player at the beginning of the game) filled with mysterious documents and old photographs, ingame blogs and websites created months before the game and regularly updated, etc. This game was also, to the best of our knowledge, the first Croatian LARP to include mainstream outside partners: Marija Jurić Zagorka Memorial Centre, Školska knjiga Publishing House and the Booksa Book Club.

The feedback provided by the players shows that their opinion of the three authors improved significantly during the game, and that they learned a lot about the life and work of these writers who marked the Croatian literature of the 20th century. This leads to conclusion that pervasive LARP, as a transmedia form, is an amazing, efficient and fun tool for promoting literature and educating people about it.



# CROATIAN SF CONVENTIONS CALENDAR

## Istrakon

When: .....end of March

Where: .....Pazin

Organiser: .....Albus

<http://www.istrakon.hr/>

## SFeraKon

When: .....Mid-May

Where: .....Zagreb

Organiser: .....SFera

<http://sferakon.org/>

<http://sfera.hr/>

## Marsonikon

When: .....beginning of June

Where: .....Slavonski Brod

Organiser: .....Orion

<http://www.marsonikon.com>

## Liburnikon

When: .....end of August

Where: .....Opatija

Organiser: .....Kulturni Front

<http://www.liburnicon.com>

## Domikon

When: .....end of August

Where: .....Donji Miholjac

Organiser: .....KMDM, UDAR

<http://domikon.kmdm.hr/>

## Rikon

When: .....mid-October

Where: .....Rijeka

Organiser: .....3. Zmaj

<http://www.3zmaj.hr/rikon>

## SF week

When: .....beginning of December

Where: .....Zadar

Organiser: .....University of Zadar

<http://sfweek.org/>





And many more events!



Liburnicon is festival which gathers fans of science fiction, fantasy, advanced science disciplines, history and mythology. It's organized by „Kulturni front“, a non-profit youth organization from Opatija, Croatia. Festival takes its place, once in a year, third weekend in August. More than 1500 people from all over Croatia, but also abroad come to Opatija, to socialize. The first Liburnicon was held 2006., under its former name „Abbacon“. Among the most important events at Liburnicon, special mention should be given to lectures of numerous respected and famous writers (Guy Gavriel Kay, Steven Erikson, Jacqueline Carey, etc.), scientists and well-known professors. Aside from quality lectures and projections, many other entertaining events are organized – such as children workshops, LAN computer gaming, quizzes with prizes, pen&paper role playing and board games tournaments, movies, music and various original and funny Liburnicon games like „Star Trek bowling“.

# LIBURNICON

## SF&FANTASY FESTIVAL

### OPATIJA CROATIA



21.-23.8.2015.

[www.liburnicon.com](http://www.liburnicon.com)



# Gotta catch 'em all!



Dear reader,

If you missed previous

english issues of **PARSEK**, fear not!

You can download your PDF copy from our site;

**<http://parsek.sfera.hr/>**

(yeah it is in Croatian, but just check for English edition archive)

We are looking forward to your feedback on our e-mail:

**[http\\_parsek@sfera.hr](mailto:http_parsek@sfera.hr)**



Previously, in Parsek no. 125 (Worldcon issue), we said:

We don't have the dates. We don't have a GoH.

**Yet.**

Guess what? On **May 15 - 17, 2015**

meet **Kate Elliott**,

ghosts of Honor

**Sir Terry Pratchett & Leonard Nimoy**,

and much more and many more... (maybe even **Shai Hulud**)



Zagreb in spring. We will be there, will you?

**[www.sferakon.org](http://www.sferakon.org)**

We have English programming, awesome, inexpensive beer  
and a LOT of fun. Of all kinds. ;))

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If you happen to find yourself in Zagreb when SFeraKon is  
not on, find us at **SFera**.

**Tuesdays evenings, from 8pm, at IV. Pobrežje 5.**

It's not a pub, but there's drinks and food and excellent company.  
More info on **[www.sfera.hr](http://www.sfera.hr)**