

PAPERBEEK

PARADOXICAL - SECULAR FANZINE OF SFERA SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY

No. 131



Eurocon 2016

There is first time for everything, even after hundred and thirty issues...

Visiting Barcelona has been my dream for a very long while, ever since in high school we studied Antoni Gaudí's work, and I found out about his tragic death that struck me as one of the most ironic of life stories.

Now, while I'm writing this, only a few hours are left before I see with my own eyes this city I've been dreaming of, and I can hardly contain my excitement.

And to add a smidgeon of science fiction to the mix, not only that I'm going to visit Barcelona, but also I'm going to Eurocon in Barcelona, which is a combination impossible to resist to.

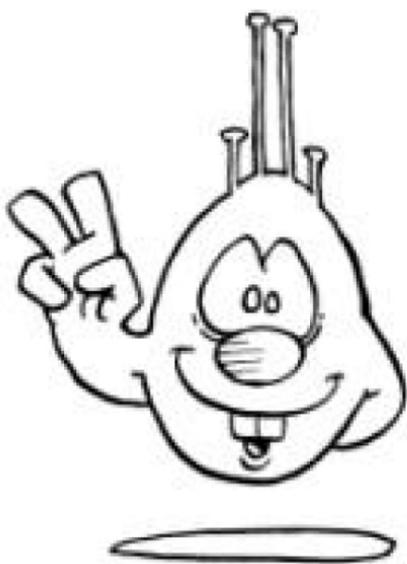
SFera has already done couple of special editions of Parsek, the society's fanzine, but this one is the first themed special Eurocon edition. We've decided to honor the beautiful city of Barcelona by dedicating stories to it, to Catalonia and Spain in general. We hope these stories will entertain you and show you what Croatian science fiction and fantasy writers are capable of.

Their dreams may differ from my dreams of Barcelona, but they are nevertheless imaginative, exhilarating, diverting and astounding.

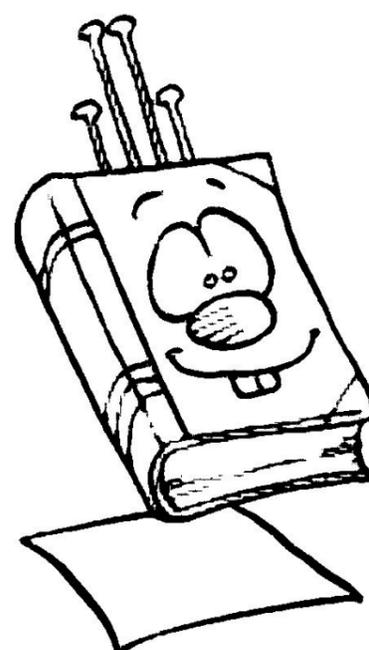
We hope you'll enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed preparing this issue.

Zagreb 31.10.2016.

Irena Rašeta



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Three Selfies With Gaudí

by ALEKSANDAR ŽILJAK

1. Sagrada Família

There's an early 20th century photo of the Sagrada Família building site, the cathedral in the early stages of construction serving as background to a herd of black goats.

I sit in the park in front of the cathedral, looking at the lake. The park has gone wild years ago. Couple of Indian rhinos cool in the lake, backs overgrown in symbionts; yellow and red orchid-like flowers swaying as armor-skinned beasts wade like some prehistoric amphibian tanks. A giraffe strolls peacefully alongside the lake shore. Fortunately, it's not on fire. The towers of the cathedral point to the Dome: huge stony rockets with rows of ports, waiting for the countdown.

The cathedral is still not finished. It will never be. It's encased in twisting, spiraling green arms of the Aldebaran vines; gaudy-flowered saprophytes and weird creepers ride them to create a plant skeleton in place of the nave and aisles; psychedelic fungi spread glittering spores that, so they say, really make you one with the Almighty; and they all compete for sun and shade and water and foothold on the artificial peaks that are the bell

towers. And nesting in them, birds of metallic sheen; crawling and creeping and buzzing around them, bizarre insects, beautiful beyond words; and whistling flying lizards circling the towers like some strange angels descending from the Heavens above Barcelona.

It will never be finished. Even the Junta Constructora gave up. But I've got a feeling Gaudí would be quite pleased. Anyway, God's will. Or rather, the Universe's, when all that ET life descended in the worst-ever xeno-contamination incident on the planet Earth.

The authorities did what they could to stop the spreading of the invasive life-forms. They erected the Dome. They sealed the city. Barcelona became the Quarantine Zone Barcelona.

There was another option. To nuke the whole place. It's still on the table. I look up and see N-cases embedded in the translucent surface of the Dome. Medium-yield neutron bombs. A city in the shadow of nuclear destruction. But hell, the entire planet has been in the shadow of nuclear destruction since 1945.

"You know what invultuation is?" A guy just sat on the bench to my right.

“Looks I’m about to find out.”

The guy looks sallow. Old jeans, black T-shirt. High hat with a hole in it, a parasitic dark mauve flower pushing through the hole. Crazy eyes. I wonder should I shoot him.

Crazy Eyes takes a wax doll from his dirty black backpack. He takes a blowtorch and fires it.

“Invultuation, my friend, is practice of melting a wax doll representing an intended victim”, he recites a dictionary definition.

“Oh. And to what purpose?”

“What do you think?” Crazy Eyes grins. I realize I’m asking the wrong question. The right question is who’s the victim?

And before I draw my gun, Crazy Eyes torches the doll’s right arm. I scream as the burning pain licks up my right arm and I collapse on the grass, cursing through my clenched teeth. This is not normal, some piece of my brain is telling me as the searing pain paralyzes my body, this is not normal, the asshole is ESP, this is not -

I’m going black, overloaded with pain ... Should have killed him the moment I saw him ... but I cannot even move and everything is black and ...

The second before I’m gone, something big and black rushes by like an express train and slams into Crazy Eyes and smashes him and the bench into one bloody, broken heap of flesh and bones and plastic. Crazy Eyes didn’t even know what hit him. The pain is gone, amputated, as the half-melted doll falls from his mangled hand.

I take a deep breath. Something coarse and wet and warm is licking my cheek. Warm breath strokes my hair. I push away the big wet nose. A black bull is towering above me. Red lacy panties are hanging from his left horn. Then I notice two notches in his right ear. Now, I did some homework before I landed here. So I recognize that particular right ear. Oh, Hell ... I’ve been saved by Ramon himself ...

* * *

It was supposed to be just another nice bull run day at Pamplona, three years back. Ramon was considered the finest bull that day, black and mean and lean and with real nasty-looking horns. The bull run started. By the time they realized they were messing with the wrong toro, it was much too late. After all the funeral, medical and legal expenses were tallied, the Pamplona City Council banned the bull run. Six months later, bull fighting was banned in entire Spain. And Ramon, after he horned his way out of the city, was never seen again. Of course, nobody bothered to check the QZ Barcelona.

And nobody explained how a secret military project found its way to the streets of Pamplona, either. Not in public, at least.

2. Casa Batlló

“What’s with the red panties?”

“Bend over, so I can show you.”

“Thanks, I think I’ll pass.”

It’s Gaudí meets Giger as the decayed Aldebaran vine stems cling to the ceramic mosaic. When the vines started creeping up the Casa, City Council people tried to kill them. And they finally did. However, when an Aldebaran vine dies, its stem rots within days into an intricate bundle of hard woody vessels and supports, very much resembling utility piping. Tearing them down would result in ruining the entire front of the building. In the meantime, new vines sprouted. And creepers. And lantern fungi, filling the eye-sockets of the balconies parapets. The dusk is creeping through the street, and I feel as if seven Krapina C ghosts gaze at me with their yellowish-white eyes.

The parapets were supposed to resemble the masks. Maybe. But from where I stand, they’re closer to the eye-sockets of the Krapina

C Neanderthal cranium. Krapina Neanderthals were discovered in 1899. I wonder if Gaudí knew about them when working the Casa. He might have.

Hypersonic shells screech above the Dome. The rail guns east of the QZ are shelling Falangist positions across the Ebro. History is a boring bitch. Always repeats itself. First time as a tragedy, every time as a tragedy.

But this time, the Republic is winning. The shells streaking above us might be the very ones I delivered two days ago. A comforting thought. Death to fascism.

The People's Militia guards block the entrance to the Casa. In urban camouflage, armed to the teeth, wearing the Republican and anarchist insignia and badges. The Republican flag - red, yellow, violet - is hanging from the second floor balcony. Several AFVs are parked close to the building, their turrets covering the street.

Fortunately, the guards know Ramon. He whispers to the senior one. The guard measures me up and down, then nods and says "The Batlló apartment".

The apartment is filled with computers and displays and cables, manned by the HQ staff. A large holomap glimmers in the centre of the living room, arrows showing the lines of advance. Small glitters where the shells are hitting the blue defense positions.

"I brought him, Comrade Georgina", the bull says to a forty-something woman studying the holomap. She looks at me and smiles wearily, running her fingers through her unruly dark hair. She orders everybody out.

"Glad you could make it, Comrade McKinley."

"I almost didn't", I grumble. "If it weren't for Ramon here -"

"Yes, yes", Georgina waves it off. "Sorry about that, but it was imperative that the Falangists learn of you. We need a plausible denial, you see."

3. Casa Milà

Hell, it does take some nerve to place a Falangist sleeper almost next door to the PM HQ.

Back when it was built, La Pedrera was ridiculed in a local paper as an airship hanger. Well, no airships around it now. But it became the main nesting place for firebirds. Imagine a flying reptile-like biomechanoid with leathery wings, pointed beak filled with teeth and long tail, covered in something resembling feathers, glowing red and orange and yellow. The firebirds.

They streak around the building as Ramon and I size the street. It's curfew time and the iron gates are sealed.

"What do you think?", Ramon asks.

I look down the street, at the AFVs. One of them has a forty-millimeter cannon.

"Forget it, Comrade. The Republic must not be implicated."

"Then I guess you should knock."

When this is over, somebody should explain the meaning of the verb "to knock" to Ramon.

"This is a piece of cultural heritage, you know", Ramon says, his hooves stepping on the shattered glass.

"It is", I agree as we pass through the demolished iron gates. "And neutron bombs were designed to minimize damage to property. And kill everybody in range."

Of course, the element of surprise is out of the window. We hear shouts and screams behind the apartment doors as we climb the stairs to the roof, under fire. So, by the time we're on the roof terrace, flocks of startled firebirds whirling around us, the sleeper is holding his trembling finger above the tablet and screaming at us not to come any closer. His gun is on the floor, his back against the air duct in the corner of the building. He fired two clips at us while going up. He's a lousy shot. Couldn't even hit something as big as Ramon.

But he's a fifteen-sixteen year old kid, scared shitless, with a finger above the proverbial red button. I'm not sure I can reason with him. So, while aiming at his head, I watch him carefully.

* * *

"The Falangists hacked the N-cases", Comrade Georgina says without much preliminaries. "They can detonate the bombs."

Oh, shit. That would certainly make the Republic have a very bad day.

"Do you know where they are?"

"Him", Georgina corrects me. "One sleeper. And yes, we know where he is."

"Who knows about this?"

"Ramon. You. Me. Three people who traced the hack." Georgina leans towards me, her voice a whisper. "We learned about it yesterday. We have to handle this ourselves. Now. Fast. Any higher-level involvement ..."

She spreads her arms. "Use your imagination." I'm using it. Hostage situation with half a million people. Mass panic. Politics. Factions accusing each other. Foreign involvement - there's a small Kahtan flotilla orbiting the Jupiter and I know they're monitoring the events. Situation out of hands. People losing nerves. KA-BOOOM! Five times simultaneously.

"We need somebody from outside. A freelancer. And you have a reputation, Comrade McKinley."

"So, if things go south ..."

"... The Republic had nothing to do with it." Georgina grins. We understand each other perfectly. The wheels of politics grind. Heavens help those caught in them.

"If things go south", I grin back. "Deniability will be the least of your problems."

* * *

The kid's in my sights. If I was feeling sentimental, I'd try to reason with him. Talk him into giving up. If I was feeling sentimental, I'd say he's just a boy, deluded by reactionary Falangist propaganda and fascist ideology.

Church, country, nation, family, law and order, yoke and arrows.

But I don't feel sentimental under the five neutron bombs that can go off at any second. Self-preservation instinct took over.

I watch his crazed eyes. His finger above the pad. He's gonna do it. A child is going to kill thousands of children for the sake of some future children to be put under yoke and killed with arrows should they ever rebel.

"Comrade ...", Ramon rumbles softly next to me.

Death to fascism!

I pull the trigger. A shot, screams of firebirds pierce my mind as they scatter, like a huge fireworks spouting flames of color in all directions.

The kid rolls over, his pad falling from his hand, dead before he even heard the shot.

A breath later, we're still breathing.

I pick up the pad, shut it down. Georgina's men will take it from here.

I take my PDA, dial her number. "It's over", I tell her when she answers.

"Any problems?"

"No. Just a kid."

"I know", Georgina says. "He was my son."

I stare blankly at the PDA.

"It's on the need to know basis, Comrade", Ramon says quietly.

"And I don't need to know", I nod as we head down the stairs and out. Civil wars are bitches. People's Militia is spilling out of the van and storming the building through the smashed gate. They'll take care of the body. Nobody spares us a single glance.

We walk the short distance back to the HQ. Suddenly, a young woman's voice calls across the street. We turn to see one of those black-haired beauties you don't want to waste time describing. She obviously knows the bull.

"Hola, Europa!", the bull greets her.

"Ramon", Europa sounds angry. "Can I have my panties back?"



Vesna Kurili writes (short stories and novels), reads (supernatural teenage trash - preferably werewolves, and fan fiction), plays (guitar, electric bass and ukulele) and makes clothes (for LARP, cosplay and stuffed rabbits). She works with and lives for books, and never says no to an invitation for coffee. She says this story was inspired by Vall de Núria.

The War Mother

by VESNA KURILIĆ

My boys always come back to me.

We were never supposed to grow attached, nor wish for their safe return. If we are caught praying or offering sacrifices to the statue of the Blessed Virgin, almost forgotten on the shrine desecrated centuries ago, we are sentenced to solitude in the east wing, sometimes for weeks at a time. What is a week spent in silence, as opposed to months, sometimes years between the visits of our children? What is solitude, with no one left I even wish to converse with nowadays, no one to share my pain with, except the Virgin?

I have seen nine daughters and five sons live to adulthood and join the Company wars. The girls are all gone now. Some of them died on the battlefield, returned to me only as notices, letters of condolences, Company credit to help sustain the convent in the days to come. Some of them went off to be commanders in opposing armies, for better pay, a chance at recognition and the possibility that, one day, they will live the lives they choose, not those drawn out for them by the Company in the ripples of the paraversum.

Some of my lost daughters are said to have settled in other parallels, leading their own lives, far away from the convent and the way they were brought into this world, the way most of them used to resent, having no father and no hearth to call their own. Still, I cannot resist thinking about them, even though I will never see their faces again. I cannot help but wonder – have they ever forgiven me? Did they find what they were looking for? Do they send

their children, too, to die in another, distant war?

The other war mothers pity me, since I have had so many children reach battle age. Even though not many live now who remember my first day at the convent, they all bear witness to the lines in my face, the silence in my step, the fact I never, not even once, join the guard posts in the south side of the convent, those that overlook the leaky church roof and the lake in the valley. What is there to watch, back in the real world? What is there to look for, when all I have left, flesh of my flesh, is scattered across the parallels, beyond the translucent window suspended in the air just alongside the walking path that leads to the mountains, north of the convent?

I have yet to see another facet of the paraversum. The war mothers never travel, apart from the yearly recruitment runs to nearby villages and, if need be, the few cities in the region. Most of us never try to go further. We see enough of what's out there, in the faces of those who come back to us, in the barely healed scars carved across the flesh of our flesh, flesh of our sisters' flesh. We see the void in once-familiar eyes, the wounds, too deep and too grave to be treated in makeshift hospitals all over the paraversum, which are, most of the time, the best our children get. Every year, some of our children are sent back to us, to die or to live, if the Company deems necessary treatments unaffordable for its purpose. For those who die – as many do – no complaints are issued to the convent since we

do our best, as documented in the innumerable forms and hearings. For those who live, orders are received in a few weeks' time, requesting them back, as if nothing had happened. And they go. And they go. Until, one day, they don't come back.

It has been seven months and three days since I've last seen my youngest; eighteen months and twelve days since I've seen my eldest, and some time in between for the middle three. The boys use their days of leave to come home, or, when they are posted for a longer period in a parallel with a small number of connecting points to ours – which usually makes traveling too expensive to bother, even to see their mother for what could very well be the last time – they send words, pictures or vids. I never ask for more, and I recognize that I have been blessed with even that much. This way, I sometimes know when to look north, when to expect them home, if only for a few hours at a time. There is nothing more someone like me could ever wish for.

I have been told, over and over again, by my fellow mothers and Company clerks alike, that I cannot continue to live in this fantasy of mine, in this foolish belief that my sons are somehow exempt from the statistics for battlefield deaths in parallels overrun by the wars. The numbers never lie, they tell me. My boys still come back to me, I offer in return. Once their lucky streak breaks, your weak old heart will break too, men half my age try to explain. My boys always come back to me, I say, and turn my back to them. If they are not willing to listen, who am I to change their quaint points of view?

I was just a girl, barely getting used to three meals a day and a warm place to sleep for the first time in my life, when the parallels were described to me as ripples in a lake, a thing of beauty, an honorable way to leave a mark in this lifetime, the only one I am now legally able to believe I have been given. Since our community is located in an old convent, I have heard even more about Ranger's charts through the years, about the way every known Earth coexists alongside other, infinite number of Earths, one breath, one blink of an eye, one wish away. I know of the cracks, the windows

connecting seemingly random parallels to others, always just one other, and the constant drive to find a way for mankind to create artificial windows on its own and stop depending on sketchy charts drawn by a crazy monk a millenium ago in some backwater parallel. I know about the wars – more than I could have ever desired to know – and that the price of human life is far less than that of a sophisticated fighting machine. I know, most of all, that orphans need to eat, and that winters are never easy in our lands, always bringing new girls to the cause and Company credit.

They say that convents and other sacred places are the only fixed points in all of the paraversum and that we are lucky to live in such a place. I am inclined to believe that, since not even the size of the old building's three wings, nor the beauty of the valley with its lake are good enough reasons to make a home for war mothers in such a remote place in the mountains, accessible only by air or by rail. Something brought the Company here, several centuries ago, and something made it stay.

Even if the stories about parallels were only half true, our convent may not be the only one of the like in the paraversum. There could be other places, just like this, other convents, just like ours, other war mothers, living their lives in a fixed place, in one of the alleged axes of the parallels. And, as the hours of waiting for my boys go by, slipping into days, flowing into weeks, growing to months, years, I cannot resist but wonder...

Is there another me, out there, in another parallel? Another girl whose days of youth have long gone, spent trying to make a living in an unwelcoming world, adding to a cause she lost faith in decades ago? Does she, like me, watch the north side of the convent? Does she notice the ripples in the lake and the way the seasons change on the mountain slope? Does she wonder about her life, the choices made for her and the choices she made, about the what-ifs and why-nots... Does she know about the wars, does she believe she's alone in her grief or does she imagine me, imagining her?

But, most of all –

Do her boys always come back to her, too?



Vedran Volarić is a writer of science fiction, crime fiction, fairytales, romance and satirical stories. He graduated with a degree in Communication Sciences from the University of Zagreb. After winning the award "Ivan vitez Trnski 2016" for the best unpublished manuscript, his novel 22 centuries will be published in 2017. He published more than 40 stories in Croatian and some of them have been translated into English. He has participated in numerous competitions registering many different successes.

Back to the Past

by VEDRAN VOLARIĆ

Translated from Croatian to English by Dora Josipović

May 11 2019, Barcelona

1

"You will be the first time traveler!" said a 60-year-old man in a white coat.

"I?" a young man asked in surprise when as he entered the room filled with appliances and instruments that he did not understand.

"Yes, you." He held out the fingers of his right hand. In his palm he kept eleven pills of different colors. "Look, everything is ready."

"I have no idea what you're talking."

The old man ran to the desk, making sure not to hit the things that were strewn across the floor. He put the pills on its smooth surface and began to mutter something under his breath.

The young man looked around during that time. He was here many times, and with each new arrival had a feeling that the clutter increased. He could not understand how his uncle could deal with such an amount of disorganization; he spotted a right shoe hanging on the chandelier by the shoelaces, a few dozen cans of dog food because of which the biggest closet could not close and a white shirt that was used as a curtain on the only

window in the entire basement. Mild morning light shyly went up to the interior of the rather stuffy room.

"When did you last clean all this up?" asked the young man, noticing his auburn short hair in a dusty mirror above the sink.

"Never mind, never mind, never mind," the old man kept repeating, running from one computer to another. His body was trembling with excitement, and nine cups of coffee he drank during the last half hour weren't too calming to the heart.

The boy stared at the television of modest dimensions which aired footage of a football match between Barcelona and Real Madrid. Current score went in favor of the guests, three goals in the lead. Above the device with an antenna, proudly hanging was a scarf of the national team. On the computer screens he spotted representations of human anatomy, accompanied by a variety of figures which were constantly exchanged, calculating the heart rate, blood circulation and other functions necessary to sustain life, "What's all this?"

"Just one more check to see if it works out as I had imagined." The old man's eyes were wide open, staring at the screen, his long-nailed fingers sliding over the keyboard."Listen,

listen, listen!" The host approached him again. "You will travel through time. You'll be back a year and change the final outcome of the Spanish football league."

"What?"

"Remember, until a year ago I was a gentleman, was I not?"

"I wouldn't say gentleman, but..."

"I had a great job, a car and a pretty girl, with whom I was doing interesting things if you know what I mean, and she was the best cook." For a moment, the thoughts came back of good times, and he continued: "You know Barcelona and Madrid do not really like each other in terms of football."

"Well ..." The young man did not know what to say. "I do not really follow football. I prefer to eat and drink."

"Just before the final match of the last season, Barcelona and Real Madrid were tied; they had an identical number of points, the same number of victories without a single defeat, identical goal difference, they scored and received an identical number of hits, got an identical number of yellow and red cards, had an identical number of outs and corners, identical number of free kicks, identical number of players on the list throughout the season, identical number of substitutes in all the matches, identical financial calculations of investments and profits, and even the air temperature was identical in all their matches. The first match in Madrid was played without goals, so their next showdown that took place in Barcelona in the last round decided on the title of champion. "

"Excellent. Who won?" the young man asked casually, throwing his hair to the side.

"Who won?!" At the mere mention of such issues, the old man freaked out. He ran to the TV and pointed his hand at the screen. Real had just scored the fourth goal. There is only a few minutes until the end. "They destroyed us!" He stopped and approached him. "And more importantly, they destroyed me. I invested my all in betting: my job, my car and my girl. In the

end all I had left was this cellar." Quietly, he continued: "Although I have been living in it illegally for years, so don't tell anyone about it."

The young man thought about not having visited his uncle for far too long.

"Here's your pills. After you take them, you'll be taken back to the match day. You will change the outcome, and then come back to celebrate."

"What?"

"First, you have to have the yellow one, then the red, then green, purple, orange, white, black, brown, blue, light blue and a bit lighter blue. If you take only one, for a few hours you'll be very sick. And remember, you must take them in exact order or you will die. "

"What?"

"Then you have to shout three times, Barcelona, Barcelona."

"That's nine times Barcelona."

"No, no, no... Only three times per Barcelona"

"Why is it mandatory?"

"It is not, but I just thought it would be nice." He then threw over the boy's shirt the jersey of his favorite team. "In your pocket I've put the pills, so that you can go back to the new present. Just in case, you'll have two doses."

"How do you even know it will work?"

"I don't, which is why I'm sending you," softly murmured the old man, reaching for the cup filled with water from the sink.

"What did you say?"

"I say you're in good hands, son. Everything is going according to plan." He handed him the glass. "All of them, drink up. Soon you will feel fatigue, and the next time you wake up, you'll be in the past."

"If you discover time travel, would it not be smarter to prevent wars or something like that?"

The old man pondered for a moment. "Don't give me that nonsense. I'll see you in the past."

How the hell could I change the outcome of football matches? If I were to believe the El Periodico newspaper, which I only grabbed to make sure I really am in the right year, this is the biggest derby in the world.

After I took the pills and fell asleep in the dusty basement, I woke up in the center of Camp Nou. The morning sun shining down on me as if I were in the desert, and the sky - blue like that ... Well, I can't remember what to compare it to.

Some obese dude with an ugly mustache was touching up the grass. I was still dazed so I didn't understand him well, but I think he unpleasantly asked how I got there. "Get out of here. Get out of here!" I did not stay any longer or attempted to communicate with him, but I left the empty stadium and went to the first cafe, where I found the daily press. It turned out the room was filled with fans in white shirts. I got two hands to the left and three on the right cheek. It seemed to me that I did well.

I sat on a wooden bench and watched bewildered people passing by. I was trying to remember where I was on exactly this day. After about ten minutes of thinking, I remembered that that day last time I failed the exam in Catalanian history. The professor asked me what year Catalonia received a temporary autonomous status. My answers were 1375 and 1624, but the correct years were allegedly in 1977 and 1979. I failed and forever lost the right to further study. I told myself I was still pretty close. At least I knew they had four digits. In anger I've destroyed the cell phone that for at least the next year I will not be able to buy.

I hoped to save my studies, but it was too late. I failed at 8 AM, and when I came back it was 8 AM.. and one minute. I did not know how to help Barcelona win, so I went on in search of my uncle.

"Ice cream, ice cream, ice cream! It's free in exchange for money!" my uncle constantly shouted, wearing a white coat, standing in front of the fridge with frozen desserts under the hot sun. Children walking in the park with their parents weren't even paying attention. Beside him was a person trying to tell him something. I got the impression that it was a friend, not a customer.

I approached them, and heard the person speaking to my uncle.

"When will you take me to see the works of Antonio Gaudani or the building of the Palau de la Musica Cantalna?"

The mystic person noticed my presence, after which they left, without a word.

"Me, taking others sightseeing?" muttered my uncle to himself, then he saw me and took a moment to rejoice. "My son, where are you these days? I have not seen you for a while."

"I was ... in time." I paused. "Who was that man?" I looked at the person getting lost in the mass of people.

"That's my girl."

My eyebrows must have merged.

"She's only got a slightly deeper voice. And she's a little stronger in the shoulders. I ..."

"All right," I interrupted, not wanting to waste time. "I came from the future. You sent me in this year."

"I? I do not remember that."

I spent the next hour explaining him what happened, and what will happen to him if Barcelona does not win. We sat in his fifty-year-old car.

The pills in my pocket did not convince him of my story, but he believed me seeing the Barcelona jersey, saying that it was the first jersey he ever stole. On the back of it was written PIGO. He told me that the Portuguese soccer player was actually named FIGO, but he took a needle and reshaped the first letter so that the first owner could never find it.

He showed me an identical jersey, the one from 2018, which he kept in the trunk of his car. I asked him to give up the betting, but he had already bet on a match that was to be held in the evening. However, he promised me that he won't bet on football matches again.

We have been devising a way to change the result of the derby for a long time. We turned down the following ideas:

- Uncles girlfriend sleeps with the referee and persuades him to preside the game for Barcelona

- Uncles girl sleeps with the best Real Madrid player and persuades him to play badly

- Uncles girl sleeps with the worst player of Barcelona and persuades him to play awesome

Just as we ran out of ideas, influenced by a strong sun that it was pounding in my head, uncle suddenly gunned the engine. He explained his plan while driving very fast.

We found his long-bearded girlfriend who was on its way to a public men's room. Since she was a cook, my uncle asked her to call the chef who was preparing lunch for the players of Real Madrid. She promised she'll sleep with him if he agrees to put my spare pills in the food of the first eleven; one for each. He agreed, and my uncle promised to take her to see all the sights that she wanted to see with him in return.

4

As the moon replaced the sun, the players ran out into the packed stadium. The away players in white shirts were so bad that they eventually lost by 1979 compared to zero. With the same number which shaped the year of Catalan autonomy.

May 11 2019, Barcelona

5

With PIGO jersey and empty pockets, the young man returned to the new present. After he woke up in the center of the Camp Nou, he ran to his uncle's basement. He proudly walked up expecting a winning hug.

"Once again you will be a time traveler!" said the 60-year-old man in a white coat.

"I?" asked the young man, puzzled.

"Yes, you." He held out the fingers of his right hand. In his palm he kept eleven pills of different colors. "Look, everything is ready."

"But..."

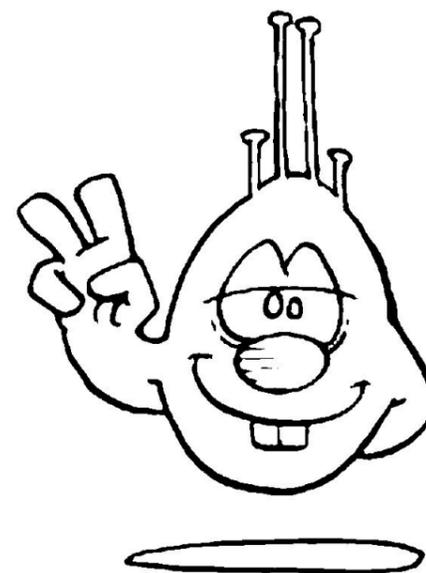
"I made them after you showed them to me exactly a year ago. Thank you for that. I wouldn't have made it without you. The idea was yours, i.e. mine from me who lived in the original 2019 year."

"But..."

"I had a great job, a car and a pretty girl with whom I was doing interesting things, if you know what I mean, and she was the best cook. But I lost everything on betting. Fortunately, you will travel through time. You'll go a year back and change the final outcome of the Spanish league."

"But you promised me that you will not bet on football."

"And I've kept that promise. It's about basketball this time."



Tamara Lövey was born in the twilight of the hottest August day in 1972 in Zagreb. Growing up in a circle of creative and constructive people, she has always nurtured a tendency towards art and creation. All through her life she flirted with many forms of art, like painting and music, professionally choosing architecture. In 2010 she has published a science fiction novel Rezervni dijelovi (Spare Parts).

Angels Privately

by TAMARA LÖVEY

People say that each of us encounters an angel at least once in a lifetime. Maybe we do not recognize them, but they are here among us, observing us from the side-lines, watching over every step we take.

Some also claim that there are times when we are particularly aware of them. Something like a revelation.

You don't believe me?

I'm not quite sure what to believe, either.

When you talk or think of angels, you usually picture huge feathered wings, a creature more etheric than material.

I usually imagined them as a golden hair maid, with firm curves visible beneath the silk dresses and porcelain skin that smells like baby powder. My thoughts would then usually take another, less divine direction.

Sometimes I pictured them as cherubs, that overweight babies with rosy cheeks.

But this, what I was just looking at, could not be classified into any of these categories. If it couldn't be a woman, it could at least be aesthetically pleasing like Brad Pitt.

Leaning out the hotel room window, he was sniffing the morning smog, looking at the

roofs of waking Madrid, and leaving me at a scene that you would never find in the tourist brochures. His builder's bum was showing itself between greasy stained jeans, wrinkled shirt, and too small jacket made of peeled artificial diarrhea-coloured skin.

I still could not believe I fell for his story. The rational part of me wanted to scream that this dude was definitely a con man with no money and looking for free lodging, but it was as if that part of me had been silenced with silver duct tape while my hands were tied with a plastic cable tie. The truth was that, contrary to my beliefs, I amicably invited him to my hotel room, since March in Madrid can be pretty cold.

Despite the heating, cold air that came through the window and empty other half of double bed reminded me how it all might have been different with a warm female body next to mine, had Marina not left me a few days before the trip.

I convinced myself that I needed those five days in a foreign country, in a metropolis rich with history, and that I would somehow turn something that was supposed to be a romantic engagement trip into a kind of field trip, a study of myself. A search for myself, caused by the

loss of my own half that Marina ripped out from our unity aura.

And so the other, less rational, lonely part of me who genuinely suffered due to the breakup, accepted the company of this bizarre creature.

I no longer remember why we chose Madrid as our destination. I think Marina chose it. And, like a hypnotized dog, I immediately accepted it as my own idea. Neither of us has ever learned any Spanish, and that was a big problem here. I was not a polyglot, but I thought that with being fluent in English and with one semester of Italian, I could get around in this country. The fact that the Italian and Spanish are both Romance languages turned out to be aggravating because the two differed in important words. When one day a cold, early spring rain started pouring down, I could barely explain to a shop assistant that I needed an umbrella. After an exhausting tour, despite the scores of tempting Serrano ham legs hanging in shop windows, I decided to satisfy my hunger in a restaurant of a world-famous fast-food chain. I was hoping to find at least someone that would understand my broken Spanish or at least try to respond in somewhat comprehensible English. Listening to the tirade of a guy in front of me and few words that he muttered to himself in my mother tongue gave me the courage to approach him. But before I was able to place an order using both of my arms and legs, he had already left the premises. Breaking through the cover to my hamburger, inhaling the scent programmed to activate your salivary glands, I was clearing my way through a pile of discarded packaging on the floor (so typical of Spanish restaurants) and looked for the guy.

I saw him as he started crossing in confusion a busy street. I ran after him and my just opened hamburger flew out of my hand, landing in a pile of garbage that swirled around, carried by occasional gusts of cold northwest wind.

I called him instinctively, realizing that I

wouldn't reach him in time.

He turned towards me after hearing my warning, and a truck that just avoided him danced along the road and took the nervous trumpet sound with it.

- Man, what were you looking at? - I pounced at him in shock.

- Oh, you noticed me – he replied with visible relief.

- What are you talking about?

- Well, I was trying to dissuade you from eating this garbage – dude looked over my shoulder at a burger that has already attracted the attention of several pigeons.

- What are you on? - I nervously looked at his haggard condition.

- I figured you wouldn't believe me - He shrugged in frustration - I knew I wouldn't have achieved anything with words. Somehow I had to draw your attention in order to protect you from that poison. You really don't need it.

- You are walking around like a headless fly to discourage people from eating unhealthy food? - Slowly I began to regret that I ever drew myself into a debate with this disturbed guy.

- Just you - he calmly replied.

- What are you, some nutrition missionary?

- As if you would've believed me if I told you what my mission was.

- You're my guardian angel! – I sigh nervously, spreading my hand.

- Great! – The guy happily clapped his hands. – This was easier than I thought.

- OK! I've saved your life so you wouldn't fall under a van; you spared me some junk food, so we're even. It was nice, but now our paths go their separate ways - I waved firmly, eager to escape as soon as possible from this madman.

- You can't travel back tomorrow - his words were finding their way to me through the fluttering wings of disturbed pigeons.

I stopped. How could he know that this was my last night in Madrid and that I'm checking out early in the morning so I could

catch a train to the Atocha station and further to the Barajas airport.

- How do you know? - I was hooked.

- Well, I wouldn't be a guardian angel if I wouldn't know your path.

- OK, why shouldn't I travel?

- It's enough to let you know that you shouldn't. I can't tell you more than that. I've already said too much.

- I've already got a return plane ticket. I can't communicate with the Spanish about lousy hamburgers. How shall I get them to exchange a damn plane ticket?

- All that won't matter tomorrow – he shrugged despondently.

- Well, is there a healthy snack in the neighbourhood that you can recommend? - darkness began to thicken, and even the Spanish slowly flocked to nearby restaurants for dinner.

- They do a great paella just around the corner.

It seemed somehow decent to invite your guardian angel to dinner. He joined me, but said that he is on some kind of an angelic diet.

He dutifully listened to my lament and, playing the role of a psychiatrist, helped me to see that each break-up isn't necessarily bad. That it was perhaps even necessary. He walked me to the hotel and stopped at the entrance.

- Thanks for the company. Where are you staying? - I asked him normally.

- I'll stay here for a while.

- In front of the hotel?

- Well ... I have to be sure you'll take my advice – he twisted his mouth into a grimace as a mixture of apologies and threat.

- Are you going to stand here all night?

- Actually yes - he nodded and took the security posture.

- Well. Good night!

- Good night.

As the midnight was drawing near, the air temperature was threateningly approaching zero. I thought of my bodyguard outside. I

didn't know if angels can feel the cold, but somehow I felt sorry for him.

When I came down I found him in the same spot. Although he didn't show he was cold, he accepted my invitation. I even thought he was expected it. Perhaps angels have some super-powers such as predicting the future and read minds.

As we passed by the reception desk, it crossed my mind how someone could look at me for bringing someone into my room at midnight. We passed a large mirror on the way to the lift. For some strange reason I wasn't surprised by the absence of his reflection, in fact I was even relieved.

We spent the rest of the night talking and I probably dozed off before morning. Fresh morning air woke me. The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was the picture that I mentioned at the beginning of this story.

I looked at the clock. It was half past seven and I certainly missed the train, and so the plane as well.

Sun was rising through the mist above the rooftops. Through the open window came the quiet stir of sleepy people starting their working Thursday routine.

Suddenly, a loud crash was heard in the air, the windows flickered and rumbled, and a shock wave engulfed the building. I jumped out of bed expecting an earthquake. Several more explosions followed. From all sides car alarms began blaring, and the cacophony of emergency vehicle sirens sliced the morning air.

I looked at my temporary roommate in shock. He quietly closed the window, attenuating somewhat the sounds of panic, and smiled at me comforting.

- Given the situation, I'm sure that the hotel will want to provide you an extra night free of charge. After this, I doubt that you could go anywhere on a plane, or a train. No buses will be running before tomorrow, for sure. – He calmly explained to me, while I was still trying to figure out what just happened. - Have you

ever visited Barcelona?

- No ... I didn't have a chance.

- Well, if I can give you another advice, I suggest that you visit Barcelona. And of tourist attractions, Park Güell for a start.

- Wait, something terrible just happened, and you're acting now like a tour guide?!

- My mission here is finished. It was just a well-intentioned advice.

- Don't people have some kind of lifelong contract with their guardian angel?

He frankly laughed.

- Let's say I'm more needed elsewhere at the moment, but I can tell you that, if you take my advice, you'll be under some sort of protectorate of mine.

- Park G...?

- Park Güell. At Gaudi's famous lizard. There will be someone waiting for you.

- How will I know who?

- Trust me, you'll know – he smiled mischievously and winked at me, indicating departure with his gesture.

- Wait, I even don't know your name.

- You can call me Eulogie – he nodded and greeted me.

He closed the door, before I could thank him. I hurried after him, but the hall was empty, as expected.

I turned on the TV. All channels were reporting about bombs on trains, explosions, hundreds of victims. 21431. It could be a number of my train. I shivered and looked out the window where smoke was rising to the sky, on the eleventh day of March.

Packing my things, I suddenly came across a book left on my bedside table. Maybe it was just a nice gesture of the hotel staff, but its title offered me another explanation. Angel's game. I flipped through it and was surprised by the publication year. Someone mistakenly put 2008. Four years in advance.

The next day I was able to get a bus ticket to Barcelona. The train would be faster, but after all that happened, I somehow wasn't up for a train ride.

The trip took seven hours, and it was enough time for me to swallow more than half of the book. I was totally overwhelmed by the book.

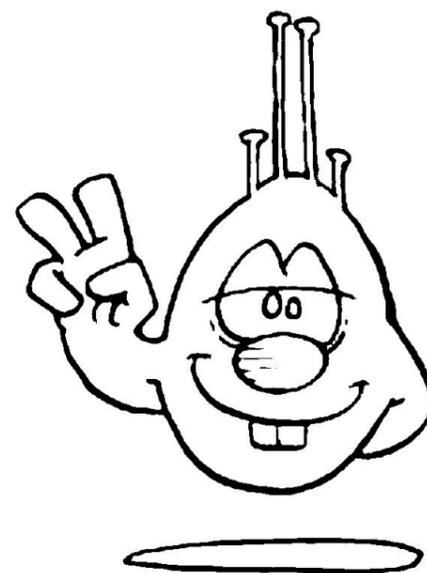
I could not wait to set foot in the city and look for places that the author described. Somehow I still felt obliged to visit Park Güell first. I got to the Lesseps square and started walking to the park.

I don't know if I was still smitten by magic of the book, but the park further strengthened my fairy-tale impression of the city.

At park entrance, I found Gaudi's fountain shaped like a giant lizard. I reached out my hand to touch the water that flowed from the lizard's mouth, but instead of water, I touched someone's hand.

We pulled back simultaneously in mutual apology. She pulled back the lock of her light brown hair with wet hand, looking at me with her olive green eyes. Instead of transparent dresses, she had a well-padded jacket, cargo-pants and hiking boots. Somehow, I suspected that her huge backpack served as camouflage for the wings.

In her other hand she held a book. I didn't have to check the title of the book. I knew it. I pulled out my copy, eliciting from her the most beautiful smile I had ever seen. That smile just added Barcelona's magical touch a romantic one. Fantastically romantic.



Rumor has it Juraj Beloševič was born in 1988, but his parents didn't tag him on Facebook so now nobody believes him. He writes every now and then, and sometimes even gets published. He makes great muffins, but his rice always ends up soggy. He's always looking for good rice-related advice.

Glimpses Into the Life of Crewman Jones, Working Class Pirate

by JURAJ BELOŠEVIĆ

I

The ship bobbed and skittered through the asteroid field, occasionally skimming a floating rock or two. This gave the captain much joy, but failed to entertain crewman Jones who stood watch in the crow's nest.

The gravity was always wonky at the top of the mast, and he was more or less used to it. Sure, it was a bit cold and yes, if he wasn't careful he'd float away into the emptiness of space, but that's what the rope was for. He learned early on in his tenure aboard the good ship Pinafore that safety always came first. Not to the captain, and certainly not to his first mate – the poor bastard, old and forgetful as he was, often mistook the cosmic waves on which they rode for old-fashioned watery ones, so they had to put on their helmets and reel him back onto the ship at least twice a week. No, safety came first for crewman Jones. It was with this in mind that he requisitioned a sturdy piece of rope (a meter and a half in length) on his second day and made it a point to tie himself to the mast every time he had to man the nest.

"We're cutting it a bit close, don'tcha think, cap'n?" he yelled when the tip of his station scratched a particularly large asteroid, which

resulted in a cloud of dust merrily dancing at the edges of his gravity bubble.

"Nonsense!" captain Vivas yelled back from behind the wheel, toothy grin flashing. "There's plenty of room!"

"I'm sure there is," crewman Jones said, "but the asteroid field's not agreeing with ya."

Standing next to the captain, old Helmut von Bratch gave a significant smack o' the lips.

"D' ye think the cap'n ought to answ'r t' 'is crewmates, or th' other way 'round, hm?" the first mate asked. He gave the crewman in the nest a crossed look, or at least that's what it seemed like from where Jones was standing. Either the first mate was mad at him for suggesting that the captain's choice of entry to the Twin City was less than ideal, or his glass eye was acting up again.

Jones wasn't particularly keen on the old coot, but he had to admit he obviously knew what he was doing. Word was von Bratch was close to a hundred and forty years, which was an impressive feat all by itself. The fact that he had spent those years sailing all kinds of ships, be they state-sanctioned or (as was currently the case) more casual in their interpretation of maritime law, made his advancing years a goddamn miracle. Respecting one's elders was

one thing, but shutting up when a bona fide methuselah gave you a suggestion, now that was just common sense. Even if said methuselah didn't have a full deck.

"Speaking of full decks..."

A figure appeared on the deck, quietly exiting the lower decks. The Contessa Isabella Erdödy strolled onto the bridge in her luxurious evening gown, shyly scanning the crew. She was a quiet woman, mostly kept to herself, so Jones didn't know a lot about her. Not that he expected her to socialize with the likes of him. There was talk among the crew that she was some bigwig from The Isle, part of some wealthy family or another, and that she left her home in a hurry after the death of her father. Rumor had it she killed him, but to Jones it seemed that a slightly stronger breeze would swoop her overboard. Probably read poetry by candlelight. Hardly the murderous type.

"Good evening, dear lady!" the captain offered her a jolly grin as soon as he decided she was close enough to fully appreciate it. "How fare you?"

"Fine, captain," the Contessa said, offering a curt nod. "I was made to understand we were approaching the Twin City."

As if on cue, the ship rocked violently as its side scratched one of the asteroids. A bit of shouting and panicky gripping of rails ensued, but was short-lived.

"Did we just hit...?"

"Turbulence, my lady," the captain quickly said. "Space turbulence. Nothing to worry about. We're almost at—Helmut, is that who I think it is?"

Crewman Jones was too busy watching the show on deck to notice the mast of a capsized ship heading straight for him. It took him a thorough double-take to fully grasp the gravity of the situation.

A ship roughly the size of the Pinafore was sailing full mast in the opposite direction, and it seemed as if the top of its mast would connect shortly with either the top of the Pinafore and/or with crewman Jones' noggin. Neither result

seemed ideal to crewman Jones.

"It's the Taurus!" the captain shrieked in delight. "Hi-ho, Sisters!"

"I don't think they can 'ear ya, cap'in," the first mate said, but Vivas paid him no heed. He waved merrily in their direction, even as their mast's gravitational field entered the Pinafore's own.

Instead of crashing into the ship or hitting crewman Jones, the Taurus merely clung to the Pinafore by way of its top bubble, the two fields mashing against each other, shaking both ships and holding them in place. This messed mightily with the gravity within the fields, and crewman Jones found himself floating in midair, the same as his counterpart in the Taurus' nest. In the absence of anything better to do, they waved collegiately at each other. The two ships, horns locked, tried to come to a stop. Only, at the same time, their masts and the ion motors within worked away, trying to propel each in their respective directions. After a few moments of uncertainty, both ships ricocheted at obtuse angles, the masts finally free of each other. It was only then that crewman Jones noticed a second ship behind the Taurus. He couldn't read the name written on its hull, but the crowned flag it flew made no mistake about what its function was.

"Police incoming!" he yelled. "They're on the Taurus' tail—"

The rest was a gibbered mess of half-articulated consonants, as gravity quickly reasserted itself in the crow's nest.

"Did he say 'police incoming'?" captain Vivas looked at his first mate. "Did I hear that right?"

"Yar," Helmut muttered. "I'd say th' Seven Sisters are on th' run ag'in."

"Good for them!"

The police ship, now faced with the bottom of the Pinafore and not the stern of the ship they had in pursuit a minute ago, tried to quickly correct course. This played out as well as you'd think.

II

"This him?"

"Yes, Jeffe."

"The... Pinafore?"

"Yes, Jeffe."

"As I tried to tell these fine gentlemen, this is all one big misunderstanding," captain Vivas tried to butt in, but this was quickly followed by a smack to the head. "Terribly sorry, wasn't my turn to speak."

"Any known affiliation with the Seven Sisters?"

"Not directly, but the captain..."

"...Ante Lafayette Vivas."

"That's right, sir. The captain has been known to be in cahoots with at least three of the Seven Sisters on two separate occasions."

"Cahoots is such a strong word—" Smack!

"Very well, lieutenant. Good work. Leave the room."

"But sir—"

"Leave, lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Quintana, who brought captain Vivas battered and shackled to the security office in the Twin City, exited the small, smoke-filled room. Now it was just the captain, sitting silently in a rickety metal chair, and Soler.

This wasn't Quintana's first rodeo. He knew how things went when a high profile criminal was apprehended. While Vivas wasn't worth a one-on-one with Soler, Barcelona's (or Valencelona's, it depended on who you asked) chief of police, he did obstruct a pursuit of actually arrest-worthy criminals. The Seven Sisters had played don Diego Stiepan y Milosh de Valencelona, the City's most prominent businessman, and stole something of value from him. What it was wasn't part of Quintana's job. They could've stolen a saltshaker for all he cared. The theft was enough to put the officers of the Twin City on their feet, for the don's loss was everyone's loss.

The thing was, Quintana was itching for a good interrogation.

He hated sailing. Giving chase to pirates

was the most exciting thing that had happened to him this month. Hell, this year. He figured he'd chase them for a bit, catch up, then get some one-on-one time with each of the Sisters. He'd play bad cop, then good cop, then kind-of-ok cop, then indifferent cop, then wacky cop. Quintana had a whole notebook full of cop variations and no excuse to use any of them.

He stood by the door of the interrogation room, partly because the chief might need him, but mostly because he hoped to at least overhear a few juicy threats. He was sure the prisoners in the cells that stretched along the hallway wouldn't mind. And if they did, well... He had a few cops he was more than happy to introduce them to.

"A likely story," the chief said on the other side of the door. The words were muffled, but by carefully placing his ear to the wood, Quintana managed to... Do next to little, as it turned out. No matter. It was better than nothing.

"I swear it's true!" Vivas yelled, then mumbled something unintelligible.

Part of the reason why it was unintelligible was the thickness of the door, but there was also the sharp buzzing sound behind Quintana that made it hard to hear. The lieutenant turned on his heel furiously, only to see one of the prisoners rubbing his ear and the force-field in front of him still shimmering from their contact.

"What the hell are you doing?" Quintana yelled.

The prisoner, a scruffy-looking man who, for some reason, sported a severed rope as a belt, shrugged and said: "I couldn't hear what they were saying."

"Of course you couldn't, you idiot," Quintana said. "They're five meters from you and behind a thick wooden door."

"You're closer, though," the man said.

"You could tell me what's going on in there. I'd love to know."

"So would we!" the rag-tag band of pirates behind him joined in.

"It's terribly boring, sitting in a cell," one of

them added.

“I’m sorry if the accommodations aren’t to your liking,” the lieutenant said. “Shut up and step away from the field.”

“It’s just that, he’s my captain,” the man with the belt-ropes said. “I’d like to know if I’m out of a job or not.”

Crewman Jones was standing behind a shimmering field of energy, but he could’ve sworn there was a twinkle in the policeman’s eye as he said this. A few seconds later, when he found himself on the other side of the field and propped against the wall, he decided that there had indeed been a twinkle. As a matter of fact, it was still there.

“Oh, I’m going to have some fun with you,” Quintana said with a devilish grin.

Avoiding the policeman’s wild stare, Jones muttered: “I doubt that. I’m terribly boring.”

“Don’t you worry about that. You just refuse to talk—”

“No no, I’ll talk, I’ll talk.”

“Oh, I’m sure you will. Once I’m done with you—”

“No need, I’ll talk right now. What do you want to know?”

“Could you at least pretend to refuse to talk?”

“I, uh... Guess?”

“Good. You pretend to refuse to talk, and I’ll take care of everything else. When I’m through with you, you’ll—”

The sound of a buzz saw coming from the interrogation room broke his train of thought.

“The lucky bastard,” Quintana muttered, staring longingly at the heavy wooden door. “I don’t even have a pen.”

“No! Not the bees!” Vivas yelled from within.

“Son of a... Listen, chico, I’ve got a... a...” Quintana started rummaging through his pockets. “A... crumbled piece of paper.”

Not ideal, but close enough for government work. He showed it to Jones.

“Do you know what I can do with a piece of paper?”

“A paper boat?”

“Among other things.”

“OH GOD NOT THE SPACETAPUS,” came from the interrogation room.

Quintana sighed and shoved the paper back into his pocket. The look of him broke Jones’ heart. Here was a man who wanted nothing more than to do his job. Jones could sympathize – he was much the same, a man brought up with a strict work ethic and taught that it was through work that people defined themselves. And the lieutenant, well... He was doing his best.

“Listen, I know you’re trying,” he said.

“I am,” lieutenant Quintana replied. “I really am. I know I’m not an interrogator, but...”

“Dress for the job you want, not the one you have.”

“Exactly!”

“You’re hardly working in ideal conditions,” Jones said. “I mean, let’s face it, your boss is a bastard.”

“A bit, yeah.”

“It should be you in there. With the saws and the bees.”

“Damn right!”

“But what can ya do?”

“Not much.”

“Not much. It’s our lot in life, I suppose. Standing in the sidelines while the bigwigs have at it.”

“It’s not fair.”

They stood in silent comradery for a while, the silence sullied only by the occasional scream from within the interrogation room. Quintana finally broke it with: “Do you mind if I torture you a bit? Just to see if I could do it.”

“Oh, no, be my guest.”

“Thanks, buddy. You’re really a standup g—”

What broke his train of thought this time was a swift blackjack to the back of the head. Lieutenant Quintana stopped midsentence and unceremoniously fell to the floor and into the embrace of sweet unconsciousness.

Behind him, decrepit but surprisingly spry, was Helmut von Bratch.

“Git ‘is keys, ya sorry seaman, an’ falla me!”

III

"This is hardly what I signed up for."

"Shut yer pie 'ole, yer excellency, an' keep a brisk pace. How's it goin', Jones?"

"Can't complain, sir."

The three of them – the first mate, the Contessa and crewman Jones – had a surprisingly hard time carrying the beaten and half-conscious captain (who was humming what seemed to be the best of Gilbert & Sullivan) through the streets of the Twin City. The man was heavier than he looked.

It turned out that the old geezer of a first mate was crafty beyond compare. Not only did he evade the authorities when they boarded the Pinafore, he managed to backstab his way into the police station and spring the two of them like it was something he did on a regular basis.

"*Premazan svim mastima*," he told Jones. "Ol' Tongue. Means no crown-licker ever goan git th' best o' me."

The Contessa was a different story. Of course the police didn't put her in a cell with the rest of the plebs – she had a nice room with a view where she waited to be processed and then, upon contacting her family and ascertaining just how rich it is, duly released. Springing her was a formality.

The rest of the crew weren't so lucky.

"We'll come back for 'em," the first mate assured Jones. "They're small fish, ya ken. They'll be out on th' streets in no time."

The captain, he told him, wasn't a small fish. Besides, he was wholly innocent. Of this particular crime.

With that in mind, they hurried through the city streets, waiting to hear the sound of the police bell. Strangely, none came. They also expected to see police swarming the streets, but the streets were suspiciously devoid of police officers. They were by no means empty, as a procession seemed to be making its jolly way through the city.

"Everyone must be off hunting the Sisters,"

Jones said. "That's good, right?"

"Aye, tha's wonderful," Helmut grunted. "Come on, lef', righ', lef', righ'."

"Mister von Bratch, I must protest," the Contessa said, trying her best not to drop the captain who was right in the middle of the Major-General's Song. "I have a record now!"

"So?"

"What will I do now?"

"Yer damned if you sin but once," he told her solemnly, then grinned, adding: "No sense in stoppin' now. Ah, thar it is! Pivot, pivot."

He lead them straight into the crowd holding signs saying things like "St. Jacob #1" and "There's no parade like St. Jacob's parade", maneuvering through the gathered mass like a bobsled driver with a death wish.

They arrived at the docks aching and panting, but still carrying the humming captain.

"Thar's your expl'ination fer th' empty streets," Helmut told Jones as they came to a stop.

The docks were crawling with police officers. Their ship, a little battered by its close encounter but none worse for wear, was floating next to the pier, a bridge connecting it to the city. Around it and on it, a battalion of blue sniffing for clues.

"Well," the Contessa sighed. "Do you have a brilliant plan to offer, sir Bratch?"

"As it jus' so 'appens," the old wolf grinned, "I migh'."

"This doesn't fit."

"Stop yer yammerin' and put th' hat on."

Crewman Jones did as he was told. Doing as he was told was a surefire way, he learned, to get out of trouble. Then again, it was usually the reason why he got in trouble in the first place.

After being tied to the mast, arrested and sprung out, he now found himself wearing a policeman's uniform, with the first mate following suit. The two policemen unlucky enough to stray too far from the docks got a

blackjack to the head for their troubles, and were now laying naked in a back alley.

“Are you sure this will work?” the Contessa asked. “It seems like a bit of a stretch.”

“I fin’ tha’ foolproof plans tend th’ run into fools stupid enough t’ break ‘em,” Helmut said. “Longshots are usually yer safest bet.”

Hoping to God the old man knew what he was doing, crewman Jones took the captain (now humming “When Fred’ric was a little lad”) by his legs, while Helmut grabbed his hands.

“Ya ready, Isabella?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Jus’ remember, lass – calm and normal. Don’t overdo it.”

They approached the ship with the confidence of people who were just doing their jobs. The officers combing the area noticed them immediately, and the one that seemed like she was running the show approached them with a pad in her hand.

“What do you think you’re doing?” she asked in that high and mighty tone reserved for kings and minor bureaucrats.

“How dare you?!” the Contessa screamed and slapped the officer hard enough for her to drop her pad. “Do you know who I am?!”

“I, no, what,” the officer replied.

“I have no time for pencil-pushers,” Isabella scoffed. “Make way. The chief insists we tie this scoundrel to the mast. Maybe that will refresh your memory, eh?”

She eyed the captain and kicked him for good measure.

“I, uh, I’m sorry, I had no idea,” the officer mumbled. “Nobody said anything—“

“Of course they didn’t, you intellectually deficient baboon,” Isabella stopped her. “You presume too much about your own importance.”

“I... Of course. I apologize, madam. Please continue.”

“May I?” she asked mockingly. “Move aside!”

“YES, MA’AM!”

The mass of officers surrounding the ship split post haste and those on board scurried off,

allowing them full access. Helmut and Jones quickly ran up the bridge with the captain in hand, while the Contessa followed at their heels. Once they were on board and sure the police couldn’t hear them, she started giggling.

“Oh my God, that was such a rush!” she squealed.

“Calm and collected, my dear,” Helmut muttered. “We’re not in th’ clear yet. Jones, tie th’ cap’in t’ th’ mast.”

“Of course what?”

“They’ll suspect something is wrong, you’re right,” Isabella said. “Do as he says.”

So he did. He tied the captain good and proper, which didn’t seem to bother him much. The man was happy singing his little tunes and slipping in and out of consciousness. Helmut didn’t waste any time either. He shimmied over to the wheel and started fiddling with the controls. It didn’t take him long to start the ship, which didn’t go unnoticed by the officers on the pier.

“Excuse me,” the lead officer yelled. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but what the hell are you doing?”

“Uh, nothing,” Isabella yelled back. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, the bridge is receding, for one.”

“Oh, that. Part of the interrogation.”

“Is it, thought? ALARM! SOUND THE ALARM!”

“Helmut?”

“Way ahea’ o’ ya.”

The good ship Pinafore started backing up, the loud beep from its onboard speakers echoing through the dock. The police shuffled and yelled, but that did little to stop the crew. Soon they were clear of the platforms and sailing away.

“See?” Helmut yelled. “Easy as drownin’ in debt!”

Crewman Jones had to hand it to him. The geezer really knew his stuff. Sure, now they were all fugitives and would like be hounded by Valencelona’s (or was it Barcelona’s?) finest, but that was perfectly fine. It kept things interesting. Besides, it would take them a while to find a ship that wasn’t in pursuit of the Seven

Sisters.

“What are our plans now, sir?” he asked the first mate.

“No idea,” the mate responded. “We go where th’ wind takes us.”

The ship bobbed and skittered through the asteroid field, occasionally skimming a floating

rock or two. This gave the captain much joy, though crewman Jones suspected that anything would bring the captain joy right now. He was well and truly out of it. Luckily, he was tied to the mast so he could laugh and sing as much as he wanted. He was safe.

Safety always came first.



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One of the most prolific science fiction and fantasy writers in Croatia, Milena Benini started writing when she was 12, and simply never stopped. In the meantime, she studied literature, and now dabbles in theory as well as practice of speculative fiction of all kinds. If you're curious about her long fiction, her novel *Priestess of the Moon* is available from MuseItUp Publishing. She lives with her husband, cat, dog and two daughters in Zagreb.

She-Dragon in the Forest, Dreaming

by MILENA BENINI

I first heard the story of the she-dragon when I was six. No, wait, that's not exactly true. I'd heard it many times before that, given that it was a staple good-night story in the area. But the first time I remember hearing it, it wasn't told by any of my mothers. It was told by Ake.

Ake was fourteen – more than twice my age, which alone gave her an aura of mystical wisdom. But she was also from the coast, and had travelled far and wide. I had never been anywhere. Ake's words had weight.

It was the feast of Lukărno, and all the people from the village had come to the fair once the sun became too tired to light their work. There was food on the stalls, and wine, cooked and sugared for us children, cool and rich for the adults. There was music, of course, and dancing under lanterns hung from trees, and carts come from half the county selling toys and mirrors and precious stones and things I did not know to name. And some, like Ake's family, sold stories.

Looking back, I know that she must have been just an apprentice. Even with children, no teller worth the name would have offered such an old story, particularly not in a village so close to the Forest Ry. We all knew it. The she-dragon was in our blood. But Ake told it like a

new story, with shadow-pictures thrown large at the wall of the old Nalise vineyard, weaved it with such conviction and gusto that none of us regretted paying for it. There had been me, of course, and Onina, and Tan, Kagě and her brother, and little Rira. We are all old now – those of us still alive – and we all to this day remember Ake's name, even though she never came back to the village again, never sold us another story. That's how powerful it was.

I know, I know. They say you always remember your first story. But then, they also say demons take children who misbehave on Midlight Night, and we all know how that turned out. But I do remember. She wore redleaf tresses for the telling: I can still see them glisten in the firelight as her hands made shadow-pictures dance. I can hear her voice drop dramatically when Ren the Hero first saw the reflection of dragon fire in the forest pond. If I close my eyes, I can even smell the spices on her breath, from the wine she sipped as she weaved the story around us. I know it was hers, because we were all holding our breaths. Even little Rira, and she was only two.

When you come to a key moment in the story, you hold your breath. It's instinctive. Just like it was instinctive to scream when the

demons came. Of course, they weren't real demons, just youths from the village with horrifying masks on their heads. We all knew that – well, except maybe for little Rira. But the rest of us certainly knew; after all, most of us had helped make the masks, gathering leaves and twigs and feathers and whatever else caught our fancy throughout the year and leaving it in the large basket in the village hall, where the mask-makers could sift through them and choose what they thought would serve them best.

I could see a string of greenish stones dangling from the dry-weed plait of one demon. I had found those stones in the brook behind our house. I remembered how mothers scolded me for coming home so late. Yet I still screamed when the demon reached for me, and grabbed Tan's hand and ran wildly through the fairers and the forest. Such fun we had! Oh, such fun!

I have a memory of kissing Tan as we hid from demons in the roots of the big old tree that grew at the entrance of the vineyard, but that must have been at least a couple of years later. Maybe the year before the Strangers came. Maybe that very year. Was there a feast of Lukărno the year the Strangers came? I cannot recall. That year, only one thing mattered.

No, I am putting it wrong. It wasn't the only thing that mattered. Nothing ever is. But it erased so much, only meaningless flashes remained of everything else. Not in the way in which the taste of Tan's breath erased the pleasant-fear sensation of the demon rush and replaced it with the pleasant-fear sensation of another world opening. The arrival of Strangers erased literally. Removed. Took away.

We first became aware of the Strangers when they started eating away the sun. We did not know that was what they were doing, and I'm sure they had a different name for it. But that was their intent, in the end. They had gone through a number of worlds in that manner, building huge sky-walls around suns they considered appropriate, sucking up their

energy and using it to build, and to travel, and to communicate.

Building and travel and communication: all good things, are they not? Yes, you will say, and so will I. Of course, the Strangers only built Strangers' things. They only travelled with fellow Strangers, and only talked to Strangers they'd left behind, to eat away other suns. When they encountered someone who was stranger to them, they left such worlds, and their suns, alone.

At least that was the theory. In practice, they searched for signs of life that built and travelled and communicated like them. Life that talked over air and lit fires to keep away the cold and built houses that reached into heavens. I saw pictures of their First World. It was round like ours, but it looked like a fair lantern, so much light everywhere I caught myself looking for the shape of a she-dragon in the tiny scraps of black that remained. I thought I saw it, too, and then someone told me it was an illusion, the habit of the brain to see patterns where there are none. There was no she-dragon on the Strangers' world. My eyes just put it there to make the image more comfortable.

But that was later. Much later. By then, Tan was already dead, and so was little Rira. Kagě's brother was also gone, for his wandering time had come. So only Onina and Kagě and myself went to see the story of the Strangers. Onina hadn't wanted to, at first, and when Onina didn't want something, Kagě didn't want it, either. So in the end, I said I'd go alone if I had to, and they relented. We went, and they even didn't make me pay the teller by myself. I would have.

I wanted to know the truth, you see. We had heard from travelling salesmen that Strangers had come. We had heard rumours about them: that they were to blame for the now constantly-tired sun. That they were fixing the sun to make it less tired. That they were huge and terrifying. That they were tiny and slick and oddly white. That they had brought

the wasting sickness that had taken so many. That they had made the cure that stopped it.

That is the way of stories, of course. When everybody tells them, they grow a thousand heads, all at odds with each other. That is why there are those who specialise in finding stories, learning the truth of them, and carrying that truth to all. And this teller had seen the Strangers from up close. Her images were not shadow-pictures, at least not the usual ones. For one, they were in colour. And she did not use fire. Instead, she had a box – a gift from the Strangers – that she would leave in the sun during the day and it would capture the light to make pictures in the dark. Strangers had a lot of different boxes that could capture the light, she said, but not all of them made pictures. Some made noises, and others made carts go, and yet others helped the Strangers think.

She told us the Strangers really were to blame for the state of the sun, although not because their boxes ate away too much. She then told us about the sky-walls, and how those had started eating away the sun, and how they only stopped when the Strangers noticed we lived underneath it.

The Strangers weren't really bad, she explained. They were just arrogant, assuming only life like theirs was life. Once they realised their mistake, they did their best to make things right again. So they stopped the sky-walls, and landed on our world to see what kind of damage they might have unwittingly done.

That was when something happened – the Strangers themselves didn't seem entirely certain what it was, or maybe just weren't willing to share the truth of it with us – and, one way or another, something of them escaped from them into our world. A bare hand, a door opened too soon, a protective cocoon ripped by a stone. An accident, no doubt, because even though there had been voices among Strangers claiming that life such as ours was not worth preserving, the overwhelming majority of them understood that space is vast enough for all life, and there are enough suns

to eat that do not harbour beings.

In any case, the teller said, normally that should not have been a problem, for our bodies and those of the Strangers were too different to affect each other. But one, only one of the tiny lives that are sicknesses was able to adapt to its new world quickly enough, and it became the wasting sickness.

As soon as they saw what had happened, the teller said, the Strangers started searching for a way to repair the damage. But it did not go easy. First they had to find someone willing to give them their dead, then they had to find out what they had died of, and figure out what it had been when it had lived on Strangers only. And then it took time to come up with a way to kill the escaped sickness without damaging any other life.

While the Strangers were doing all this, Tan lost so much strength in the space of a single quarterday that even lifting a cup became impossible. I know. I held the cup to Tan's lips until there was no longer any reason to do so. Then I waited for the wasting sickness to fell me, too. It didn't. It got little Rira, though, and three of her mothers. Two of Tan's, as well. A whole nest in the house down on the other side of the brook. One of the last three surviving Nalise mothers, the oldest mothers in the village. And, worst of all, almost everyone younger than Rira.

By the time the Strangers' flying boxes passed over our village, so high in the sky we didn't even know they were boxes carrying the cure, we were down to just three hatchlings, and no wanderers in sight. Even though the wasting sickness seemed to like the very young and the very old more than grown-ups, we saw no wanderers that year. The teller said it was probably because some villages had become wary of all outsiders as the sickness raged. There had been talk of wanderers getting killed, too – by villagers, not by the wasting sickness – but she could not vouch for the truth of it.

Kagě's brother had stopped writing. At least, his letters stopped coming. For a while,

we thought it was because the arrival of Strangers had changed so many things, it was no longer simple to find someone going our way. After all, the Forest Ru sat at the foot of Mother Ja, the great mountain. It was a place where people went to strengthen their feeling for the land, the feeling for themselves and each other. With the Strangers' arrival, that had changed. It was no longer nest-village-the world. A new element had been added to the equation, and that destroyed the balance. Mother Ja could not give advice for this new world. One that contained wasting sickness, light-gathering boxes, and Strangers who travelled over the vast ocean of stars yet barely noticed we were alive.

These were not things Mother Ja could help comprehend, it seemed. Even when the wasting sickness was eradicated, and life began returning to some semblance of order, the number of travellers passing through our village on their way to the Forest and the Mountain remained abysmal. Traffic mostly went towards the south, now, to the places where the Strangers had landed, where light-boxes could be had just for the asking, and tales of wonder and glory heard directly from the Strangers' tellers.

There was brisk trade, too: the Strangers wanted artefacts – sculptures, jewellery, demon masks, even kitchenware. In return, they offered their own crafts, and knowledge, too. They could figure out cures for most our sicknesses, set bones much quicker, make sure even the weakest and shakiest of hatchlings survived to adulthood. That was undoubtedly good, and reason enough for people to want to be near them.

They taught their language – not to speak, for their mouths were too different from ours for the sounds to come out anything alike, but to write, for their writing system was fairly simple and only had a couple dozen signs. And they asked to be taught our languages. When tellers asked how it was possible that our people had dozens of different languages and theirs,

spanning so many suns and worlds, only one, they explained that yes, they had other languages, too, but they were not important, and this one language was known by all, making communication so much easier. Even if we could not produce the sounds, our people could learn to write their language, and then use more light-boxes to create the sounds they needed. That way, the Strangers said, there would be no more misunderstandings. We could be friends.

We heard all this from the new teller, who did not tell us her name. And even though her pictures were more like life than anything I had ever seen done with shadows and dolls, they were not more lifelike. And her story was interesting, and true, but it did not build excitement in us. We did not hold our breaths at any point: neither me, nor Onina, nor Kagě. We paid the teller, and thanked her as is polite, and then excused ourselves and returned home as if nothing had happened.

And then, for a very long time, nothing did happen. We went on living as we always did, with our small nest empty for a few years, until a wanderer finally appeared. He was not particularly handsome, or charming, but as we were short of hatchlings, he mated with all of us, and also with our mothers, and just about everyone else in the village except for the two remaining Nalise mothers, who were past hatching age. And then he asked to be paid, for services rendered.

The two Nalise mothers tried to explain to him that wanderers did not get paid for begetting children any more than mothers got paid for raising them. It was just what we all did so that all of us could live on. But he said that it was no longer the custom in the developed south. He added that was the reason why no wanderers came our way, for what could we offer as payment, anyway, since we had nothing of value. That last thing, the Nalise mothers said, was both completely true and completely untrue, and that much should be obvious to anyone with any sense. He laughed

in their faces. Then he called them old hags out of touch with reality. One of the Nalise mothers got offended at that, and cried out painfully. The wanderer just laughed at that, too, and that was when the other Nalise mother pecked him to death.

The Nalise mothers were too old for so much effort, so it was up to us younger ones to carry the body. We – our nest, and two others – took the wanderer’s body into the forest Rų, and up to Mother Ја. We left him on one of the lower slopes, as he was not worth the effort of climbing all the way up. And then, since we were there, I said to Onina and Kagě, “Let’s climb all the way to the top.”

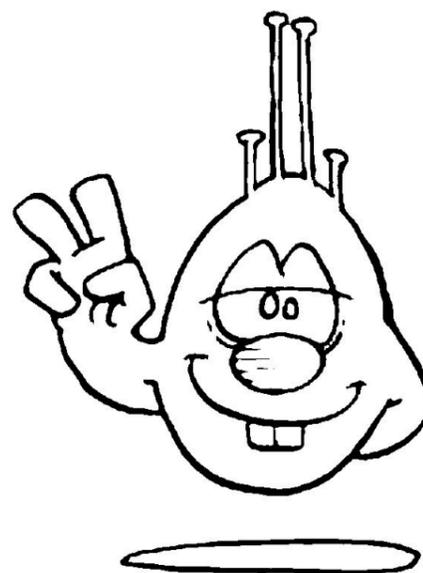
Mother Ја is not very hospitable in her upper reaches. She gets cold, and the forest gets sparse, nothing standing between our bodies and the wind of the heights. But we knew that, and had brought capes to protect us. And Kagě, who had always liked the wilderness more than anything, knew every step of the way. With her in the lead, we reached the summit before sundown, even with our tired sun.

The view that opened before us was breathtaking. Not even in the sense in which good stories are breathtaking. The sheer vast expanse of land rolling beneath us, the red and brown leaves of the forests, the orange and yellow of the fields, and the purple waves of the ocean in the distance. We could see all that, and breathe in the cold, clear air that made our chests heavy but still felt refreshing like water from a brook.

And then we saw, far to the south, a single building rising above all others, like a broken bone protruding from the skin, or a threatening finger rising in anger. Above our heads, we saw the tiny line of the sky-wall across our tired sun. The Strangers had not yet dismantled it, because they were trying to think of a way to make our sun not-tired again, and felt the sky-wall could be of some use yet. At least that was what they’d said. Maybe some believed them. Maybe some didn’t. But that evening, on top of Mother Ја, it did not matter. We had seen what was happening. And we knew what to do. We looked at each other, Onina, Kagě and myself, and we just knew. We may not breathe fire, but we would find a way to preserve the view from Mother Ја.

By the time we had come down the mountain, Kagě was already a male. There had been times before when wanderers were scarce, and our bodies knew how to deal with those times. We would hatch, and hatch more. We would preserve what could be preserved, for as long as we could. And we would live, so that our stories, too, would live. Told right, with shadow-pictures, in a way that makes you hold your breath.

So now you know everything and, as you are old enough to go wandering, remember to tell our story. Tell everyone. The she-dragon lives in the Forest Rų. The she-dragon lives, and dreams of freedom.



Mirko is former chairman of SFera, editor of Parsek, and probably the one that will take on the mantle of the Archiver. Or the Librarian. Or whatever role it is where you mix your drinks and tales with oldest and youngest members of SFera alike.

Here he is meandering through his thoughts and history, thinking about events and people that lead to one particular birthday.

SFera Turns Forty;

Why Does It Feel Like Generation Starship?

by MIRKO KARAS



Once upon a time, as all fables begin, someone asked SFerans, "What is... SFera?"

They all gathered, wise greyhairs and eager younglings, quiet observers and loudmouth thinkers, and each of them have their own answer. And each of them was perfectly right.

Then, one of the Great Old Ones* simply shouted across the room ... C'EST MOI!

And that was it. The Answer. However I turn the question, whatever answer I may find, the truth remains that SFera is not just part of my life, but me. I only hope it feels about me the same way.

It is an old beast, SFera is, and this February it celebrated its fortieth birthday. Forty might not seem much, but Europe is full of states that are younger than that! In science fiction terms, if it was a starship, it would be further away from Earth than both Voyagers.

And this is where a generation starship story starts.

When generation starships embark on the journey, they go never to return building their own society and history. Generations come and go, each one weaving the legends of the those who were before. Customs and methods change, but the goal remains the same. Stars.

When SFera was founded, I wonder if The Founders knew how long it will last (Well, I'll ask them next time we get together for a tippie). At that time and place, it was a great idea for a science fiction fans to gather with their soulmates and exchange stories, books

* Mythos says it is not wise to name them, but it is more dangerous to omit THIS one. His name is Ivica Posavec.

and experiences. It was also a great way to get their hands on the latest movie tapes - remember, it was the seventies, VCRs barely existed in Yugoslavia then.

Legends speak of a Carousel, Merry-Go-Round shelf in the bookstore in Zagreb, filled with foreign science fiction books, mostly in English or translations, where lovers of such tales frequently stopped for a new read. Soon they noticed the same faces around the carousel, started trading books and tales. Soon there was too many of them to fit into the bookstore and they spilled out onto the streets and pubs of Zagreb.

Science fiction was not something extremely new at the time. Yugoslavia was between blocks at the time, open to both East and West. While it had ties with USSR and common ideological acceptance of genre that stimulated faith in bright technological future where it wanted to strive as a society, it also opened their borders to the influences from the capitalistic west. For the science fiction fans it meant access to the Anglo-American science fiction and the grandmasters of the Golden and Silver age.

What fans lacked was a central point where they would meet. It was a time before the internet, and if you did not meet like minded people, you were quite alone in your pastimes and hobbies. So, they needed a room, a place to meet and store the books. And at the time, when

they met, they did not talk about how many books they have read, but how many METERS of books they have read (What did you expect? As we said, it was before the internet came).

And so, in May of 1975, another Great Old One, Želimir Košević, uttered a spell:

"I think we have to form a Club"

Forming a club at a time was complicated nightmare, so, for a start, new club started as a subsection of local Astronautic and Rocket Club. Appropriately designated as "Propaganda section" (well, they read and wrote about rockets after all, haven't they?), science fiction fans soon outnumbered rocketeers, and everybody involved felt it was time to move on.



First generation on YUKON II 1979.:
Ivica Posavec, Darije Đokić, Drago Božić, Zoran Milović,
Boris Marini, Borivoje Jurković, Gordana Marini, Andrija Franetović

Yeah, I know I promised you the generation starship! Look how it all started; there were the rocketeers where the first generation got together and built something that will become starship.

Officially it was founded by four of them: Krsto A. Mažurani (also known as a Friendly Alien throughout the world), Ivica Posavec, Krešo Ljubi and Vojko Kraljeta, but there

They named it SFera.

The full name was a little bit longer; "SFera - friends of science belles-lettres and fiction". SFera was actually a pun suggested by Oliver Frani, another of the Great Old Ones.* It was acronym of "Science Fiction era", but also the Croatian word for sphere, perfect mathematical body.

And here would the legend of The Founders end, but bloody buggers were just too busy.

They immediately started to publish "Sirius", a science fiction magazine that offered their readers not only translated stories of foreign authors, but also original stories of the local authors from the Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia. Published from 1976 to 1989, Sirius had circulation of 40.000 copies in its Heyday. It was noted abroad as well, and two times awarded as best European science fiction magazine (ESFS awards in Brighton, 1984 and Zagreb, 1986).

Soon, SFera started to organize science fiction conventions modeled on

the Worldcon format. First Days of Science Fiction, more an exhibition than real convention, were held in 1977. but already in 1979. real full blooded convention took place.

SFera and Sirius became catalysts for emerging of other clubs Yugoslavia. Soon, the convention became much more than local Zagreb affair and it got name Yukon, for Yugoslavian convention. Plan was to rotate the host of the convention throughout the country, but very soon people realized that many of them can't afford the trip across the state, and more important, that they can't wait their turn to host a convention!

So, SFera started to host their own annual convention, SFeraKon. Several other clubs followed the suit, and quite soon those conventions flourished while Yukon was forgotten. Although SFeraKon was, as the largest and best organized one, de facto a national convention, it was never one officially. It was just the oldest one in this part of Europe, held annually, without a year skipped (something to say about the generations that passed through SFera).

Thus, Yugoslavia had no national convention. It did not need one. This practice continued and after Croatia got independence. Quite soon, clubs emerged throughout the Croatia and started organizing their own conventions, none of which bothered to claim the title of official national one. We did not need one.

* We should be safe as long we don't utter the same name thrice. Right?... Err... Right?

And, so, year by year, generation by generation, we came to 21st century. Generations that followed bumped into empty space left after Sirius was gone. SFerans wanted to write anyway, so SFera started organizing literary workshops that resulted with many new writers. To secure the publication for them, we started publishing annual story collection that was distributed on SFeraKon, free with each membership (yup, we stole the idea from the Scots). With it as a starting point and other literary workshops held by clubs in other cities, Croatian science fiction flourished and now we have many magazines and collections throughout the country.

Ok, it is not as picture perfect as I make it. There were struggles, but there are struggles on every generation ship. So enough of history, although I omitted many important things, like SFERA award and children award SFERICA. We'll take that ride in Tardis some other time.*

Lets talk about generations that made SFera what it is.

You know it is a long history when the current generation is aware of the first one only as of the mythological creatures that once roamed these lands. We even have the name for them, although we are not sure if we named them, or they named themselves.

SFerosaurs

Yes, the SFerosaurs are the Great Old ones I was talking about before. Whatever the name says, they are not long lost generation lurking from the dark corners. Even in their golden years, they stomp around every SFeraKon, letting the young ones do their job. They have many comments and ideas though, and they are not afraid to give them. They are not forcing them either. They know they did their share and that the new times are upon us.

For the bunch of old guys and girls they are very vital. I guess science fiction does that to a person. When I become the chair, they took me under their scaly wings and I often join them in their mostly irregular meetings and get-togethers where we eat, drink and talk about science fiction and everything else. Although a portion of time is always reserved for "Back in my days..." memories, they are well versed about current events in literature and technology.

From a generation starship point of view, they are something of the uploaded consciousness that has fun in its own matrix, but always keeps an eye on its scions.

Then, there are later generations. Those that came after were somehow nicknamed Mastodons. Too big of a leap in my opinion, as we are already missing extinct animal that is supposed to come after (I hope the list will not grow). That is the group that took us up to now, and is handing the

* For a read on SFERICA children awards, take Tardis to the past, issue 125. For SFERA award, find an issue in the future. We don't know which one exactly. Always in motion is the future...

power to the next generation for the several last years. And I will for sure write in details about them in the future...

Again, there is a generation starship reference. Remember the scions of the SFerosaur I mentioned? Some members of the currently active group stem from the SFerosaur!

One of the current board members ran between their feet in the eighties, when he was only ten. By all the unwritten rules, he IS one of SFerosaur. Current chair of SFera was just a baby when he attended his first SFera meeting. He boasts probably the largest number of SFeraKons attended

under his belt. His sister is one of the coven that lead Mastodons all these years. It is all about the upbringing, you see... From one generation to the next one.

So, to get back to the first question that started this (too long) article.

What is SFera? Besides generation starship, of course.

That SFerosaur was right. C'est moi. C'est nous. All of us.

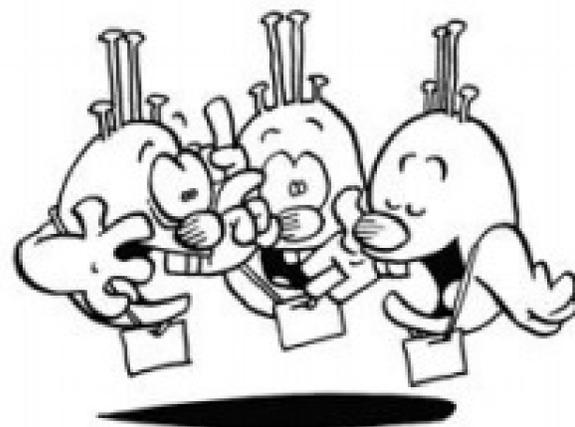
All the way to the stars.



Generations of SFera on Rikon 2016: SFerosaur (you'll never guess!), Mastodons, friends and the Next generation that yet has to earn the proper name.

Croatian SF Conventions

Calendar



FantaSTikon

When: March (possibly July)

Where: Split

Organiser: F&ST

(www.fantastikon.com)



Istrakon

When: April

Where: Pazin

Organiser: Albus

(www.istrakon.hr)



Liburnikon

When: end of August

Where: Opatija

Organiser: Kulturni Front

(www.liburnicon.com)



SFeraKon

When: mid May

Where: Zagreb

Organiser: SFera

(sferakon.org)

(sfera.hr)



Domikon

When: September/December

Where: Donji Miholjac

Organiser: KMDM, UDAR

(domikon.kmdm.hr)



Zagreb Fantasy Convention

When: June

Where: Zagreb

Organiser: ZFC

(facebook.com/zgfantasycountry)



Rikon

When: mid October

Where: Rijeka

Organiser: 3. Zmaj

(rikonrijeka.com)



Marsonikon

When: June

Where: Slavonski Brod

Organiser: Orion

(www.marsonikon.com)



SF week

When: December

Where: Zadar

Organiser: University of Zadar

(sfweek.org)



... and many more! Contact us for a comprehensive list of all the events...

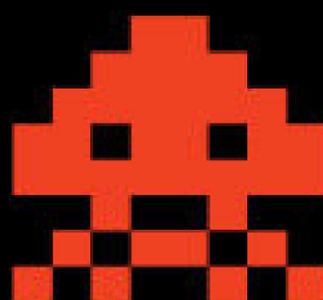
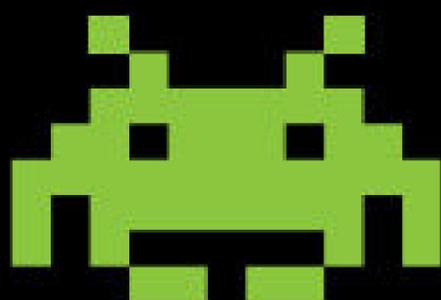
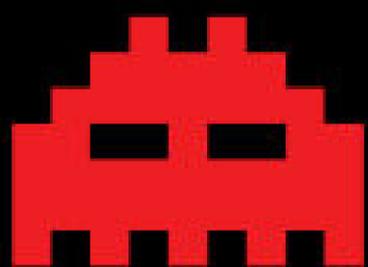
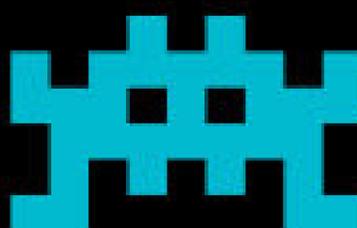
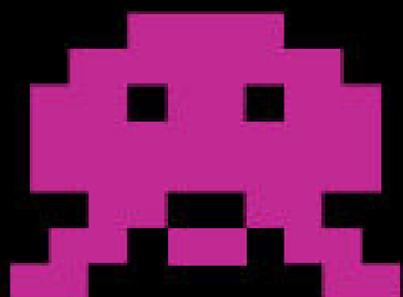
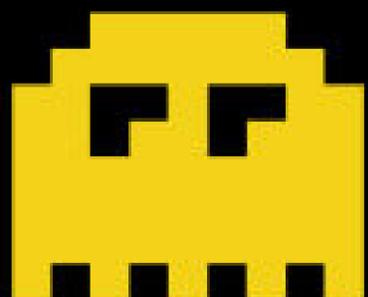
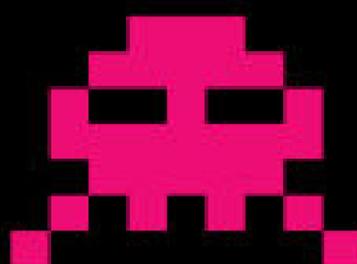
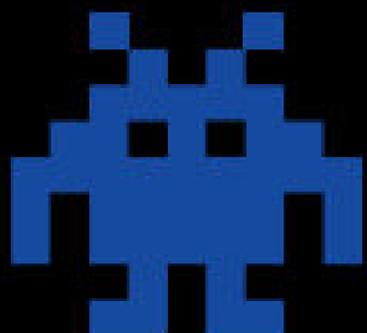
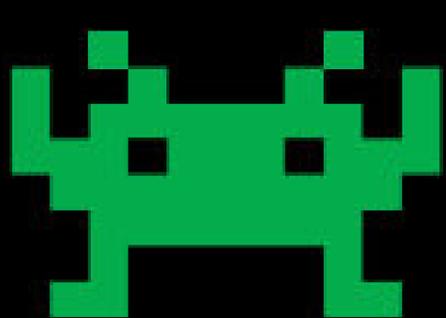
And if you happen to find yourself in Zagreb, find us at SFera.

Tuesdays evenings, from 8pm, at IV. Podbrežje 5.

It is not a pub, but there are drinks and food and excellent company.

More info on www.sfera.hr

SFERAKON



12-14.5.2017

WWW.SFERAKON.ORG