

## WORLDCON 2005



# EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

"Parsek" is the oldest Croatian fanzine, first published in 1977 as the bulletin of science fiction club Sfera from Zagreb. Sfera consists of some two and a hundred members and is a literary society, as well as being a fan club. The annual conventions attract hundreds of fans, while prestigious SFERA Award is being given in several categories. You will also notice that almost all authors represented here are SFERA winners.

Now, let me introduce you to the Croatian SF, with the little help of SFERA's official mascot, Bemmet.

Enjoy!

Boris Švel

In Zagreb, 25th July 2005

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Darko Macan	
<b>Across Kalavalahalatine</b>	<b>3</b>
Aleksandar Žiljak	
<b>Price Of Freedom</b>	<b>8</b>
Tereza Rukober	
<b>Everything She Was</b>	<b>12</b>
Marina Jadrežić	
<b>Sad Madonna</b>	<b>22</b>
Mario Berečić	
<b>Love Story</b>	<b>26</b>
Dalibor Perković	
<b>Misjump</b>	<b>31</b>
Aleksandar Žiljak	
<b>Science Fiction in Croatia</b>	<b>34</b>
Živko Prodanović	
<b>Robots In War (Six Situations)</b>	<b>43</b>
Darko Macan	
<b>BEMMET</b>	<b>44</b>
Dalibor Perković	
<b>SF Conventions in Croatia</b>	<b>46</b>

NOTE: all materials are translated by the authors themselves, unless stated otherwise

*Darko Macan is probably best known outside Croatia as a writer of scenarios for comics, working for Marvel and Dark Horse, amongst others. Nevertheless, his activities spread from writing and illustration to editing, and he won SFERA Award four times. Living in Zagreb, he is generally considered one of the leading personalities of Croatian SF generation that arose during nineteen-nineties, having published two novels and other works. The story we bring you here won the first place on the short-story competition held in the Croatian region of Istria this year.*

# Darko Macan

# ACROSS THE KALAVALAHALATINE

**Translated with the invaluable assistance by Tatjana Jambrišak**

**1.**

The turquoise orb of Wife, our principle star, has risen over the immense ocean of tiny, dark-blue crystals. The seven of us are treading over the endless emptiness of the Kalavalahalatine desert, with our human friends and their equipment on our backs.

I am the fourth in the column. Right in front of me my friend Norozorobuck waddles, whose rump is swaying before my snout in the rhythm of our sixsteps with a hypnotic regularity, which reminds me of a supple stir of the bitches that our friends the humans rewarded us with, last night, in the pen.

Bitches bitches bitches, my insides  
are singing happily.

Bitches bitches bitches.

Bitches bitches bitches bitches bitches

bitches bitches bitches bitches bitches...

2.

The turquoise darling Wife is joined today by New Husband, her small but radiant orange companion, circling low over the horizon. He adorns the crystals of the Kalavalahalatine with a deep green sparkle, and this is a fitting color for a day-long walk. It is warmer than yesterday, yet not unpleasant.

I am the third in the column. We take turns leading, for in the desert it is easy to follow, but hard to lead. "You will take turns," said our friends the humans while strapping their equipment onto us, saddling us for the trip. It was a wise decision, it is much easier this way.



A moment ago we paused for a while because Achtibachtinono has hurt one of his sidelegs. The wound does not look bad - his shin has been rubbing against his armor a bit too much during the long march - yet our friends the humans decided to dress the wound anyway and to redistribute a part of Achtibachtinono's burden onto us, the younger ones. I would not be surprised to find out that Achtibachtinono, that old shirker, has arranged somehow for this wound in order to lighten up his burden. It would not be the first time.

It seemed like Norozorobuck has wanted to tell me something during the halt, but he was not very clear and I preferred a roll in the crystals to talking with him, anyway. A good roll cleans you from the parasites and the green sand's warmth was coy, reminding me thus once more of the night before the last and the pleasures of the

pen.

Ah, the bitches!

Bitches, bitches, bitches.



3.

The turquoise Wife and her orange New Husband twirl in their wedding dance above our heads. The flames of their passion make the Kalavalahalatine perspire, its sweat vaporizing instantly. The horizon is ashen and blue and white

and hazy with the mist.

I am the second in the column, right behind the Norozorobuck. Neither does his posterior wobble as the other day, nor am I paying attention. The protective scales are covering our eyes, half of our hearts working on cooling the feet; the future does not extend past the next sixstep.

Then, at the very moment of the star climax, it is as if I am hearing someone's

voice. And yes, it is Norozorobuck and I receive him a lot clearer today, my mind feels sharper, despite the heat.

"Balichalidon!", he is calling me:

"Balichalidon!"

"Norozorobuck? What is it?"

"Can you see what they are doing to us?"

"Who does what to us?"

"The humans!"

"Our friends the humans?"

"No friends, them! Can't you see what they are doing to us?"

For a moment I almost do, but the heat makes it hard to think and the images Norozorobuck is sending are not clear. Let the evening come, let the evening come, let the evening come...

#### 4.

Achtibachtinono died while I was in the lead. His death pains me and I feel it as my responsibility even though I know I could not have helped him. The wound on his sideleg has infected and festered, and he kept quiet while the poison was killing off his hearts, one by one. He would not say a word so not to slow us down. He was dead for at least two leagues before he collapsed. When my turn to die comes, I hope to do it

with half a such devotion and dignity that Achtibachtinono showed.

When the celestial spouses reached the zenith I felt that all of us shall die today. Spurned Mistress appeared on the horizon, the rarest seen of our suns. Purple-red is she, like an overripe fruit or poisoned blood, and she is lunging at the Spouses with fervor, the blaze of her rage joining the flames of their conjugal passion and threatening to destroy all of us, all their children lost on the black sands of the Kalavalahalatine desert.

With my head bowed deep, I treaded on. I led the column which depended on me today. I treaded on, seeing nothing but the black sand. And suddenly, from the well of suppressed knowledge, a memory appeared - a thought that we should not be walking across the black sands. In the days of black sand our people stay at home. In the days of black sand we do not go marching across the deadly plains of the Kalavalahalatine!

"Norozorobuck!", I called to my friend at the rear. My mind was weeping.

"Can you see?", he asked me.

"Balichalidon, can you see?"

I can.

## 5.

The sands were brown. Wife and the Spurned Mistress have hid behind the horizon for a day, to decide with a fight to whom New Husband would belong tomorrow. It was less torrid and we could breathe with more ease.

At the rear of the column,  
Norozorobuck and I talked.

"Do you remember, Balichalidon?"

"I remember."

"Do you remember everything?"

I remembered everything. I remembered our life from before the humans came. Our long, prodzctive mindtalks, our learning and arts, our cities, our culture built under tens of thousands of cycles of the stellar drama, the culture sired in the days when New Husband was still called Son and lived with Spurned Mistress, then called Daughter; in the days when Wife was contently living with her first Husband.

"What did they do to us,  
Norozorobuck? How?"

"Do you remember the barrier?"

I remembered the barrier. I remembered the cities split into male sectors and female sectors. I remembered the lesson that was taught to us in the days when the first Husband burst from too much passion

and created the Kalavalahalatine desert.

"Once a year!", Norozorobuck was confirming all my recollections: "We saw the bitches once a year! Because, because..."

"...because our people would amount to nothing otherwise!", I finished his sentence.

My people are not like the humans. My people can think of nothing but mating when males and bitches are near each other. We are like the stars which have to dance regardless of what their passions consume. And after the mating, for days after the mating, our minds are dull. We do not talk and do not think. We do what we are told, witlessly content.

The humans used this trait of ours against us. Our friends the humans. No friends, them.

"We have to wake the others!"

"We have to!"

"We have to rebel!"

"We have to!"

"We have to stomp them into the ground!"

"We have to!"

"Tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow!"

## 6.

By the morrow's midday,  
 Norozorobuck and I managed to more or  
 less wake up the remaining four of our  
 people. We explained to everyone what our  
 friends - no friends - the humans, did to us,  
 how did they ensure our obedience. We  
 made them all angry. New Husband was  
 making love to Spurned Mistress in the sky,  
 and their glow turned the sands into a whiter  
 shade of violet, but we burned hotter than  
 even them. We were ablaze with shame and  
 the thirst for revenge. We desired human  
 blood.

Compared to us, the humans were  
 puny, fragile, their senses underdeveloped,  
 having even no armor. Soon, at  
 Norozorobuck's signal, we would rear up,  
 throw down them and their equipment and  
 crush them into the dust finer than the  
 crystals of the Kalavalahalatine. Soon!

Then, the warm desert winds had  
 brought us a trace of the scent from a station  
 a half a day away. All of our senses were  
 better developed than those of the humans,  
 we can sniff what they can not imagine. So  
 we knew, all of us, that in the station half a  
 day away there was a cold water reservoir

and, nearby, a pen.

A pen with bitches.

As one, no talk and no signal, we sped  
 up. The humans on our backs were taken  
 aback for a moment - the one on my back  
 almost fell over - but then they started  
 laughing and whipping us, spurring us to  
 trot.

Trot, mind you! By ourselves, we  
 were galloping already.

Bitches!

*Bitches!*

***BITCHES!***

## 1.

The endless Kalavalahalatine is light  
 blue today. Spurned Mistress has been  
 spurned again and Wife is coming back to  
 her New husband.

I am fourth in the column, behind the  
 new bull that our friends the humans have  
 bought at the station. His rump is bobbing  
 perkily in front of my snout and I find  
 pleasure in walking behind it, a sixstep after  
 sixstep, my insides singing contently.



*Being one of the foremost Croatian SF authors, Aleksandar Žiljak resides in Zagreb. He won SFERA Award five times, equally excelling in illustration and prose. Aleksandar Žiljak published in Germany and Denmark, and currently co-edits the anthology of Croatian science fiction.*

## Aleksandar Žiljak

# PRICE OF FREEDOM

Wailing sirens finally break the whole day of tense uncertainty. We all jump at the piercing sound, almost sighing with relief. Waiting is worst of all. Once it starts, you know what to do and you do it. TV crews leave their drinks, grab their cameras and run out of the spaceport bar, like dogs smelling fresh blood.

I leave after them, those few people still out run to shelters. Before the sirens even stop, I'm left all alone in the street. Then, the spaceport sinks into darkness, block by block. Everything is empty and blackened out in just a few minutes. Good civil defence, I nod as I rush to the crew entrance. It will take me some twenty minutes on foot and I don't expect the first bombs for at least three quarters of an hour. Just enough time ...

The war was brewing for a long time. Same old story: a strong, aggressive force next to a small nation determined to defend

itself. At first, negotiations with the help of mediators were tried and then the big guys issued a ultimatum, expecting the little ones to capitulate. But, the ultimatum expired this evening, and there's still no surrender. And so, hundreds of combat aircraft and cruise missiles are just taking off to attack.

I'm a stranger here and, basically, all this doesn't concern me at all. Except for one small detail: my ship is being unloaded for the past two days in the capital's main spaceport and, exposed on the tarmac, it's nothing else but a nice, fat target. So I have to break through to it and climb into orbit before it's too late.

At that moment, a horn blows behind me. I turn around, a floater slows down and the doors open. Zenia sits at the wheel, wearing a helmet, a flak jacket and a bag. A little bit too much for personal protection kits being issued to citizens for the past



couple of days. "Where are you going?", I ask her.

"To my air defence post", Zenia replies. I'm left speechless: Zenia is a sweet little candy, her hair brown, her eyes green, her proportions flawless. Her profession? The oldest one, favours for tired spaceship crews charged by an hour. The only way I can imagine her in the air defence is to distract enemy pilots as they drop their bombs.

"You want an advice of someone who's been in the war and knows what's it like?" Everybody knows that the local air defence is a pile of junk that won't last ten minutes. "You just come with me, so we can get lost while there's still time."

"You're afraid?" Zenia studies me. There's determination in her eyes, and something else. I've seen it plenty of times, it doesn't go until it's too late, until you

scream in the mud with your leg torn apart or your chest shot through.



I know I can't dissuade her, not yet, not until death starts raining all around her, perhaps not even then. And I can't just leave her like that, to be cannon fodder: I've spent too many lovely moments with her. With me, she still has some chance. There will be someone to hit her over her head and

drag her to some hole when it turns hot.

"Not for myself", I answer sullenly as I climb into the seat next to her.

Zenia steps on it, the floater rushes through empty streets, leaves the town and climbs the road uphill, through the forest. The trees rush past us in the darkness. I check the time, the fireworks will start in about twenty minutes. The floater exits into a clearing and Zenia stops, opens the doors and jumps out. I follow her. A nice view of

the city under black-out breaks from the clearing. Starry sky above us, without a single cloud. I wish we came here under different circumstances.

"Come and help me!", Zenia calls me as she runs to a large dome on the edge of the clearing. The dome opens wide, revealing a platform with six launching pads carrying winged missiles, resembling small aeroplanes. This is something new, I decide as I follow her on the platform.

The missiles are built for speed, having swept wings some three metres in span, a warhead surrounded by an air intake, a vertical fin and two starting rockets slung under the fuselage. "An athodyd?", I ask Zenia.

Zenia nods. An athodyd is the simplest jet engine, no compressor, no turbines. Admittedly, it needs some initial speed to work. That's why the rockets. Basic, even primitive, but efficient. "Get them off the feeder!"

I find the line on the nearest missile and detach it. Zenia does the same and we unhook all the missiles, one by one. Feeder ... Somewhat funny name for fuel supply. I want to get off the platform, I walk around one of the missiles. Suddenly, the tip of its warhead opens and an eye looks at me,

blinking, as if driving the last remains of the long sleep away. The missile's wings bend and stretch. I look around, dumbfounded, the neighbouring aircraft also wake up and stir. They're alive! "It took us a lot of trouble to breed them."

"They have brains?"

"Primitive ones. At first, we wanted them smart, but then they started contemplating the meaning of life. It's easier to guide them ourselves."

It won't go that easy, I'm afraid. I'm certain jamming started already. At that moment, the sky is torn apart by fiery trails of the first missiles. Suddenly, they rise in hundreds. And the first explosions, bright thundering flashes turning night into day for the briefest of moments, some in the air, some on the ground, well beyond city limits. I realise these are the attacking cruise missiles that are being hit, exploding mid-air or crashing out of control.

Swarms of new missiles take off all around the city and I want to ask Zenia how many of them there are. Then, a roar of rocket engines behind my back deafens me. The rockets rise the missile and give it the speed necessary for the athodyd to produce thrust. Once spent, they are jettisoned, just two dark cylinders falling into the forest.

Zenia stands still, her eyes closed in the spasm of concentration, and I suddenly realise that somebody on the other side miscalculated. Miscalculated badly! There are thousands of missiles already airborne, they will simply run over everything in their way by sheer numbers. And not even all the jamming will help the attackers: the missiles are guided telepathically! Now I know what is Zenia doing on the front-line. She obviously has the power, they drafted her and trained her, together with others. Nobody ever dreamed what kind of defence was being built here.

Zenia is tense, linked to the missile, her forehead sweaty. The missile certainly has excellent night vision, Zenia will direct it as soon as the target is spotted. At that moment, a flash. Zenia staggers and almost falls, suddenly opening her eyes. And in the sky above, brilliant streak of burning fuel tears the night apart. Probably an electronic warfare aircraft, sent ahead to find and destroy radar stations.

I chalk up one for Zenia. I want to congratulate her, but she closes her eyes again and two more missiles scream off into the night. A minute later, flashes and Zenia collapses to her knees. Then, too late, I understand what's happening and rush to

stop her, but she pushes me away and launches the remaining three missiles. Three flashes, another plane falls as Zenia sinks without a voice. Each hit is a death of a missile, each death strikes with full power, six deaths in succession.

I can barely feel Zenia's pulse, she's on the edge, her brain shaken by the fury of explosions. I lift her and carry her to the floater. I set the controls for the nearest hospital. The autopilot takes us back down the hill and into the city. Zenia doesn't come to her senses, her pulse gets weaker and weaker. Helpless, I feel I'm losing her. She seeps through my fingers, and it's not shrapnel or bullet to just press and bandage and shoot with morphine.

Zenia burns out like a candle. I hold her hands and I know when it's over, when she finally goes out.

I stop the floater, there's no more reason to hurry. I step out, the sky is filled with new swarms, taking off into counterattack. I watch the missiles fly for enemy bases, and I wonder how many of those that guide them will end like Zenia, how many will pay the price she paid, the price of freedom.

*One of the newcomers onto the Croatian SF scene, Tereza Rukober lives in the city of Rijeka on the Adriatic coast. She quickly established herself, and she wrote this story especially for "Parsek".*

## Tereza Rukober

# EVERYTHING SHE WAS

Rea was sitting on the bed, talking to herself. She was asking questions, forming them into sentences without saying them out aloud - after a short pause her memories would answer.

*Do I like walnut pancakes?*

A moment of silence, emptiness in her thoughts. Then: Yes, they are fine. Not my favorite, but I don't mind having them. The recollection of taste followed: the smell, the aroma, crumbled walnuts between her teeth...

*Yesterday Ana asked me would I like pancakes for lunch?*

There was no delay. The image was already in her mind: the tall, dark-haired woman, broad shoulders, friendly smile ... All the memories she has collected in the past two weeks were accessible instantaneously.

*How did I meet Ana?*

A pause.

Elementary school: a new girl in class, sitting next to Rea. Rea and Ana playing basketball. The red jogging suit, school competitions ...

*What should I do now?*

Instantaneously: Darko will pick me up and we'll go to Ana's house. He said he'd be here at three o'clock. I need to shower and wash my hair.

She got up and went to the bathroom. When she was washing her hair for the first time after the hospital, it took her a while to remember what to do. Now there weren't any problems.

The doctor told her that the pauses in her thoughts would become shorter and disappear with time. That soon she wouldn't feel any difference between the "lived" and "copied" memories.

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There were no pauses when she was dreaming.

Last night she dreamed of climbing down the stairs. She was inside a high tower and had to get down. The tower had a shabby, old elevator, which she didn't dare to use. She started to walk down carefully,

feeling each stone plate with the tip of her shoe before stepping on it.

The stairs were gradually becoming higher. After a while she had to jump down from one to another. They were also getting wider, turning into consecutive stone platforms. She turned and looked up, wondering if going back and taking her chances with the elevator was a wiser thing to do. But climbing up would be exhausting - she must have climbed half a way down long ago.

She decided to continue, hoping to reach the ground before the stairs became too high. She was moving on by sitting on the edge of a stair, and then sliding down to the next one. They became so wide that she could see only one subsequent stair at a time.

The stairs were higher than her now and it would be impossible to go back. The fact that she had no choice left brought a wave of panic. She sat for a while on the edge of a stair, gathering the courage for the next jump. Then she took a deep breath and ventured down.

What she saw was terrifying. The stair she was standing on was the last one. There was nothing more below her, besides the ground. And she must have been standing at least 20 meters up in the air.

Her estimation to have already climbed more than the half a way down was completely wrong. Suddenly there was no stair under her feet and she was falling,

sinking through the air faster and faster. At the last moment she realized that it would have been better if she had used the elevator.

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"I dreamt again I was dying," she said to Darko. "I was falling down and I knew that was it. I think it might not been a dream, but a piece of my memories?"

"It was a dream, Rea. You can't recollect your own death."

"Maybe I can remember, at least some parts?"

"It can't be possible. Your memories were downloaded three days before the accident and you can't remember anything that happened in the mean time. But it is normal for you to dream, you went through a traumatic experience."

"It wasn't me. It was *her* who lived through that experience."

"By experience I mean waking up and everything that followed. And there is no *her*. You are the same person." Darko spoke with a calm voice, but Rea recognized a bit of nervousness in it.

They arrived at Ana's building and used the elevator to the fifth floor. Rea felt awkward inside the small ascending space although the ride was very short. Ana opened the door with a smile. "Take a seat, tuna salad is on the table and the pancakes are coming!"



The room was completely unfamiliar. A round table with no tablecloth, four chairs, a blue couch, a TV on a small table, a bookshelf and an exercise bicycle in the corner. The walls were colored light pink and on the wall across from the balcony door there was a painting with a floral motive. Rea stood still for a second and waited. Then the images came back.

*She and Ana are sitting at the table, studying for an exam.*

*They are watching TV with Darko and two more friends.*

*Marina, Ana and Rea are redecorating the apartment - all the furniture is packed into one corner and there is some pink painting waiting in the bucket. The walls are still pale yellow.*

*It is late at night; Ana and Rea are sitting on the couch, talking - about boys, exams, rent payments, plans for the future.*

"Everything's all right?" Ana asked.

"Yes, it's all right. I haven't been in your apartment yet."

"Of course you have, many times."

"I meant after the accident, you know."

Ana nodded and smiled with understanding. They sat down and started to eat. Ana told them how she had prepared the salad. "I lost my can opener. If you saw the way I opened the tuna, you would laugh your head off!"

"What did you do? Use your teeth?" Darko asked.

"No, I used a hammer and a screwdriver."

Rea and Darko laughed and praised Ana's ingenuity. She brought in the pancakes and tea. "I've got your favorite," she said, showing the tea box. There were blueberries drawn on the box.

Rea watched the picture without recognition for a moment, but then the memory of the smell and taste poured into her mind. She nodded. "I'm getting tired of having to wait to remember things," she sighed. "But I've noticed the pauses are becoming shorter."

"I think you'll feel better when you start training again," Ana said. "When are you going to start?"

"I don't know. The doctor told me to decide myself. Physically I feel excellent, I even believe I'm stronger than before."

"Your muscles are weaker than they used to be. You'll have to make up for that," Darko added.

"But I have a new knee," Rea laughed. "The old one was giving me trouble, but I don't have to worry about it any more."

She said it cheerfully, but a moment later she became absorbed in her thoughts. "You know, Ana, in a way I am here for the first time. No molecule in my body has ever been here before."

"Nonsense," Darko argued. "You're not just a bunch of molecules. Look!" he said opening his palms. "Could you tell which of my molecules have been here before and which haven't? The skin, the hair, the tissue, everything grows and changes. You are a person, not a set of molecules. And that person had been here before!"

"Darko, why are you trying to persuade me? Or console me? I appreciate your support, but let me deal with what I'm going through. I need time to get used to it, I'm also a bit frightened whether I'll be able to. But I'll be fine soon."

Rea was speaking abruptly and Darko just shrugged his shoulders, looking at her. "I'm sorry if I'm exaggerating; I'll try not to do it any more. But I worry about you."

Ana put her hand on Rea's forearm to reassure her. "I think you're becoming your old self again. This is the first time after the accident I've heard you raise your voice!"

After dinner they decided to go to the cinema. They left Ana's apartment and headed towards the elevator. When Darko pressed the button, the machine produced a

deep humming sound, announcing that the elevator began ascending from the ground floor in order to meet them. Rea caught a glimpse of the thick black cable moving behind the glass door.



When the door opened, she stared into the small cubical space opening up in front of her. "I'm not coming inside, it frightens me," she said and slowly turned towards the staircase. She began climbing down one step at the time, holding on to the wall. Darko and Ana followed her. "Help me," Rea asked in a low voice and let Darko hold her hand. They climbed all the

way down together, and when they reached the ground floor Rea's heart was beating fast.

Watching the movie was relaxing - everything was new to her, she watched all of the scenes for the first time and didn't have to struggle with her memories.

Later, when they walked through the park, Rea said: "I've never been afraid of the heights."

"The fear will go away eventually, I'm sure," Ana answered.

"Tell me what happened in those three days which I can't remember."

Darko began talking: "After you finished the recording in the laboratory, you called me and we went out for a dinner. We went to your place afterwards and spent the night together. In the morning we packed and caught a train. We met Ana, Vedran and Maja, hiked all afternoon and reached the cabin by sunset. We made a fire, cooked dinner, sat around the fire and talked as we usually do. In the morning we continued towards the top. You were walking behind all of us and you fell behind a bit. When we almost reached the top, on the steepest part of the path, we heard a scream. We ran back and saw you lying on the rocks. When we climbed down to you it was already too late."

They were silent for a moment, and then Rea asked: "Who did you call?"

"People from the laboratory, of course. If we had called mountain rescue, they would have pronounced you dead and we wouldn't have been able to ... bring you back."

"Vedran and Maja know everything?"

"They know there is a laboratory and that it practices some unofficial medical methods. They think they succeeded in bringing your body back to life."

"You mean they didn't know she had died?"

"No, Ana and I are the only ones who know."

"Why did you say *her*, instead of *me*?" Ana asked.

"Because I can't say *I died*. It makes no sense. It is the thought that scares me a lot. I didn't want to tell you, but sometimes I regret what I did." Rea spoke very seriously.

"You know," Darko said, "when you decided to let them clone your body, I didn't like the idea. I almost tried talking you out of it. I didn't because it was your decision after all. But now I'm so glad you did do it."

"I am afraid to remember that."

The waiting time in her recollections was becoming shorter. When Rea eventually gathered the courage to reach for her frightening memories, the pauses were hardly noticeable.

Four years ago she had agreed to be a part of an experiment. "People who engage in dangerous hobbies, like you, might benefit from what we are doing," said the doctor, the leader of the medical team. "Since the project is still in an experimental phase, we have to ask for complete secrecy. But on the other hand, you'll only have to cover part of the expenses."

She didn't want to know the technical details - not even how the inside of the laboratory looked - all those tanks, containers and instruments. All she had to do was to let them take some of her blood.

Three years later she was informed that *the body* was ready for *installation* and that she should begin with the memory recordings. "It would be ideal if you came

once every three months. And also, before undertaking any dangerous climbing," her doctor had told her.

The doctor's surgery resembled any other surgery she ever was in. She had to sit in a large, comfortable chair with a head rest. The nurse would put something that resembled a motorcycle's helmet on her head. Although she knew it was a very sophisticated piece of equipment, she preferred to think about it as a simple helmet. She would be given an intravenous anesthetic then, and would stay out of consciousness for a few hours. Apart from the injection itself, there would be no other discomforts during the procedure.

\*\*\*

"I'm glad you're back to work," Ana said. The two of them were sitting, wearing the tracksuits, on a bench in the entrance-hall of the fitness club.

"Yes, it was about time for me to do it. I have to go on with my life." Rea felt cheerful and energetic.

"You know," Ana smiled, "I believe our clients will also be glad when they see you're back. Your aerobic students were slowly dropping out ever since they were lead by substitute trainers."

Rea was physically strong enough to lead two groups in a row. Still, during her first week back on the job, she discovered that she didn't feel the same any more.

Before the accident, the rhythmical movements used to fill her with enthusiasm, almost elation. She used to be able to transmit her élan to the women in her group. The time they spent exercising would pass quickly, and the clients left the club feeling happy and satisfied. But Rea found that she wasn't able to build a good atmosphere in the group any more.

During the exercises, she observed the women around her. A young, plump girl did her best to keep up with the others. The thought crossed Rea's mind that she comes to exercise only because she sees herself as overweight and unattractive. That she finds no pleasure in the rhythmical movements and that she considers her sore muscles a sign of failure.

Another woman, lean and tall, moved harmonically and almost without effort. Rea knew her well - she came several times a week, both to the aerobics classes and the gym.

She knew that her main goal in life was to keep her body fit. She was almost forty, but appeared to be much younger. It suddenly occurred to Rea how senseless that desire for prolonging physical youth actually was.

One afternoon, ten days after she came back to work, she realized that she didn't find her job fulfilling any more, although she used to, for so many years. The whole club, the scents of sweat and deodorants, voices and music coming from

the gym - it all suddenly seemed distant and unfamiliar. "I don't belong here," she thought. "I'm not the woman who used to work here. I'm someone else just trying to live her life."

Darko had asked when they would start hiking. "Our team has already been to several trips without us. We should join them."

"I'm not sure I want to go."

"Go where? On a hiking trip or to the expedition?"

"Both."

"I don't understand, Rea. You used to want these things so much. You were the one who talked Ana and me into it. The only thing you dreamed about in the past two years was to climb Kilimanjaro. The expedition starts in six months. If you don't start training, you could end up not being part of the team."

"But I've never trained for that expedition. I've never climbed a single mountain top. At least my body hasn't."

Darko shrugged his shoulders. "You told me not to try comforting you. But I will tell you that the climbing experience you possess does matter, even if you never physically did it."

Rea nodded. "I guess you're right. I will think about it some more."

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She asked her doctor to introduce her to some other patient of his, somebody who had gone through the same thing. The doctor said that that wasn't possible, because the files were strictly confidential. But Darko managed to find an email address.

She couldn't tell the person's name, gender or age from the address. She wrote a message and asked the recipient to meet her. Her request was denied, but she was told that she was welcome to ask questions, as long as they didn't involve personal information.

*Are you the same person you used to be?* she asked.

*Yes, of course I am. I have the same memories, the same name, the same family and genetic code I used to have ...*

*That's not what I meant. Do you feel the same? I'm asking you because I feel different compared to how I used to feel. It seems as if someone has put me into that woman's life, but it is not mine. I don't want the same things she used to. I don't know who I am. Am I a person, or just someone's clone?*

*In a technical way, you are a clone. But whether you're a person, you have to decide that for yourself. You said that you don't want the same things you used to. What do you want?*

Rea didn't know what to say. She wrote that she hadn't really given it much thought. She did her best to continue her life, without even trying to change it.



She asked the mysterious correspondent if he (or she) believed in souls. *Are we just shadows, soulless bodies? Maybe they really died, and we're just shells of the people they used to be?*

*I don't have any specific belief in that matter. But I know I'm an individual, not a shell. And I am different than how I used to be before the accident. However, people change all their lives.*

*What accident? When happened?*

*It was a car crash - I won't tell you anything else.*

Rea did tell her correspondent everything about her accident. About what she was told by her friends and about her dreams. *Do you ever dream about your death?* she asked.

*No, Rea, I don't. But I prefer trains to cars.*

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One weekend Rea decided to join her friends with the preparations for the expedition. Darko and Ana had already been participating in several mountain climbings without her.

The group gave her a warm welcome. They set off on Saturday morning, from the feet of the mountain which wasn't far from the city. The plan was to climb almost to the top before sunset, make a camp in a meadow, and wait for the sunrise on the top of the mountain the following morning.

Rea was fit enough not to fall behind. She kept her job at the fitness center, because she couldn't decide what else to do. In despite of her adequate physical strength, the climbing felt difficult.

They walked fast, as they always used to - the main goal of the trip was to gain the physical strength. They had walked the same path many times before, and Rea knew the way well. She wasn't falling behind, but she was aware of her tiredness and the drops of sweat sliding down her back. The backpack she carried was heavy and pressed on her shoulders like a stone.

"Hey guys, we're doing well and moving fast. I believe we could break our record!" Vedran said after a while. The team agreed that it was something to be happy about.

Rea suddenly stopped walking. "I'm not going any further," she said. She stood on a steep rocky slope, covered with the rough grass. The sight she could see beneath her was amazing - the whole valley with the city cradled in the middle.

"What is it Rea, are you tired?" Darko asked.

"I'm not too tired. But I don't want to climb any more. I'd like to sit down here and enjoy the view for a while. To sunbathe. I wish I had a camera - it is so beautiful."

"But this is a training climb, not a pleasure trip. We need to reach the top!"

Rea shook her head. "I don't want to reach the top or to go to the expedition."

Darko stood beside her, letting their friends walk away. "I think you've changed a lot," he said.

"Yes, I have. I'm not the same person I used to be." She looked at him, with more sadness than determination in her eyes. "You should go after them. I'll return to the city and we'll see each other tomorrow."

"Darko nodded. "I regret that you and I are drifting apart," he said before turning away, and then he began walking.

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The next morning someone rang the bell on Rea's door. When she opened it, there was an elderly man, wearing jeans and a sports jacket. He greeted her with a wide smile: "Good morning Rea. I've decided I wanted to meet you after all."

Rea looked at him with surprise. "Are you ..."

"Yes, I'm your cloned friend," he laughed. "My name is Miroslav." He held out his hand to greet her and asked her if he could come in.

"Yes, of course you can."

Rea took him to the living room. She offered him some coffee and told him about her unsuccessful climbing. She felt as if she was talking to an old friend. "I've realized I can't live *her* life any more. That scares me."

Miroslav shook his head. "It is *your* life. However, I'd like to tell you something

about me. When I was younger, I used to travel a lot. I ran a merchant firm and enjoyed the work that allowed me to spend a lot of time in motion and on the road. I used to drive fast and careless – my wife worried about my safety and she was the one who talked me into participating in the experimental program. When the accident happened, they installed my memories into the awaiting body. However, they weren't able to set the body's biological age precisely back then – I woke up in a body which looked and reacted as if it were ten years older than my old one. I also felt very different. As if I had become another person. My behavior and habits had changed and I started to take interest in different things. After a while, I sold my firm and opened a restaurant – instead of traveling myself I decided to let people come to me. I started to spend more time with my family, although I gave them a hard time during the first year after the accident. Finally, I realized that I was the same person I used to be, although I had been going through things that had changed me."

Rea asked if he ever regretted participating in the project.

"No, if it weren't for the project, I wouldn't be alive now. And life is something to be appreciated. I got another chance."

"I'm not sure I understand what you said about the changes. Are you the same person you used to be? Am I?"

Miroslav smiled. "What I wanted to say is: your accident did change you. But it didn't make you a different person.

Memories and thoughts make a person, not the body. You did change – it's what happens to people during traumatic experiences – like nearly dying is. Even if you survived the fall in the other, "ordinary" way, you would feel like this. You would be scared of heights and would cease wanting to climb mountain tops. Nevertheless, one small thing is enough to start an avalanche of changes in our lives."

Rea nodded in understanding. The talked for a while longer, then Miroslav said he had to go. While he was heading towards the door, Rea noticed he was limping slightly. "Is that from the accident?" she asked.

"No, of course not. It happened a year ago, while I was skiing with my children."

"I forgot to tell you that my doctors suggested I have another *spare* body cloned, in case I have another accident. They told me I could use it not only in case of death, but also as a way to *heal* major injuries. Did they propose that to you? I mean, you could have your leg cured."

Miroslav shook his head. "They proposed it, but I didn't want to accept."

"Why? You just told me that the body doesn't make a person. And that you're glad to have a new one."

"Yes, that is true. But I have learned another thing in the process. I wouldn't be able to appreciate this life enough, if I knew I could replace it. It is valuable because it is unique and irreplaceable. It's something I hadn't realized before the accident."

When Miroslav was gone, Rea set on the couch for a while. Then she poured herself another cup of coffee and walked to the window. Now, when she realized that the life she had was still her own, she needed to decide what to do with it.

The morning sun bathed the treetops beneath her window in a uniform, warm light. Rea felt she couldn't make any major decisions right now. She would leave that for later. But she thought buying a new camera would be very nice.



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## Marina Jadrejčić

# SAD MADONNA

She stood in front of the building - huge, imminent, abducting. She knew what it will rob her of. It will rob her of her time. But, that's why she came: to trade her time for money. Because time *is* money. And she needed money very badly.

She repressed her tears somewhere in the throat, overpowered her sobs because they would avert her from her decision.

"I'll never see them again", her heart cried.

"And that will lengthen their lives", present day's logic was relentless.

A step ahead, into the shadow of a gigantic, impressive building of power, cut off her agony. Irreversibly.

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A young man stood in front of uncountable stasis compartments and looked for a name. He glanced uneasily left and right: the visitors scrutinized their relatives in upright sarcophagi frozen in time. He

held hands with two little children, a boy and a tiny girl. At first he thought it was right to bring them to their mom - timeless in the moment, in stasis, but still their mother. Now he wasn't sure anymore it had been such a good idea.

The boy looked drowsy, tired; he would probably rather be somewhere else. The girl, man's favorite since he and his wife have adopted them, laid her little hands on a smooth, cold surface of the sarcophagus and, pressing her face and nose on a murky screen, watched the vague shadows beyond the barrier.

The man lifted his gaze at the eye-height. Young woman's refined profile outlined clearly through the icy glass. Her eyes were closed, her head slightly slanting and bent. She would have been beautiful if only her face were not twisted by bitter twitch and enormous burden of sadness.

No, it wasn't a good idea to come. Children need live parents, him and his wife. And they don't understand yet, they are too

young. And, really, she shouldn't have let her emotions make her face so ugly; she was aware that she would show that face to the world for the next thirty years.

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There's a crowd again in front of the stasis-rows. During *All Living Days* people swarm to visit their timeless parents, as they come to see each other in front of the temporal repose of their known. The Guard frowned and scratched his shaven head. Why, for God's sake, does the whole world go mad these four days a year, when all this timeless persons dwell here during the whole year, don't go anywhere, and patiently await their time?

He took a slow walk along the fence, watching visitors procession along the rows. He felt slight repulsion for their appraising glances that waded over transparent compartments like they were fashion shop-windows.

He paused in front of the compartment of Sad Madonna, as he called her. For many long years nobody has come to stand in front of her figure lost in time. They have forgotten her, so young and beautiful.

Often he asked himself what urged people to choose this voluntary exile from the world. Is it misery, poverty? Life disappointment? If it's misery, he understands. People sell anything they have

for living, and some have nothing but naked life. During the years that he guarded timeless repose, innumerable faces changed beyond those icy walls. People came here, relinquishing their time, and then left carrying with them their hard earned money and a burden of non-lived years.

He has never managed to grasp the principle of time trading, but from fragments he's heard during these years, he created simple pattern: rich creep buys time, years of time, and spends it in one of new-detected accessible realities, often in portions. He comes back in our reality like he had just left, and no matter that he has lived somewhere else for years, he is not the least older. Poor guy that sells his life-time enters the stasis, works through his timeless years, and at exit gets all his spent years back from his accessible realities. He leaves the stasis older for the exact amount of his sold years.

The plain-looking Official Guard with a plain wit watched his Sad Madonna. His simple mind reached for the grief and despair on her face, and gave her the most beautiful verses about timelessness:

"I can touch cold surface of a tomb-plate,

frigid ice of death under which a timeless person repose.

I can cry and dew the ice with hot tears,

but it won't melt;

it's been frozen for too long."



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"Aren't those dreams?" mumbled her slow mind. She floated above sand beaches of aching blue sea and impossibly blue sky. She tasted the salinity of the sea foam, the winds softly rustled, the waves softly rustled, the sand touched her skin rustling. Impressions were disappearing, seeping away, but still she had rustling in her ears. She was awaking.

Suddenly, there was a space around her, somebody was holding her, they led her through the nearly complete dusk, towards something that looked like infirmary. She saw a man standing by the door, the official guard, who watched her intently. He reminded her of a young man she'd seen this morning when she came in. Probably a relative.

They gave her something. They told her she should sleep. She slept.

Later, it was light, morning. Words woke her up. The voice held her hand and spoke to somebody:

"The metabolism stabilized, temporal

age equalized. Non-proper residual memories of spent years disappeared."

She opened her eyes and met the warm glance of a young man in a medical robe.

"Welcome back. To you it will seem that you've just come here, but you have to understand that you are fifty-two, and that you've been, let's say, asleep, for thirty

years. Be ready to accept your new appearance. You knew that when you decided to sell time ... anyway, that's the reason you came here.

As I've seen in your file, full time-charge amount was paid to your children on the day of your entry in stasis. It means that you have no obligations towards us, as we have none towards you. You're free to leave when you wish to."



While getting up, he put an ascetic-looking leaflet in her hands.

"I suggest you visit one of the Centers for Reality Reconciliation immediately. Outer world has changed a lot, you know."

She glanced at the leaflet, and saw her hands. Those hands were thirty years older than her. Hands of an old woman.

There was a mirror high on the wall. God, oh God, she didn't want to see the face of the old woman.

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Today she has seen her children. She was hiding on the other side of the street.

They explained her everything in the Centre, about changes, progress, adapting to new circumstances, life goes on, etc. Also, they told her that there were no messages for her during the timelessness. Not one.

Today she hasn't seen her children, but two people older than her (it's so easy to

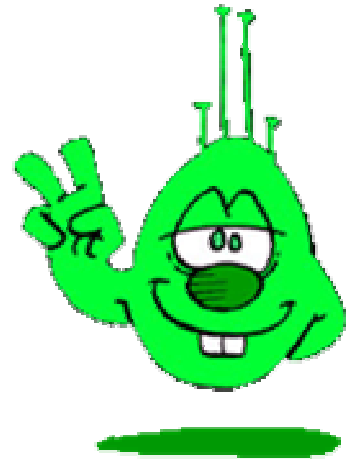
fall in the trap of a retained reality!). She knew they were her children. They passed by her only a meter away and scarcely lifted their eyes before rushing off after their lives.

She didn't have anything anymore. She had no life because she gave it to her children. She had no children because her sweet little boy and her tiny girl disappeared without a trace. She had no future because to find strength to travel towards future we need our memories and love of our children.

But, she still had one thing left. She had her future time. It was her own, and this time only she will have it at her disposal.

This river, so deep down there, resembles so much to the time flow ...

God, why did I have to have only this reality?



### **Marina Jadrejčić: MEGAPRIVATIZATION**

"Going once ... going twice ... gone! Earth is sold for one Galactic dollar to a Rigelian in a third row!"

*Coming from the eastern Croatian city of Osijek, Mario Berečić mixes various genres in his writings, SF, fantasy and horror, often with ethnic flavour. He published a collection of stories in Hungary, and is a SFERA Award winner.*

**Mario Berečić**

## **LOVE STORY**

**Translated by Boris Švel**

Like a patriarch among his minions stood the large mansion, the only one in the midst of the cottage neighbourhood. That house of the rich was always comfortably in shadows, eluding the streetlamp glow in the sweaty summer night. A small band was approaching the building: a youngster and a gal, with three more teenagers following them. The leading couple, Dario and Daria were holding their hands. Other three young men - Kristijan, Miroslav and Toni - were silent. They solemnly watched the couple quietly parting, Dario heading into the house, Daria moving through the shadows into the dimly lit street, fast paces going away.

"Shall we follow her," Kristijan asked his two friends.

"Nah, it's certain we'll lose her," replied Miroslav.

"As we did over and over again..." Toni was musing more for himself.

They tried to follow her several times, but she escaped them in the village streets and paths. Does she come by car, bicycle or

by simply walking, they couldn't figure out. It was not the jealousy that drove them to find out who she really was. Part curiosity, part concerns for their friend, but the efforts were fruitless.

"Even after two months, we still know as much as before. She's living with her mother and uncle, somewhere on the edge of town", Kristijan murmured.

"Doesn't matter. Somehow I feel she's all right", Miroslav replied.

"Even if she doesn't want to know anything about us..." Toni added.

"Jealous, aren't you", Miroslav was opposing him.

"No, not at all... But Dario might find her secretiveness upsetting, no?"

"C'mon, you two. If she is any good to him, she ought to be good for us!"

"Right! If she's avoiding us, it's her problem, not ours!"

So they argued in the night, slowly disappearing into shadows themselves, a trio of brave nearly-twenty-oldsters having

perhaps the most exciting discussion of their lives.

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"I know what I'll do, sister. Tommorow morning", said white-bearded man to the white-haired woman, as the dusk was falling on the garden.

The woman was staring blankly: "I have to rely on you. You always find the way, somehow." She was despairing more and more. Her daughter Daria ignored all bans, curfews and punishments, stubbornly meeting with that boy. Daria cunningly evaded her mother's supervision, now and then disappearing to enjoy her relationship. Relationship that was immature and potentially dangerous not only for the girl, but for all her kin.

In the meantime, Daria milled around the little plum orchard, next to the large high-rise building at the town outskirts. She was perfecting her mimicry skill. She needed to, for her everyday look - white hair, youngish face, and smile of sharp teeth - might scare away even her beloved Dario. There was no evil in her, but strange looks can be scary. So, when she was impersonating a young teenage girl in ordinary tee shirt and jeans, she didn't invoke the usual fear of the unknown. Of course, her name was not Daria; she invented it for her lover. But we will call her Daria anyway, for her real name might be

difficult to pronounce. She obviously wasn't human, although she was very closely related to the mundane dwellers of towns and villages. Others of her kind are not too dissimilar: white hair, barely clothed, some of them covered with plant growth. They inhabited some three acres of land at the edge of town, some several hundreds fairy people, with only dozen males between them.

Fairies dwell in the orchards and gardens next to living blocks that communist government built just before the War, in the place of ploughed land. They lived in this place for thousand years, seeing all good and bad. They remember kings, pests and choleras, Turks conquering and fleeing, the arrival of Austrians... They have a lot of things to recollect. Some fifteen years ago, the progress finally touched them, the new buildings forcing them to settle into the remnants of farmlands and orchards. Inhabitants of buildings took the rest of the fairly land for their gardens, cultivating them in their leisure time. The fairies only slowly retook some town streets, but didn't move into the villages, for the village fairies live there. So Daria has a long walk - some couple of thousands of paces - to the village where Dario lives. Never mind, it has been enough frolicking; it is time to meet her love. She departed into the dusk.

Fairy species is small in numbers, being generally unknown, and invisible to the most of humans. Still, many people have

actually heard of the fairies, believing that stories of such beings are only a concoction of lies. Some do know of fairy culture and their diminishing dwellings. Such people are considered weird or even lunatics, their words being ignored by sane folks. On very rare occasions, humans and fairies come close together, such encounters usually being fatal for both sides. That is the reason why Daria's mother is despairing over her only child. Her liaison with a man, nearly three hundred years ago, almost destroyed her. In the times of the empress Maria Theresa, she fell in love and gave birth to a child. Needless to say, the life of Daria's father was brief, too short for the child to remember him. The little half-fairy must not suffer like her mother did.

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It was nearly dawning, and Daria slowly strolled away from her lover's house. Starry sky was still above her, and she felt better than ever. She was happy, fulfilled with love. Suddenly, a pale hand reached for her from the dark. She jumped away, prepared to scream as only fairy can. A deep sigh comes out of her chest when she recognises her uncle.

"Quiet, my little one", said the fairyman. "We will have a short walk. Back."

"Back? Back to Dario's house?"

The uncle nodded: "Indeed. And for a little longer."

"Where to? Dario is asleep..."

"Is he?", the white-bearded apparition interrupted, with a bit of irony. "Is he?"

They walked in silence. When they approached the house, the mansion seemed somehow different to Daria. As they slid inside, the rooms were dusty, even faintly smelling of rot. Daria realised that the spaces appeared untidy, perhaps deserted.

"Now look", uncle pointed to the tiny nail that was protruding from the doorpost. "I hammered it in yesterday evening. The nail is full of magic: it lured your boyfriend onto it, so he has pricked himself. The rest you know..."

Daria became silent: the body bitten by such nail leaves a thin, almost invisible track of blood. The fairyman was by then following the dark-red thread on the ground. "Now you will see who your Dario is. Let's go!"

Unwillingly, she came along. Concerned for the outcome of the walk, she was letting her magic go, becoming more and more fairy-like. She was repeatedly convincing herself that nobody could make Dario repulsive to her. They met secretly so many times, she eluded the custody of her mother so often, but she was rewarded every time. She felt that he was the one she waited for all of her life. And Dario was always answering to her passion with his love.



They followed the thin trail of blood across the whole village, and it was for quite a distance. Villages in this region follow roads, often for thousands of paces. In their quest they occasionally evaded the workers that were hurrying to their shift in the town, the farmers still sleeping. The traces of recent War were visible only to the ones who knew where to look for them. A neatly patched roof here, or fresh facade there, were silent testimonies of the shellings and bombardments. The actual fighting occurred more to the east, so here the traces of terror were quickly disappearing.

Daria and her uncle were quickly approaching the end of their short journey. Thin track of blood was leading unmistakably to the village cemetery, to the home of her lover. To the home made of stone, the biggest on the cemetery.

*Wertačnić Dario, 1968 – 1986.*

She gasped when her uncle proudly showed his discovery. He gently patted the gravestone: "Now you see... He died in an accident, driving a motorcycle."

She saw. Dario wasn't mortal at all. He has nineteen for the whole eternity. And he perfectly hid his true essence. A sudden thought shook her: "Is he a werewolf? He is not, tell me he is not?"

"No, he is not", the fairyman said reassuringly. "He does live in the grave like werewolf, but isn't noisy like werewolves. Dario is simply a living dead. And there are more of them."

They strolled along the alley of graves. The uncle was showing more graves to Daria: Miroslav Šarić, Kristijan Tadijanić and Antun Mijatović, called Toni. In the year of 1992, all three of them were of the same age, nineteen, when one night they died under the Serbian artillery barrage in the small town of Valpovo.

"And they were just leaving the snack bar, after having their pizzas. Poor boys", uncle murmured pensively. "They sleep in their graves these days, and walk by night through gardens and street. Most of the year, they gather in the Wertačnić's house, while Dario's parents and a younger brother work in Germany. Nobody notices them."

"How did you know?", asked Daria.

"A village fairyman told me. He actually praised them quite a lot. He repeatedly told me that living dead are much better company than the unruly werewolves."

Daria sobbed. Her uncle was content. Just one look on her tormented face was enough to assure him that she regretted her recklessness. The tears were the true sign that the love is over. The day went well.

On the return trip they sneaked into a lorry that was hauling wood to the town. Crouching on the logs, Daria had enough time to calm down. She went through a most disturbing experience, but the world is still turning. As they approached their dwelling, sober resolution replaced pity. After all, it was better that way. From today on, there

will be no secrets between her and her love, and his friends too. They all belong to the same world. The hurricane of her thoughts was revolving around a single idea: Dario

isn't mortal. Therefore, their love is not in jeopardy.



*Dalibor Perković is one of the most prominent young authors of Croatian science fiction, winning SFERA Award two times. Resident of Zagreb, he published his first novel this year.*

## Dalibor Perković

# MISJUMP

He looked like a young bum. He sat there curled up, shivering from cold, wrapped into a blanket the guards threw at him after hosing him down with ice-cold water. They found him wandering around the Brandenburg gate, lost in the pouring rain, dressed in some weird outfit, mumbling incoherently "Where is the wall? Where is the damn wall?" They said that after he saw them, he jumped at first as if he wanted to run, but then he saw the markings on their sleeves and almost fainted. He cried all the way to the station.

And now he was here, in the interrogation room. *Herr Doktor* announced he was coming in half an hour or so, so I decided to put every minute to good use. The young man's fixation sounded mad, but I had to admit, it had a logic of its own. Someone with less experience might have had fallen under his influence. One had to explore, get to know one's enemy.

"So you're some kind of celebrity, eh?" I asked, trying to sound casual. I put the cigarette into my mouth and inhaled slowly; the tip glowed in the dim room. The young man sniffled and nodded, holding

tight to his blanket. When they realised what he was, they didn't even want to give him some standard prison clothes, in order not to get it filthy.

"And what was it you said? There are thousands of other people looking through your eyes?" I continued. A small cloud of tobacco smoke started for the ceiling, slowly dispersing.

"Millions", he corrected me. I nodded. "Looking, listening, feeling," he explained obediently. I noticed that, as time passed, his fear seemed to shrink and give way to some strange spiteful despair. "If I inhale now they'll feel the smoke. If you hit me, they will feel the pain. Millions of them. In the future."

It was a good defensive theory. It was possible that the boy wasn't mad at all, maybe he was only acting mad. But it wasn't probable that it would save him. It probably made his end even closer.

"Then we should treat you very carefully," I concluded and stared at the cracks in the wall. After they caught him, Klaus called me and I phoned dr. Joseph and he said "Excellent, I will pick him up

personally." Dr. Joseph holds professional interest in cases like this.

"And are all those millions ... Jews like you?"

He looked at me with scorn and then, as if he finally realised where he was, looked down again. "Maybe. Probably. I don't know. I think they are mostly Germans. I should have landed into the week when the Berlin wall fell. It is an important event in our history."

"The Berlin wall?" I asked and took another smoke. I noticed how he said *our* history.

He nodded. "The wall that divided the city in half after..." he started, but then his voice simply faded away. Maybe I was just imagining it, but it seemed like he smiled for a moment. He shrugged and continued staring into emptiness. "What will happen to me?"

"There are many walls in Berlin, but none of them is what you are talking about," I replied. It didn't sound like a question, but I left it hanging in the air, watching him, observing.

He shrugged again. "I guess there was some miscalculation. They missed by half a century. It seems that someone messed up the digits."

"And, as you say, they all feel what you feel?"

"Yes. It's called *reality show*. Something like television..."

"Television?" I asked. The man stopped, confused, and then nodded. "Like a radio. I have a biotransmitter installed into my brain. It's sending my mindstate through the temporal link. Into the future. The signal is then sent into the homes of a few million people who are lying in their beds and experiencing everything I am experiencing. They paid for a one-week visit to Berlin during the celebration of the unification of Germany."

The unification of Germany? Sounds good, but Germany will probably never be more united than it is today. The boy has a vivid imagination. But, I had to admit, that thing with the biotransmitter was a really good idea. I'll have to mention that to Dr. Joseph when he arrives. It might give him new ideas to work on.

"So if anything ... ugly ... happens to you ..." I started.

The young man's eyes glared. "Yes, yes, that is correct! Everything that happens to me will be felt by the millions of people plugged into my mind. And there are many Germans among them."

"And what would happen to them in case you, say, die?"

"Serious psychic traumas for everybody receiving the signal," he replied. "And the signal can't be terminated, there has to be a preparation period. It is required because of the biochemical processes that the viewers were subjected to in order to be able to receive the transmission. You see,

the human perception has certain limitations..."

A knock on the door interrupted him.

"*Herr Standartenführer*," It was Klaus. "*Herr Doktor* has arrived."

I took a long, final look at the prisoner and shrugged. What awaits him will be a punishment enough for wandering the city centre without the proper markings on his sleeve. Justice will be done. I got up and left the room.

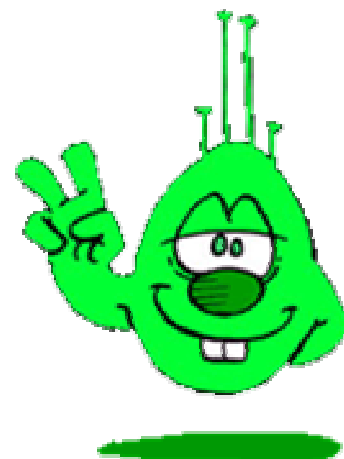
Dr. Joseph and I shook hands like old acquaintances. We knew each other from the time he was a young internist under my uncle's supervision and we maintained contact after he climbed in the Party hierarchy. "So, what have you got for me?" he asked.

"A young Jew who was walking the streets without permit and without the David star on his sleeve. And he's either suffering from some heavy delusion, that is, he's either crazy as a bat, or he is a very inventive liar. He has tried to convince me he's coming from the future as some kind of ... reporter, and that millions of Germans are plugged into his mind. He says that, if he is hurt, they will suffer serious psychological damage."

Dr. Joseph smiled. "Well then, I guess we'll have to take care to keep him alive as long as possible, won't we? All right, we'll take him. We need more of these, we had a bad month and the Eastern front is lacking the suitable prisoners at the moment. But tell me, how are you? How's family?"

I shrugged. "We're alive. We are suffering because of the shortages, but we know it will pass. Georg, my elder son, picked up a cold and he's lying in bed right now. I don't know what to do with that kid, he keeps getting sick. Do you have some advice?"

The doctor seemed to glow. "No, just keep him warm. It would be good if a doctor could have a look at him. I'll give you the address of a colleague of mine, we cooperate on regular basis. If he asks anything, just tell him dr. Mengele sent you. There shouldn't be any problems."



Aleksandar Žiljak

# SCIENCE FICTION IN CROATIA

## 1. The Beginnings

Although the elements of fantastic and speculative in the Croatian literature can be traced back to the years around World War I, it is generally claimed that the first Croatian SF novel was *Na Pacifiku God 2255* (*On The Pacific In 2255*) by Milan Šufflay, published in 1924.

In 1932 Mato Hanžeković published *Gospodin čovjek* (*A Man Of Rank*), a utopia about a group of people rebuilding the civilisation destroyed in the new world war. Even more novels were published in Zagreb during the 1920s and 1930s, mostly by authors using pen names, initials, or altogether omitting to sign themselves. The best were *Muri Massanga* by Mladen Horvat and a series of novels by Aldion Degal (probably a pseudonym) *Atomska raketa* (*The Atomic Rocket*), *Zrake smrti* (*The Death Rays*) and *Smaragdni skarabej* (*The Emerald Scarab*), as well as *Crveni duh* (*The Red Ghost*) and *Majstor Omega osvaja svijet* (*The Omega Master Conquers The World*) by Stan Rager. This was the pseudonym of Stanko Radovanović and Zvonimir Furtinger (whom we'll meet later) writing in tandem.

The beginnings of the Croatian SF comics also date back to the 1930s. The first was *Gost iz svemira* (*The Guest From Outer Space*) by Božidar Rašić and Leontije Bjelski, published in 1935 in Zagreb, followed by Krešimir Kovačić's and Andrija Maurović's *Ljubavnica s Marsa* (*The Mistress From Mars*) and *Podzemna carica* (*The Underground Empress*).

## 2. Croatian SF Comes Of Age

The 1950s were characterised by the increase in translated novels (by American, Russian and European authors) published by various Yugoslav publishers. The Croatian authors of that period were mostly writing children's SF novels, the tradition continuing to the present day.

In 1959 the first novel by Mladen Bjažić and Zvonimir Furtinger, *Osvajač 2 se ne javlja* (*The Conqueror 2 Does Not Reply*), was published. In the following years, these two writers wrote several novels together which are considered classics of the Croatian SF. *Svemirska nevjesta* (*The Space Bride*), *Varamunga - tajanstveni grad* (*Varamunga - The Mysterious City*) and *Zagonetni stroj*

*profesora Kružića (The Mysterious Machine Of Professor Kružić)* were published in 1960, *Mrtvi se vraćaju (The Dead Return)* in 1965 and *Ništa bez Božene (Nothing Without Božena)* in 1973. These novels include lots of elements of the detective and action genre, seasoned with humour. Being a very prolific author, Furtinger also wrote a considerable number of SF stories.

### 3. The *SIRIUS* Years

The crucial year in the history of the Croatian SF was 1976. In July of that year, the first Croatian SF magazine *SIRIUS* was started. *SIRIUS* was published by Zagreb newspaper and magazine publisher *Vjesnik*, one of the largest publishing companies in socialist Yugoslavia. It was started by Borivoj Jurković (its first editor) and Damir Mikuličić. Despite severe economic difficulties in 1980's Yugoslavia (resulting in inflation and chronic shortage of paper), *SIRIUS* maintained a regular monthly rhythm throughout most of the period of its publication, lasting until the end of 1989. It had the circulation reaching 30 000 in its heyday, and was elected twice (in 1980 and 1984) the best European SF magazine. After Jurković edited *SIRIUS* for more than 100

issues, he was succeeded by Milivoj Pašiček and finally by Hrvoje Prčić.

*SIRIUS* was modelled after American SF magazines and published stories of various lengths, mostly by English-speaking, but also Soviet and European (particularly French) authors. In more than thirteen years, *SIRIUS* introduced to the Croatian readers the stories by the best SF writers in the world, authors both classic as well as the recent ones. *SIRIUS* was also opened to various theoretical works, reviews, biographical texts, interviews and fandom news, and this had considerable influence on the development of SF in Croatia.

Most important of all, *SIRIUS* offered Croatian (and Yugoslav) writers an opportunity to publish. Having the full-colour cover and later even black-and-white story illustrations, *SIRIUS* also became a sort of an exhibition hall of the SF art.

Among the Croatian writers who became well-known on the pages of *SIRIUS* were (in alphabetic order): Neven Antičević, Branko Belan, Radovan Devlić (otherwise a comics author), Darije Đokić, Zvonimir Furtinger, Vera Ivosić-Santo, Biljana Mateljan, Damir Mikuličić, Slobodan Petrovski, Branko Pihač, Vesna Popović, Hrvoje Prčić, Živko Prodanović, Predrag Raos, Zdravko Valjak and many others.



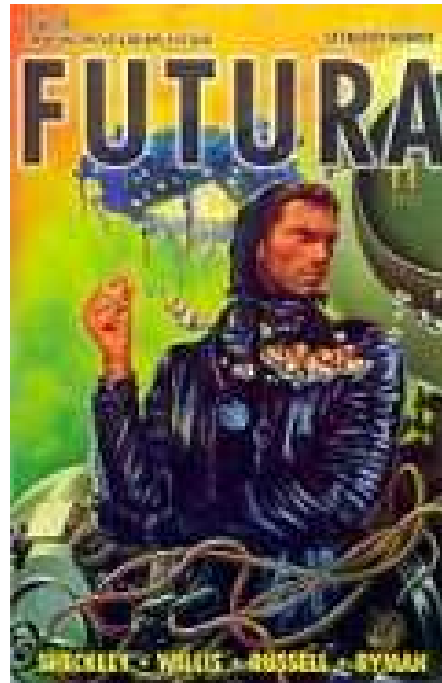
In this period some very important SF novels appeared. Predrag Raos published his two-part epic *Brodolom kod Thule* (*Shipwrecked At Thula*) in 1978. *Mnogo vike nizašto* (*Much Ado About Nothing*) followed in 1985, and *Nul effort* came out in 1990. In the mid-1980s, Neven Orhel wrote two medical-SF novels *Uzbuna na odjelu za rak* (*Alert At The Cancer Ward*) and *Ponoćni susret* (*The Midnight Encounter*), while Branko Belan (better known as a film director and lecturer) published the anti-utopistic *Utov dnevnik* (*Ut's Diary*) in 1982. In the same year, Damir Mikuličić published a collection of his stories entitled *O*. Some main-stream writers also incorporated the SF and fantastic elements in their novels, the most notable being Pavao Pavličić and Goran Tribuson.

So far the only two Croatian SF movies appeared also in this period. The first was *Izbavitelj* (*The Rat Saviour*) in 1977, directed by Krsto Papić and awarded at the Trieste SF Film Festival. The second was Dušan Vukotić's SF comedy *Posjetioci iz galaksije Arkana* (*Visitors From The Arkana Galaxy*), made in 1980.

#### 4. Future With *FUTURA*

The untimely death of *SIRIUS* in late 1989 is still mourned by many. Although

there were rumours in the following year or two that *SIRIUS* will be revived, nothing ever came out of it. In the meantime, the clouds of war were gathering over Croatia...



The early 1990s, marked by the fall of socialism and the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, seemed hardly an appropriate time for the *SIRIUS*

successor. So it came out of the blue when, in late autumn 1992, a small Zagreb publisher *Bakal* introduced *FUTURA* to the news-stands. Less than a year after the war in Croatia was stopped by an uneasy cease-fire, and with war at full swing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, here we were, bewildered, holding a new SF-magazine in our hands!

Basically, *FUTURA* was not very different from *SIRIUS*. It was a monthly and it opened its pages to the Croatian artists and writers almost immediately. However, the times had changed. *FUTURA*'s circulation was much lower than that of *SIRIUS*. Denied the support of the major state-owned

publisher and faced with a general drop in income and living standard in Croatia, *FUTURA* had financial problems. It changed several editors (they were: Vlatko Jurić-Kokić, Krsto A. Mažuranić, Mihaela Velina, Davorin Horak and Milena Benini) and was sold to another publisher several years ago. Eventually, it became quite irregular, sometimes not appearing at the news-stands for two or three months. But, it is still being published and is currently (May 2005) at issue number 124.

*FUTURA* had similar importance for the Croatian SF as did *SIRIUS*. It became the place where authors could publish. And publish they did and still do. However, in 1995 *FUTURA* stopped being the only place.

## 5. New Vibrations

In that year, a new and important project in the Croatian SF was started. The SF-club *SFera* from Zagreb issued the first of their story-collections, entitled *Zagreb 2004* and edited by Darko Macan. *Zagreb 2004* collected stories by young (the oldest being 32) writers, about Zagreb 10 years in the

future. Although many had already published, mostly in fanzines and *FUTURA*, this collection proved that a new generation of SF authors had arrived. At the same time it seemed that the *SIRIUS* generation had mostly faded away, at least in their capacity as writers.

Not that nothing was heard of them. Predrag Raos was loud as a member of the opposition against President Tudman's authoritative rule. However, only two of the books he published in the 1990s were true SF: *Mayerling* and the children's novel *Od rata do zvijezda* (*From The War To The Stars*). He is also a well-known translator. Živko Prodanović published the somewhat out-of-date *Tamara* and *Smrt među rimskim ruševinama* (*The Death Among The Ruins Of Rome*), while Zdravko Valjak collected his old *SIRIUS* stories in *Plastična duša* (*The*

*Plastic Soul*). Damir Mikuličić became an important SF and popular science (Einstein, Hawking, etc.) publisher. Vesna Gorše, also one of the *SIRIUS* writers, but today better known as a musician, collected some of her stories in *Dar* (*The Gift*).

In the meantime, *SFera* continued producing its collections every year. After *Zagreb 2004*, *Dnevnici entropije* (*The Entropy*



*Diaries*) followed in 1996. Then, there were *Kvantni portali imaginacije (Quantum Portals Of Imagination)*, Zagreb 2014, *Krhotine svjetova (Fragments Of The Worlds)*, *Dvije tisuće šarenih aliena (Two Thousand Gaudy Aliens)*, *Jutra boje potopa (Deluge-Coloured Mornings)*, *Alternauti (Alteranauts)*, *Djeca olujnih vjekova (Children Of The Stormy Eras)*, Zagreb 2094 and, finally, this year's *Kap crne svjetlosti (A Drop Of Black Light)*. The editor of most of these collections was Darko Macan (alone or together with Tatjana Jambrišak and, recently, Darko Vrbanić). *Quantum Portals Of Imagination* was edited by Davorin Horak, while Tatjana Jambrišak and Darko Vrbanić edited *A Drop Of Black Light*.

Because of the careful selection and editing, these collections became the cutting edge of the modern Croatian SF. The stories published in them are on an average much better than the stories in *FUTURA*, firmly establishing the new authors. Even more important, the story-collection bug spread from Zagreb to Istra, so in the last four years four short story-collections were published in the small town of Pazin, these being *Tvar koja nedostaje (The Missing Matter)*, *Svijet tamo iza (The World Beyond)*, *Bolja polovica (The Better Half)* and *Ispod i iznad (Below And Above)*.

Beside *FUTURA* and the annual collections, there are several mainstream magazines where an occasional SF story can be found, particularly the defunct *Plima* that regularly published plays with elements of the fantastic. Since late 1998, short stories have been published in the Sunday-supplement of the *Jutarnji list* newspapers, and we must not forget the various fanzines.

Taking the full risk and responsibility for omissions, let me now introduce some of the most prominent of the new writers established in Croatia in the past decade!

## 6. The Hall Of Fame

Ladies first! Milena Benini is best known for her fantasy novel *Kaos (Chaos)*, her translations, and also as the current editor of *FUTURA*. Jasmina Blažić had several good stories and novelettes set in the historic Zagreb. Viktoria Faust (a pen-name) is called "the first lady of Croatian horror". Beside numerous horror and SF stories, she wrote a vampire novel *U anđeoskom liku zvijeri (In The Angelic Image Of The Beast)*. Marina Jadrežić wrote a series of stories about the Istrians colonising deep space. Tatjana Jambrišak caused considerable interest with her stories about the psychic fortune-teller and

detective Una Razum, and is also known for her 3D computer-art.

Danilo Brozović shows strong preferences for cyberpunk, sometimes adding unusual ingredients such as ancient Greek mythology. Dean Fabić and Goran Konvični were both known in the mid-1990s for stories showing influences of cyberpunk, Dick and Delaney. Zoran Krušvar is successfully writing humoristic short stories. Igor Lepčin's work ranges from absurd burlesques to melancholic end-of-the-world dramas, and includes the children's novel *Prsti puni mora* (*Fingers Full Of Sea*).

Darko Macan is known internationally as the comics writer working for major American publishers. But, on the Croatian scene he was the initiator and editor of *SFera*'s collections. He also wrote numerous SF stories, the novel *Koža boje masline* (*The Olive-Coloured Skin*) and the children's novel *Pavo protiv Pave* (*Paul vs. Paul*).

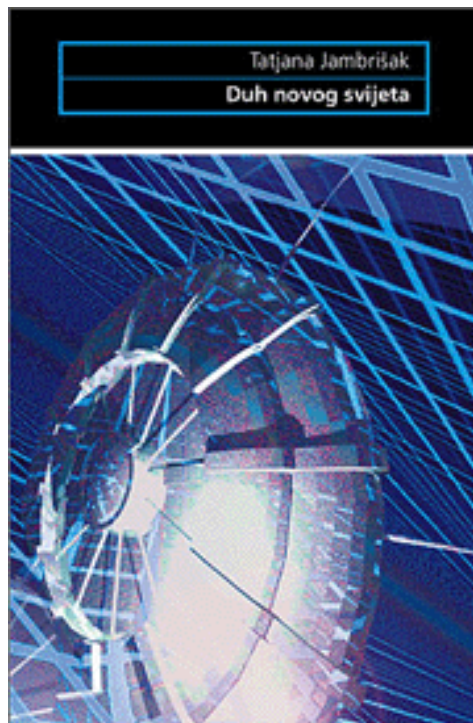
Denis Peričić writes stories often relating to actual historical persons, events and settings. Zoran Pongrašić was also noticed in *SFera*

collections. Dalibor Perković favours military SF. Vanja Spirin published several novels and story-collections, mostly fantasy spoofs.

Zoran Vlahović usually writes hard-SF stories, but also melancholic fantasy pieces. Finally, Aleksandar Žiljak, the author of this text, writes mostly action SF and fantasy. Being the freelance artist, he also ventures into the field of SF and fantasy illustration.

In 2003, four of the aforementioned writers published their own story-collections in the edition *SFera*. The collections are: *Duh novog svijeta* (*Spirit Of The New World*) by Tatjana Jambrišak, *Purgeri lete u nebo* (*Burgers Fly Up To The Sky*) by Igor Lepčin, *Teksas Kid (i još neka moja braća)* (*Texas Kid (And Other Brothers Of Mine)*) by Darko Macan and *Slijepice* (*Blind Birds*) by Aleksandar Žiljak.

This project of author collections was continued in 2004, with another edition of four books. They are: *Najbolji na svijetu* (*The Best In The World*) by Zoran Krušvar, *Preko rijeke* (*Across The River*) by Dalibor Perković, *Čuvari sreće* (*Keepers Of Happiness*) by Zoran Pongrašić and *Frulaš* (*The Piper*) by Zoran Vlahović.



Finally, in this year, the third series of four books was published. These are *Jednorog i djevica* (*The Unicorn And The Virgin*) by Milena Benini, *Jeftine riječi* (*Cheap Words*) by Goran Konvični, *Zvezdani riffovi* (*Star Riffs*) by Krešimir Mišak and *Zeleno sunce, crna spora* (*Green Sun, Black Spore*) by Danilo Brozović.

This list is all but complete. Compared to writers in the West, the individual output of all the listed authors is quite small. The reason is simple: SF writing in Croatia is not commercial. Therefore, it is merely a hobby for most of the authors. This also results in writers who show up with only a story or two and then disappear, often for good. Another consequence is the almost total lack of true SF novels. It is to be hoped that this would change. There are signs that publishers, previously reluctant to publish Croatian SF, are now showing some interest.

In 2002, Dejan Šorak published his black-humor novel *Ja i Kalisto* (*Me And Calisto*). In late 2003, the best Croatian SF novel in more than a decade was published. It was *Sablja* (*The Sabre*) by Ivan Gavran. A fast-paced and superbly written space opera

about a group of Earth jet-pilots fighting in a galactic air combat tournament, *Sablja* deservedly won the *SFera* Award as the best SF novel in 2003. In 2004, a three-part epic *Araton* by Oliver Franić was published, while Dalibor Perković published his novel *Sva krv čovječanstva* (*All The Blood Of Mankind*) in this year.



## 7. Translations, Art, Comics, etc.

Some ten to fifteen SF, fantasy and horror novels, almost exclusively by American and British authors, are being translated annually into the Croatian language. The most important publishers now are *Algoritam*, *Izvori* and *Zagrebačka naklada*, all from Zagreb, followed by several more. Despite the 1991 - 1995 war, books published in Serbia were also available through various channels. Naturally, the choice of imported books (exclusively in English) is much larger.

The SF art, being tied to book and magazine covers, is not particularly developed in Croatia. Among the authors who were producing in some quantity are Igor Kordej, Esad T. Ribić and the author of this text.



Karlo Galeta and Robert Drozd monopolised the *FUTURA* covers for several years with their 3D computer-art. A much better computer artist is Goran Šarlija, while Miljenko Zvonar produced a large body of SF art, illustrating the already-mentioned *Jutarnji list*'s Sunday-supplement stories. Željko Pahek also returned to the



Croatian art scene, working mostly in Serbia before the war. He is famous for his SF-art, but also for his hilarious comics, spoofing almost every SF-cliché known to mankind.

The situation with comics in Croatia is poor indeed. So far, no comic magazine succeeded in running regularly and for any period of time, so the scene is mostly oriented towards the fanzines and school-magazines. However, the Croatian comic artists have a relatively long tradition of working for foreign publishers. This continued in the 1990s with the breakthrough on the American market, mostly in the franchise-universe and super-hero series by *Dark Horse*, *Marvel* and *DC*. The best-known writer in this field is Darko Macan, while the art was produced by late Edvin Biuković, Igor Kordej (who moved

to Canada), Esad T. Ribić, Goran Sudžuka and Danijel Žeželj.

The SF theory work is sporadic at best, but we must mention Darko Suvin here. One of the world foremost SF theoreticians, he was born in 1930 in Zagreb, but continued his career in the USA and Canada from the late 1960s.

## 8. F Is For Fandom

The organised fandom in Croatia dates back to 1976 (the year of *SIRIUS!*), when the SF-club *SFera* was founded in Zagreb. It was followed by more clubs, including the *StarWars* and the *Star Trek* club. As is usual, these clubs have been involved in convention-organising and fanzines-publishing, the oldest fanzine being *SFera*'s own *Parsek*, started in 1977.

Perhaps the true phenomenon of the Croatian fandom are conventions. At the moment Croatia has five annual conventions: in Zagreb, Kutina, Osijek, Rijeka and Pazin. To these, one must add gaming conventions and LARP events, as well as the *Jules Verne's Days* held in Pazin.

*SferaKon* in Zagreb is the oldest convention in Croatia, running every year from 1977. It is organised by the *SFera* club and is now held on the last weekend of April at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences, Unska 3. *SferaKon* attracts almost 1000 visitors (other conventions are smaller), offering the usual convention programme, lectures, movies, costumes and gaming, as well as being an opportunity for fans and professionals to meet and exchange ideas. In the recent years *SferaKon* invited quite an enviable number of foreign GOHs, including Martin Easterbrook, Guy Gavriel Kay, Robert Silverberg and Karen Haber, Walter Jon Williams, Lois McMaster Bujold, George R. R. Martin, Ken MacLeod and this year's Michael Iwoleit, writer, editor and translator from Germany. *SFera* Awards are also given for the best SF stories of various lengths, plays, novels, art and life-achievements. These are the traditional annual awards, first given in 1981.

*Istracon* in Pazin is now firmly established as the second-largest Croatian SF convention. Held in March, it is now running for five consecutive years, and is attracting some 500 visitors looking for a lot of fun and good times in the beautiful surroundings of central Istra.

Science Fiction is now becoming more and more accepted as part of Croatian popular culture. The history of SF in Croatia includes two long-running magazines, important annual story collections, author collections and several good novels, all appearing under difficult economic and political conditions. Several authors are now well-known and established on the Croatian SF scene, and the next logical step - already being taken - is their breakthrough into the international market.

There is now a rising need for thorough evaluation of the development of SF in Croatia. There's more and more talk about bibliography of Croatian SF a historical review of Croatian SF stories was edited by Žarko Milenić, and an anthology of the best Croatian SF stories is well in the process of editing. This anthology, probably one of the most important projects in the Croatian SF today, is scheduled for Spring 2006. In the meantime, we hope this text, with all its shortcomings, will provide the basic insight into the past, present and possible futures of the Science Fiction in Croatia.





*A member of the 'Old Guard' of Croatian SF writers and SFERA Award winner, Živko Prodanović is a most prolific author of science fiction short stories and novel. Besides his occasional strolls into mainstream prose, he also writes poetry. He was also one of robo-winners on the Australian robot poetry competition that was organised last autumn by Port Philip Library Service from St. Kild and Cordite Poetry Review from Melbourne.*

Živko Prodanović

## ROBOTS IN WAR - SIX SITUATIONS

1.

military band roaring  
robots going to the war  
not versed in why

2.

in mankind war  
very sorrowful robots  
marching to the victory

3.

a hitting robot;  
his head is spinning,  
he foresees a medal

4.

military cemetery;  
on the robot's part  
no flowers

5.

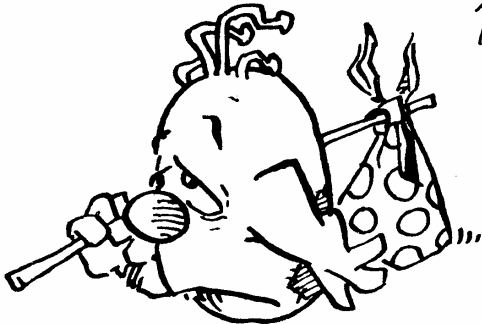
Noah's Arka  
- robots entering  
two by two

6.

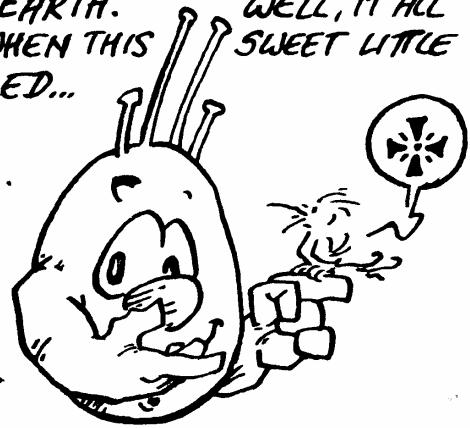
the last robot  
silently strolling,  
no man anywhere

# BEMMET

by  
DARRO  
MACAN



LET ME CLEAR YOU UP ON MY BEING  
HERE ON EARTH. WELL, IT ALL  
STARTED WHEN THIS SWEET LITTLE  
BIRD CALLED...



EXEC...  
EXACTLY!  
...WAS FIRST BROUGHT TO MY PLANET!

CUTE AND LOVABLE AT FIRST, \*  
SEEMED A PERFECT PET. EXPE...  
EXCEPT FOR...



...EXCEPT FOR IT'S BREEDING RATE!

...THE ONLY SOLUTION WAS \*-EATER...

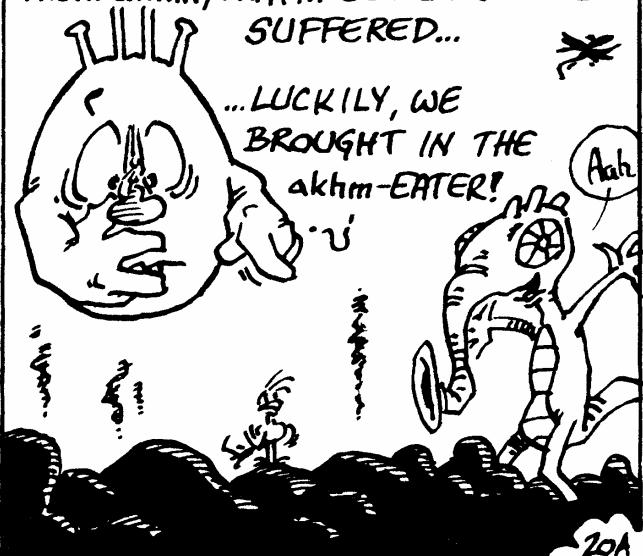


...IMPORTED FROM THE SAME PLANET.

AND EVERYTHING'D BE PERFECT, EXP...  
EXCEPT FOR... EXCEPT FOR THE  
PECULIAR IMPACT OF \*-HEAT ON  
THE \*-EATERS' DIGESTIVE SYSTEM...



OUR FORCE FIELDS KEPT US ABOVE  
THE... akhm, THAT... BUT OUR NOSES  
SUFFERED...



...LUCKILY, WE  
BROUGHT IN THE  
akhm-EATER!

Aah

20A

...FROM THE SAME PLACE. PERFECT!  
EX...CEPT FOR THE *akhm*-EATERS'  
HICCUPS...



...WHICH  
PRODUCED DURABLE PINK BUBBLES!

...WHICH, AGAIN, HAPPENED TO BE  
\**s*' FAVORITE FOOD...



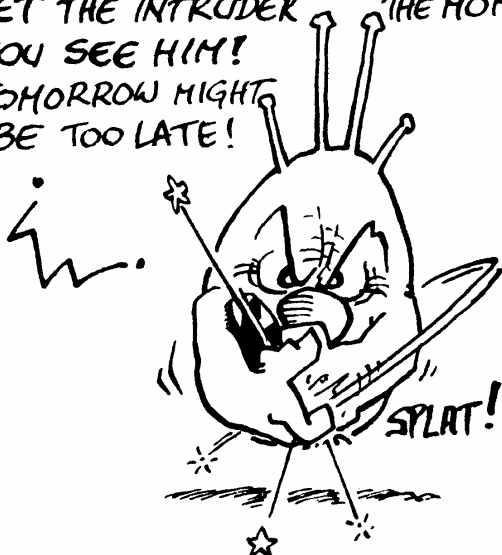
...FOOD THAT, ALAS, STIMULATED  
\**s*' BREEDING...

...THUS DUPLICATING THEIR OWN  
BIOCENOSIS. NOW THEY ALL  
HAD TWO HOMES...



...AND WE HAD NONE.

THEREFORE, A PIECE OF ADVICE!  
GET THE INTRUDER THE MOMENT  
YOU SEE HIM!  
TOMORROW MIGHT  
BE TOO LATE!



WAIT! I JUST THOUGHT  
OF AN EXCEP...  
EXPEC... EXE...



EXECUTION!

*Murphy 9/1*

Dalibor Perković

# CROATIAN SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTIONS

## SFERAKON

**Where:** Zagreb

**When:** last full weekend in April

**SFeraKon 2006:** 21-23 April

**Organised by:** SFera

**Typical attendance:** 600+

**[www.sfera.hr](http://www.sfera.hr)**

The oldest Croatian SF convention. The first convention called "SFeraKon" was held in 1983, but SFera had been organizing similar events - officially and unofficially - since it was formed in 1976. In 1986 it hosted a Eurocon with Sam Lundwall as a Guest of Honour. Zagreb also hosted, on one occasion or another, guests such as Martin Easterbrook, Guy Gavriel Kay, Robert Silverberg and Karen Haber, Walter Jon Williams, Lois McMaster Bujold, George R. R. Martin, Ken MacLeod and this year's Michael Iwoleit, writer, editor and translator from Germany. In the last ten years SFeraKon visitors who attend full three days also get annual collection of Croatian SF stories included in their membership fee. This convention is more inclined towards the "serious" type of programme: lectures, panels, presentations and a yearly SFERA Award ceremony for best Croatian SF.

However, there are also quizzes and games for those with a more relaxed approach to SF. SFeraKon is also renowned for its film programme, where people can see up to 20 films ranging from obscure and bizarre to the non-commercial works of art, usually hard to reach the audience.

## ISTRAKON

**Where:** Pazin, Istria

**When:** mid-March

**Organised by:** Albus, SF club in Pazin

**Typical attendance:** 200-300 and growing

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

The first Istrakon was held in 2000 as a part of "Jules Verne days". Today it is an independent convention whose popularity among the Croatian fans is increasing rapidly. Istrakon has strong local elements. Although there are many lectures and panels about SF and F, Istrakon's young team of organizers also likes to keep their guests entertained by an abundance of games, shows and quizzes.

## ESSEKON

**Where:** Osijek

**When:** early November

**Organised by:** Gaia

**Typical attendance:** 50-100

**<http://gaia.hr>**

Over the years Essekon (called after the old Hungarian name for Osijek - Essek) is in constant danger of turning into a gaming convention, but the organiser have been resisting it so far so there is always some literary SF programme included.

## RIKON

**Where:** Rijeka

**When:** early October

**RiKon 2005:** 7-9 October

**Organised by:** 3. Zmaj

**Typical attendance:** 50-100

**<http://www.game-master.org/phpBB2/>**

This convention had the misfortune that the club organising it fell apart last year, so there was no RiKon 2004. However, a newly formed club seems to have much enthusiasm and determined leadership so they will most probably succeed in having a good convention with plenty of programme.

## KUTIKON

**Where:** Kutina

**When:** February

**Organised by:** SFinga

**Typical attendance:** up to 50

Kutikon had its brightest days during the mid-90s. Today, they have some organisational problems but there may always be some pleasant surprises.



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