



International Speculative Fiction



Aliette de Bodard
Cristian Mihail Teodorescu
Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro

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Can you listen to the drums rolling? Hum?

No? But they are so loud!

Shhh... just listen, please!

Ahhh, never mind: It's only my heart! Now that I think about it, I am pretty nervous...

Getting to this point was not easy, but now, as we take our last step to reach the top of the mountain, we can finally breathe, enjoy the landscape that the world unfolds for us, and smile!

And, believe it or not, I am smiling, we all are!

The magazine is finally yours: read it intensively, and take good care of her, she is our first "ISF" baby, so treat her carefully. Prepare to feel a "sense of wonder" as you read further, beginning with one of my favourite short stories written by a Romanian writer, a type of Science Fiction that really appeals to me, passing through a great Science Fiction story with beautiful word building by Alette de Bodard, "The Wind-Blown Man", and finishing with an Alternative Story by Brazilian author Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro, "The Ethics of Treason". Three pieces of fiction of the highest calibre that we are proud to publish!

As for the nonfiction, Fábio Fernandes, our Non-fiction Editor, presents the first of a series of articles about Brazilian Science Fiction, and Cristian Tamas, our official Interviewer, interviews Judit Lörinczy, a writer and painter from Hungary.

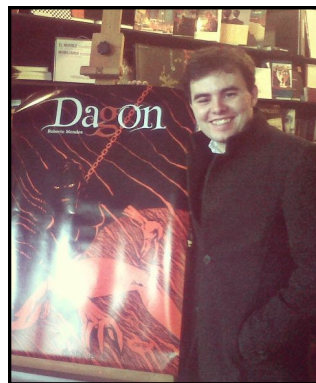
The cover art belongs to a brilliant Portuguese artist: João Pedro Fonseca!

To make this number even more unique, all the fiction authors signed their short-stories and all of them presented an "about my short-story" text. How awesome is that?

International Speculative Fiction is very much alive!

We are waiting for you to join us on this great adventure, and maybe you will be the next one to publish on ISF!

My heart is still racing, but hey, with a first number like this, how could it not?



Roberto Mendes
Editor in Chief

A SHORT-STORY WRITTEN BY:
CRISTIAN MIHAIL TEODORESCU

THE DEATH OF MR. TEODORESCU

- Can someone call the wife of the deceased, said the Doctor, sweating. Then he pulled back up his surgical mask, and closed behind him the door to the operating room. Nurse Number Three clicked her heels on the floor of the waiting room.

- Mrs. Teodorescu! Mrs. Teodorescuuu! yelled the Nurse with a strident voice. The dusk was falling over the University Hospital XI, mingling with the fog and smog of Bucharest. Lately the car exhaust fumes had a pungent and organic smell, difficult to identify.

- Mrs. Teodorescu!...

Mrs. Teodorescu was a small old lady, somewhat coquettish and with a glass eye. She was just walking out with a confused look from the men's bathroom.

- Would you come over?

- He... (and the old lady could not articulate the second word "died") But her tone of voice articulated the question.

- Yes. Let's go because we have to get it over with. Others are waiting too.

Mrs. Teodorescu was easily convinced to take off her old mauve Chanel jacket, worn at the elbows, and drop off the pink pocketbook. She did not put up any resistance, and probably never will again.

- Please sign here.

Illegible.

- Please put on this coat and these slippers over your shoes.

The Doctor was muttering under the mask.

- Have you informed her?

- About the death yes. About the rest, not yet.

The Doctor swore profusely. He wiped off the sweat with the back of his sleeve, and took off the surgical mask. He looked at the old lady, straight into her glass eye.

- Mrs?...

- Teodorescu, whispered Nurse Two after she glanced briefly at a piece of paper.

- Mrs. Teodorescu, our team has done everything possible to save your husband. We used advanced technology, at the level of the year 2040. But acute appendicitis is, sadly, still an incurable disease, and this surgery has only a very small chance of success, even for young patients. Mr. Teodorescu's heart has failed.

Mr. Teodorescu was lying down on his back, and the Doctor was busy with some scissors and pliers, poking around his lumbar area.

- Hospital's self-financing, grunted the Doctor. We are obliged to harvest all the organs which can be salvaged. I am convinced that Mr. Teodorescu would not have objected. The organs we are harvesting can save lives.

- This is true, said Mrs. Teodorescu. He would not have objected.

- We start with the kidneys and the liver. These are mandatory. For the others, we need your approval.

The Doctor continued his work.

- So little blood, said Mrs. Teodorescu.

Indeed. The body was open in a few places, but there was very little blood visible.

- Do you know about these things? asked Nurse Number One.

- Yes. I was an accountant.

- The first thing we harvested was the blood, said the Doctor speaking through the mask. When it was clear that we could not save him, we pumped his blood out, and sent it to the municipal transfusion center. I am convinced that he would not have objected.

- Or that he "did not" object... dared Nurse Number Three.

The Doctor pretended not to hear, with some hostility.

- Mr. Teodorescu was a blood donor, he continued. I am convinced that he would not have objected.

- That is true, said Mrs. Teodorescu.

- Look, the first kidney.

Nurse Number Two grabs a black register and a red pen.

- Right kidney, stated the Doctor.

- Quality? asked Nurse Number Two.

- Size 9.5, grade B.

The kidney was placed into a metal box, which inserted into another, bigger, metal box.

Mrs. Teodorescu was watching with the empty eye. Yes, he will save a few lives this time, she thought. He always wanted that.

- Left kidney, size 9.75, grade FB, said the Doctor after some time. Next we move on to the liver, he added, after the kidney was placed into another small metal box.

The Nurse Number Two, in charge of the paperwork, prepared a few forms, which she presented to Mrs. Teodorescu.

- You will have to sign here, and here, and here, for each organ harvested.

- This is the only document which proves that we did our work, explained the Doctor, suddenly more friendly. Otherwise we will not be paid. Let's turn him over.

They turned the dead with the face down. Mr. Teodorescu was not too heavy. Mrs. Teodorescu helped too. She was conscious that everything must be finished as soon as possible. Others are waiting too.

The Doctor continued to cut with precise movements.

- What a big liver! exclaimed Nurse Number One.

- I am not at all surprised, said Mrs. Teodorescu.

The Doctor took out the liver and touched it carefully, examining it closely and from several angles.

- But it is perfectly healthy. Extremely healthy. No nodules or cavities. Grade - let's say B, size 10XXL.

- I have to find a bigger box, said Nurse Number Three.

The normal hepatic boxes were too small. The liver was placed into a small tray, until a bigger box could be found.

- Next is the pancreas, said Nurse Number Two. Sign here please. Only if you do not have any objections.

Mrs. Teodorescu agreed and signed in three places. Illegible.

- It is a good pancreas, declared the Doctor. Grade B, size 9.

- The heart will be more tricky, said the Doctor, and picked up the electrical saw. I don't know why they insist on harvesting hearts. No one has done a heart transplant in our country in the last twenty years.

- I heard that they send them to Hungary, said Nurse Number One.

Nurse Number Three joined them again, after having found a box for Mr. Teodorescu's liver.

Mr. Teodorescu's ribs cracked, one after the other. From time to time, the Doctor stopped cutting, and Nurse Number One extracted carefully a piece of bone.

The Doctor felt the need to talk.

- Mrs. Teodorescu, it is my understanding that you have no objection that we use everything that can be used from your deceased husband.

- Yes, this is so, admitted the old lady. He would not have objected at all either.

- You don't happen to have any of his belongings at home? Clothes, personal effects? Or do you perhaps intend to give them away? The nurses shuddered at this suggestion.

- No, replied quickly Mrs. Teodorescu. We talked about this subject many times. We were both atheists, ever since we met. There will be no religious service, and I will not give any alms for him either. How can anyone imagine that the dead will have it better in the afterlife if one gives food or clothes as alms in his memory!...

- Two millennia of superstitions are enough, declared the Doctor.

- Besides, where can you bury him in this agglomeration? said Nurse Number One. The cemeteries have been closed, at least in the city. Even at Bellu they are planning to extend the Mall over the cemetery. And normal crematories use fuel and pollute the air.

- The dead is dead, and that is it, said Nurse Number Two, and then asked about the size of Mr. Teodorescu's heart.

- Grade FB, size 9.25.

Mrs. Teodorescu wanted to ask how could that heart be grade FB if it failed, but she always disliked being looked down upon by the so-called experts; she may have been an accountant, but she had her pride. For example. She glanced at the forms she just signed, and noticed three mistakes in the way they were filled out by Nurse Number Two.

The Doctor was still working to extract the heart.

- If you have no objection, then, we would ask you to bring us here, to the hospital, also the personal effects of the dead. Let us see what can be salvaged from them. You know, I told you about the self-financing problem.

- I knew that you will ask me about this, said Mrs. Teodorescu on an official tone. The personal effects and the belongings of my husband are sorted and packed, ready to be taken out of my apartment.

- It is better this way.

- He would not have objected.

- Too much emphasis on personal memories about dead people generates superstition.

- Sign here, here and here. For the heart.

- What follows now? asked Mrs. Teodorescu.

- The eyes, said the Doctor. Was he wearing glasses? He asked.

- Never. His eye sight was very good.

- Then we have to harvest them. Do you know that in our hospital was performed the first eye transplant in all Sector 5?

- Then... Then, dared the old lady, maybe you can help me with one of his eyes. You know... I have a glass eye. The right one.

Four pairs of eyes of the medical staff rested first on the glass eye, then on the healthy one.

- Can't be done, said the Doctor.

- You don't have the same eye color, said Nurse Number One.

- Nor do you have the same point of view, stated Nurse Number Two, after she glanced at the medical sheet.

- The dead's eyes will be sent to our eye bank, decided the Doctor. He prepared the boxes.

He cut with dexterity, and shortly two black orbits were where Mr. Teodorescu's eyes had been. Two thin blood rivulets were trickling out from them.

- Please sign. What follows now? he asked Nurse Number Two over Mrs. Teodorescu's head.

- ???.. the testicles

- So. The Doctor grabbed a big pair of scissors and clipped the scrotum. The Nurse Number Three prepared the boxes.

- Do you have children? Asked the Doctor while cutting.

- No.

- One can tell. Size 4, grade S. They fit into one box.

- It is not only about children, said Nurse Number Two looking in the files. It seems that he was a nobody. Everybody was mocking him. Sign here.

- Is there more? Asked Mrs. Teodorescu.

- This will take longer, said the Doctor. We have to extract the brain, the spinal cord and the bone marrow.

- The brain? But what do you do with?...

- Mrs. Teodorescu, you know as well as I do that brain transplants are not possible. On the other hand, we are interested in retrieving the neurons, even dead ones. The neuronal cytoskeleton is made up of microtubules, which are extracted and are used in the computer industry. Obviously, not in our country. But we export them.

- It says right here, said Nurse Number Two, pointing out on the form. Look, the article: prime quantum material.

- In fact it is for quantum computers, says Nurse Number Three, proud of her knowledge.

This time, the preparation of the procedure took somewhat longer. The Doctor took a drill and used it to drill a hole between the orbits. Then he grabbed another device, and started to twist it in the hole, with precision and patience.

- He is threading. Makes a thread, said Nurse Number One. A technology perfected in our hospital, a first for our city.

After he made the thread, the Doctor grabbed another drill, smaller than the first, and drilled for a short time. The cephalorachidian fluid seeped through the hole.

- Aren't you interested to find out what kind of brain he had? asked Mrs. Teodorescu.

- Not at all. We recover only the microtubules. These are the same for all individuals. They differ only among species.

- Look, even here on the form there is no entry for size and grade...

- Yes, but for the unit of measure it says kilograms, observed Mrs. Teodorescu.

- We weigh it at the end.

- In fact, we will extract the spinal cord and marrow through the same method, said the Doctor. Pumping. He inserted and screwed in a tube as those used for compressed air, which had a big blue valve attached. That tube continued with a thicker, semitransparent hose, which led to a jar (also large), to which it was attached by Nurse Number One. The Nurse Number Three connected the jar to a vacuum pump.

- Ready, said the Doctor. Start the pump.

The pump was rattling loudly. Through the transparent tube one could see first as thin threads, and then in big gobs the brain and spinal marrow of Mr. Teodorescu.

- We have to exchange this pump, yelled the Doctor. Make a request and take it to the procurement division.

The pump noise went up one octave, which was a sign that the pumping was approaching the end. The Doctor flipped the button with his foot, and the si-

lence was reestablished in the operating room.

- Mrs. Teodorescu, said the Doctor, to be more efficient, and since you are already prepared, it would be good if you would go home, and bring us the personal effects and the items of the deceased. Maybe in two-three hours we can finish him off completely.

- We have to do another procedure which can take a bit longer, continued the Doctor. We have to collect the skin and the bone marrow. By the time we are done, you will be back. You can take a taxi, the cost is covered.

Mrs. Teodorescu left. She took off the white coat, put on her old Chanel jacket, and walked out in that pungent smell. She was already missing, not her husband, but the operating room, with its filtered air, pure and clean.

She reached the building where she lived, stepped into the elevator, pressed the button for the 7th floor, got off on the 6th floor, and climbed the stairs to the next floor. In the apartment, everything was gleaming clean. After she took her husband to the hospital, she cleaned the entire apartment, and put everything in order, even better than at the Central Accounting Office of the Health Insurance. Mr. Teodorescu's clothes were wrapped in small bags, which she could easily carry. She took a few trips downstairs, where the taxi was waiting, carrying with small steps the bags, and then the cardboard boxes where she had crammed (without trying to order them) the papers on the desk, from under the desk and from around the desk of Mr. Teodorescu.

As the trunk of the taxi was full, she had to put some of the boxes on the back seat.

- Let's hurry, lady, move it, yawned the bored taxi driver, and he picked his teeth, after which he blew his nose loudly out of the window. He was listening to manele on the car stereo.

- I am almost ready, she sighed. Just a little more and it will be all over with. We go back to the hospital, she said after she collapsed on the front right seat.

- You have a dead? asked the taxi driver with interest, after realizing that a little politeness may not be out of order.

- My husband.

- God rest him.

Mrs. Teodorescu was horrified hearing these words, but she remembered that she was living in a free country, and the right to religious beliefs was guaranteed by the Constitution, although officially discouraged by the Presidency and mass media. But then she thought that the taxi driver did not say the words with too much conviction. He was probably angling for a tip. With this view in mind, he engaged her into a discussion about how bad is this organic gasoline which "these" are selling at the pump, and how he "puts" only the other one, "the good one". He thought that he saw a gleam of approval in Mrs. Teodorescu's eye on his side (the glass one). But she did not reply in any way.

He did not get any tip. Moreover, Mrs. Teodorescu asked for a receipt. The taxi driver did not bother to get out, and turned ostensibly the music louder at maximum level. Mrs. Teodorescu unloaded alone the 5 bags and 6 boxes, and left

them at the curb while she walked up to the postoperating room.

In her absence two more jars materialized in the postoperating room, marked "bone marrow", and the skin was rolled up carefully, and placed over the sink to dry. All that remained from Mr. Teodorescu was a pile of cut bones and bleeding flesh, without a form, piled up in a tub on a small cart.

- Sign here.
- What will happen with the rest? She asked.

The Doctor straightened up. He was visibly tired. He took off his mask and gloves.

- This is not within my responsibility. But you should know that we have in our hospital German technology on the cutting edge. It would be instructive – if you have the time – to see what will happen next. You can go with this young lady.

The young lady was the Nurse Number Two, who gained somewhat Mrs. Teodorescu's sympathy because of the thick file she was filling out. She started pushing the cart, and Mrs. Teodorescu followed her docile. She was talking to her over the shoulder.

- The installation arrived two years ago, but they turned it on only last month. The tissues are subjected to high voltage discharges, in ultrashort pulses, which break up the cell membranes. The result is a total dehydration, and we extract all the fluid, together with salts, oils and minerals from these cells. The end product is a kind of oil, which after distilling, becomes prime material for the oil industry.

- Gasoline?
- Yes, this is one example. Or engine oil. Or detergents.

They walked past several metal doors marked with the sign Danger of Death written in Romanian and German.

- Help me, asked Nurse Number Two.

Both of them strained to push the contents of the plastic tub into a metallic trough, then the Nurse grabbed a sort of paddle and pushed the flesh and bones towards the entrance to the device.

- Look here.

The remains of Mr. Teodorescu were now in a transparent cylinder of thick glass. Everything was connected by thick cables to the high volt-

age installation whose buzzing could be felt from a distance.

- You can press the button, if you want.

The button was big, and of course, red.

- Not much will happen.

Mrs. Teodorescu did not expect that much will happen anyway. Her experience as an accountant taught her many times that the technological wonders hyped by doctors and engineers were usually big disappointments. She pressed the button.

A discharge started to take place in the glass cylinder, which opacified the glass walls almost completely. Mrs. Teodorescu could not tell what the body was transformed into, or what was left of it. Then she saw a big piston, which compressed all that could still exist in that cylinder, after which through a hose she saw a few liters of a yellowish fluid flow out.

- It is good this way. Everything is recovered, she thought out loud. She chased away a stray thought about that penetrating smell the car exhaust fumes in Bucharest started to have over the last few months.

- Let's go back now. Next we should deal with the personal effects.

The bags and boxes brought by Mrs. Teodorescu were carried into the post-operative room. The Doctor opened one of the bags with clothes, and inspected the contents together with the Nurse Number Three. He had put on again latex gloves.

- You are positive that they are well sorted, Mrs. Teodorescu?

- Yes. We had another dead in our apartment building, just last month. I saw how it was done.

- Well, then, said the Doctor. Fabrics – with fabrics. Shoes – which shoes. Leather? he asked. Perfect, he continued, after Mrs. Teodorescu's affirmative answer. Everything is being recovered. German technology. This will contribute significantly to this week's self-financing. Such an organized death we do not see every day. You know, one can tell that you were an accountant, Mrs. Teodorescu.

- What do we do with these papers? asked Nurse Number Two pointing at the cardboard boxes. She started to have a certain respect for papers.

- You can take them to the recycling center. The Doctor turned towards Mrs. Teodorescu.

- We have the recycling center with the highest conversion efficiency in the sector. Swiss technology.

Nurse Number Two came closer to the Doctor, whispered something, then she turned towards Mrs. Teodorescu.

- I weighed the papers. 32 kilograms. Sign here.

Nurse Number One entered, carrying under her arm a sort of cardboard disk.

- Mrs. Teodorescu, do you want to take home... what is left of him?...

She offered her the disk-like object. It was a sort of compressed cardboard, soft at touch, but with a hard consistency, dark brown with shades of scarlet.

- This is what remains after the process of electrical discharge, dehydration, and compression. I just took it out. It is still a bit warm, you see?

- If you don't need it, I will take it, said Mrs. Teodorescu. Can you do something with it here?

- Not here, said the Doctor. But it can be used as construction material. From such panels are made for example pedestals for statues. They are sufficiently elastic and earthquake resistant.

- If you don't take it, said Nurse Number Two, we will donate it to the City Hall. They are just building a statue of Caragiale on Eminescu Street.

- Send it to the City Hall, said indifferently Mrs. Teodorescu.

- Sign here. Now we can go with the papers to the recycling station.

Mrs. Teodorescu took two boxes, and the Nurse Number Two the other three boxes. They staggered under their weight, and put them heavily down on a cart.

The recycling station does not run continuously, but only when we have a delivery of prime material. They put the papers into the shredder, and then Nurse Number Two closed the door, made of thermo-resistant glass.

- That was it, she said. Start the shredder, then the mill. Press here, and then here.

Mrs. Teodorescu pressed, and the shredder started to work. The papers were turned quickly into thin strips, which were then transformed into a soft paste – and Mrs. Teodorescu thought that these inventors and engineers sometimes do also something useful. Look how they recovered everything they could recover from him. "It is good that he was useful for something after all."

The grey paste was twirling faster and faster, absorbing the last remaining shreds of paper. Mrs. Teodorescu saw one last piece of paper fluttering, almost clinging to the glass door, trembling as if it wanted to escape. She could still barely distinguish on it "The Death of Mr. Teodor",

...escu.

About my short-story:

"The idea of this story stems from the well known problems of health systems in the actual societies. One idea to rentabilize the system is to treat patients as 'sources of spare parts'. The name of the dead person was chosen such as to strengthen the emotion of the story by using means which are close to intertextualism. His wife may be regarded as an exponent of the rigid, cold, purely economical standard of the actual society. You may laugh while reading this story, but it's not that funny."



Cristian-Mihail Teodorescu (born October 19, 1966, Bucharest) is a Romanian SF writer and physicist.

Literature

Debut: 1984 - „Ancestors Story : A Legend of Old Times” (in an almanac)

1987: „Tina the dancer” (Anticipatia Almanac)

1988: „File 74” (anticipation Almanac (awarded the prize for narrative story in National Meeting of anticipation circles Craiova, 1987).

1990: pedal and be happy in the anthology On the horizon, this constellation, the publishing house Albatros.

After 1990, published several stories in the collection of stories reborn SF, 1996: Des-catching, in anticipation Almahahul.

2007: Imperial Master in Science fiction Almanac. Also in 2007, obtaining first prize in competition with narrative prose fiction Kandru Helion (published in the journal Timisoara Helion).

2008: coefficient 128, the Almanac Science fiction.

SF volume begins with an Bastion Publishing House, Timisoara, 2008.

Founding member and secretary of the Romanian Society of Science Fiction and Fantasy (SRSFF), 2009. Volume published in 2010 SF Two, also at Bastion House.

Teodorescu

Dispatches from Brazil

Fábio Fernandes

The New Brazilian Science Fiction: Post-Scarcity Blues

There is much to say about Brazilian Science Fiction these days. And I won't say it all in one article.

Suffice it to say – for now – that Brazil has never, in its entire history, produced so many fantastic stories. And by fantastic I mean not only Science Fiction, but also Fantasy, Slipstream and other subcategories of Fantastika. Steampunk is experiencing a Golden Age in Brazil, with three anthologies published in the past four years (one exclusively by women, the other two featuring men only – this apparently being more a matter of lack of women interested in writing in the genre than machismo, and I tend to believe in this theory, but that's just the tip of the iceberg, as we will see in the future), and queer SF is getting out of the closet with no less than three anthologies.

Brazil is also publishing original Space Opera (of the old and new kinds, one volume already published and other coming up), a New Weird fiction anthology (edited by your humble non-fiction editor here) and we have just published our first Sherlock Holmes anthology (featuring mostly canonical stories, but at least a couple stretching the boundaries in the direction of the fantastical).

The current state of affairs of SF in Brazil reminds me of Nancy Kress's short story *Nano Comes to Clifford Falls*, where suddenly nanotechnology is made available to everyone and even small towns get a kind of cornucopia that is able to create everyone's desires from scratch. After a while, things become unbearable (I won't give spoilers, but you can imagine a few possible scenarios for the end – and you can read it for free here, courtesy of Asimov's magazine). But let's consider this: what you can give a person who has everything?

The answer, IMHO, is *quality*.

Brazilian Science Fiction is starting to live what a few writers (and fewer researchers) call its Third Wave, regarding not a movement *per se*, but a generation of writers (the First Wave would have taken place approximately between 1960 and 1980, the Second

Wave between 1986 and 2006/7 and the Third, since then.) I don't entirely agree with this classification, but I'll take it for convenience's sake. Aside from André Carneiro, our most celebrated SF writer of the 60s and 70s, unfortunately there is no one else alive from the First Wave. What we have today is several authors from the Second Wave and many more from the Third publishing a lot these days, when small print runs (and finally ebooks) are affordable to the average Brazilian small press.

These authors are publishing lots of anthologies of original stories and a few novels every year since 2007. The amount is increasing fast. Quantity is good. But is the quality keeping up?

This column doesn't intend to be a harsh scrutiny on the Brazilian SF fiction production. On the contrary: the interested reader will find here reasons to believe Brazilian writers are starting to concoct sometimes weird, sometimes even more-of-the-same stuff she have already read in Anglo-American fiction, but always in a different, skewed angle, an angle that bears a more detailed observation. Brazilian writers don't (necessarily) worship Chtulhu (maybe they should), but they surely know their way around non-Euclidian spaces of the imagination. And that should account for something.

Fábio Fernandes is a SFF writer and translator living in São Paulo, Brazil. His short fiction in Portuguese has won two Argos Awards in Brazil. In English, he has several stories published in online venues in the US, the UK, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, and Brazil. He also contributed to Steampunk Reloaded, Southern Weirdo: Reconstruction, and The Apex Book of World SF Vol. 2. Co-editor (with Djibril al-Ayad) of We See a Different Frontier, an upcoming anthology of colonialism-themed speculative fiction from outside the first-world viewpoint for The Future Fire Magazine. Fernandes translated to Brazilian Portuguese several SFF essential works, such as Neuromancer, Snow Crash, A Clockwork Orange, Boneshaker, The Steampunk Bible, and is currently working on the translation of Robert Jordan's A Wheel of Time.





THE WIND-BLOWN MAN

ALIETTE DE BODARD

ON A CLEAR DAY, YOU COULD ALMOST SEE ALL THE WAY INTO HEAVEN.

That was what Shinxie loved about White Horse Monastery: not the high, lacquered buildings scattered across the mountain's face like the fingerprints of some huge Celestial; not the wide courtyards where students sat like statues, the metal of their second-skins gleaming in the sun; but the clear, crisp air of the heights, and the breathless quiet just before dawn, when she could see a flash of light overhead and imagine it to be the reflection of Penlai Station.

In those moments, she could almost imagine herself to be free.

That was, of course, before the first bell-peal echoed across the mountains, calling all the students to the meditation halls; when the stillness of dawn was shattered by the sound of dozens of bare feet, and the smell of incense and cinnabar wafted down to where she sat, a perpetual reminder of her exile.

That morning, as on all mornings, she pulled herself up, wincing at the ache in her calves; and began the climb upwards. Soon, she'd have to begin her examinations. By the looks of it, there were at least one or two students who might have achieved the perfect balance: fire and wood, earth and water and metal in perfect harmony within—two more, ready to take their gliders and transcend into Penlai Station.

She was thinking of the second one—Fai Meilin, a short, skeletal woman whose bruised eyes looked almost incongruous in her serene face—when she saw the glint of sunlight.

Penlai Station, winking to her again? But no, the glint came again, and it was larger, spinning itself out of nothingness, layer after layer carefully superimposing itself on reality, until a glider flew out of the singularity in the sky, the slender silhouette underneath shifting to accommodate the strong headwinds with the liquid grace of a Transcendent.

She stood, stared at the glider—hoping it would go away. But it did not. It remained stubbornly there, floating towards the monastery, a patent impossibility. One transcended—became one with the universe, knowing, for a brief moment, how to be everywhere at once before rematerialising on Penlai Station, in the company of peers. One did not, could not descend. That was impossible.

The glider was coming closer to her, its rider manoeuvring the metal wings with casual effortlessness. His face, shining under the second-skin, tilted towards her, and somehow the faceted eyes met her, and pierced her like a spear.

For a moment more, she hung indecisive; and then, with a shudder, she broke the contact and ran up the mountain, abandoning all protocol and decorum, calling out for the guards.

Shinxie pressed her hand to the door, waited for the familiar tingle of recognition that travelled through her palm—and slid it open.

Inside the holding cell, the Transcendent was sitting cross-legged in a pit of sunlight, showing no inclination to move or escape. He'd abandoned his glider soon after landing, and now looked oddly bereft, as though something vital had been torn from him. But, of course, that was only illusion. The gliders were more for the protection of White Horse than for the Transcendents: no one wanted to take the risk of a failed singularity opening within the monastery.

Shinxie sat cross-legged in front of the Transcendent, unsure of what to say. The faceted gaze rose to meet hers, incurious—following her movement as if by instinct. His aura saturated the air: the five elements in perfect balance, nothing standing out, no emotion to be read or perceived.

She couldn't help shivering. She'd grown too used to the implants in her palms, relying on her ability to read auras to understand people. But he... he was a Transcendent, through and through: nothing remained, no desire, no interest, no care for anything. He'd let go of his self—the only way he'd be able to open a singularity and lose himself into it.

"I know who you are," she said. Carefully, she laid the papers she'd been holding on the floor between them. "Gao Tieguai, from the Province of Anhui."

The eyes blinked, briefly; the head was inclined, as if in acknowledgement.

"Your family was outlawed after you wrote memorials against the Tianshu Emperor, may he reign ten thousand years." She closed her eyes. "You came here in the fifteenth year of the Tianshu reign. I—helped you transcend."

She should have remembered him better, but even the faded likeness on the file hadn't brought back any memories. She'd have been newly appointed as Abbess of White Horse, still bitter at her expulsion from the Imperial Court: she'd done her work like a chore, laying hands on students every morning, reading the balance of their humours as if in a butterfly-dream—and forgetting them as soon as they'd got out of her office.

The head bowed to her again. "You did help me, Honoured Abbess," the Transcendent—Gao—said, the first words he'd pronounced since returning.

His voice was low, broken by disuse; and yet, in the pauses between the words, lay an abyss of untapped power.



"Why have you come back?" Shinxie said. And, when the eyes still did not move, "It's not possible, to do what you did. You cannot descend..."

Gao's hands moved, as if to a rhythm of their own. His second-skin stretched between the fingers, creating a softer transition like a webbed foot. "Do you presume to know everything?"

She was no Westerner or Mohammedan, to view the world with boundless arrogance, presuming that everything must cave in to reason. "No. But some things among the ten thousand have explanations."

"This isn't one of them." Gao smiled, vaguely amused—she'd seen the same expression in her terminal students, except not quite so distant and cold. She hadn't thought she could feel chilled—by a former student, of all people—but then she'd never been made so aware of how different the Transcendents were.

Shinxie reached for the paper, steadied herself with its familiar touch. "You're going to have to explain it to me."

"I fail to see why."

Had he lost all awareness of Earth? But no, she knew the answer. To transcend was to detach oneself from the real world, measure by measure—until no other destination remained but Penlai, where all desires, all emotions had lost meaning.

"You're a child," she said, feeling cold certainty coalesce within her. "With the powers of a Celestial. You could will yourself anywhere in the world—within the Censorate, the Forbidden City—even in the Imperial Chambers..."

"If I willed it so."

For a moment, she stared at him. His face under the iridescent second-skin was almost featureless: only the eyes, protected by their thick facets, retained a semblance of life. His mouth—a bare slit—was impassive, expressionless.

"You're never going to make them believe that you don't want to do this."

"To want, even the smallest thing, is to desire." Gao inclined his head. "And desire is impure."

Shinxie shivered—thinking of the Sixth Prince's touch on hers, of the hands stroking the curve of her back—before they were found out, and the Imperial Edict shattered her life. "You're—" she started, and then realised that he was right. Desire, love, tenderness—it was all an expression of the self, and only those who had no self could open the singularities.

"You haven't changed, then," Gao said.

He said it so matter-of-factly that it took his words a moment to sink in. "What do you mean?" she asked—though she knew, like ice in her guts, that he already knew.

"You have never transcended."

And she never would; and she'd known it even before the Tianshu Emperor sent her there. She'd known it as she'd watched the Sixth Prince just after the Edict's proclamation, his face frozen in what might have been grief, what might have been anger—a memory warm enough to last for a lifetime. "No," she said. "I have made my peace with that."

Gao inclined his head again—could he even feel ironic, or amused? No, of course not; he couldn't—and that was what frightened her so much. Lust burnt and destroyed the world, and duty compelled, maintaining the structure of the universe; but he was beyond either of those, so far away from the living creatures he might as well have been a rock, or a waterfall.

"Why have you come back?" she asked. "Something had to draw you here. Something had to make you return." He had to have found a way around the constrictions of the Transcendents; some trick to bend the rules to his will.

But Gao sat, and smiled, and said nothing.

"If I can find no explanation, someone else will come," Shinxie said. "Someone with fewer scruples"

than I."

But, no matter how hard she pressed him, she obtained nothing but that enigmatic smile—the same one teasing up the corners of her students' lips, the same one carved on the statues of all the Celestials in their temples.

In the end, weary of his silence, she left him, and retreated to the safety of her room—where she began composing, with painstaking eagerness, a missive to the Imperial Court, explaining what had happened, and humbly pleading for guidance.

She had to pause for a moment at the transmitter, her hand frozen on the controls—it had been so long since the last communication between White Horse and the capital that she'd forgotten the proper protocol. But the lights shimmered on the panel; the humours swirled within the machine, until a single spike of wood-humour surged through the antenna; and the reassuring hum of an outgoing transmission soon filled the room.

The Court's answer was curt, and almost instantaneous: wait. Someone will come to you.

The Sixth Imperial Prince arrived with all the pomp due to one of his rank: a row of attendants, the metal of their engineered arms glinting in the morning sunlight; a few advisors, their gazes distant and contemptuous; and, finally, at the end of the procession, the Prince himself, a short, plump man of middle-age, who looked curiously at every building in the monastery, as if working out a particular literary or alchemical problem.

The students, the alchemists and the teachers had all assembled in the Hall of Cultivating the Body and Mind, the teachers and alchemists looking almost colourless next to the students—their second-skins shimmering in the sunlight, so strongly Shinxie could almost imagine the whirlwind of humours beneath the alchemists' modifications.

As abbess of the monastery, Shinxie was the one who welcomed the Prince—standing in the centre of the Hall, under the ever-shifting pictures of successful Transcendents.

"Your Excellency." Shinxie abased herself to the ground, in the prescribed position for welcoming a son of the Emperor—her chest pressed against the stones of the floor, her head lowered, her gaze down—she couldn't afford to look up at him, couldn't afford to meet his eyes.

She found, to her dismay, that she was shaking. Ten years past, and a whole world between them, and she couldn't even quieten her memories and her desires enough to respect protocol. What a waste.

"Yue Shinxie." The Prince's voice was low, with the cultured accents of the court. "You may rise. There's no need to stand on ceremony here."

From where Shinxie lay, she heard the sharp, shocked intake of breath course through the ranks of the assembled teachers and students—how could the Prince set aside protocol, unless he had some previous acquaintance with her? She could only guess at the questions she'd have to face later, the idle speculations at the noon rice and in the quiet hours after evening, the subtle accusations spreading like wildfire among the students.

But then, none of that mattered, because she was rising on stiff knees, to meet the Prince's gaze. He hadn't changed in ten years—aged a little, with new wrinkles on the moon-shaped face, a few lines pulling his eyes into sharper almonds. But the same presence emanated from him: the palpable charm and aura that underlined every one of his postures. She knew, of course she knew, that the imperial alchemists had worked on him while he was barely in his mother's womb—and she knew that, if she laid her hands on him, her implants would feel the engineered humours pulsing, combining into the melody of seduction—but it didn't matter, it had never mattered. Her throat was dry, her breasts aching as if with milk.

"You'll want to see him," she said, struggling to bring her mind back to the present.

The Prince inclined his head, gracefully. "Of course. Walk with me, will you, Yue?"

Protocol would have put him in front of her—but protocol had to give way to practicalities; for, of

course, he had no idea where the holding cells were. She walked slightly in front, head bowed, trying not to think of his presence behind her—of the hands that had once traced the contours of her body; of the lips, moist and warm, sending a quiver of desire arching through her body like a spear.

There were no other footsteps: neither the attendants nor the advisors had followed them, and the others in the monastery had gone back to the flow of their lives.

"You're happy here," the Prince said. There was a hint of wood in his aura—a hint of enquiry, barely perceptible unless one knew him well.

Shinxie sucked in a slow, burning breath. "Of course," she said.

"Shinxie." He gave her name the edge of a blade.

She stopped, still not daring to look at him. "My work is here," she said. "Helping them transcend."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"No," she said. "You were the one who once said that happiness wasn't our fate, Your Excellency."

"Your Excellency? Is this what it has come to?"

It wasn't, and he knew it—he had to know it, to see something on her face, in her bearing, of the confusion of humours within her. "I'm sorry," she said, finally. "But it's been a long time."

"It has." Was the quiver in his voice bitterness, or regret? She'd never been able to read him properly; she, the physician, the empath, the one who could always know what her students were thinking, who could always open the book of their lives with the mere touch of her hands.

"Why did they send you? There are many Princes, and even more censors."

The Prince did not speak for a while. Their path crossed the Pavilion of the Nesting Phoenix, where the hum of the alchemists' machines made the slats of the floor tremble underfoot. "They could have sent someone else," he said, with something like a sigh. "But I asked."

The shock of his answer was like cold water. "You—"

The Prince shook his head. Before them stretched the Corridor of Stone, and the rows of holding cells, all doors half-open—save one. "I wanted to see how you were, Yue."

The hint of hunger in his voice made her uncomfortable—as if something were not quite right with the world. He had always sought what he needed, taken what he wanted; but never had he let protocol lapse, except for that one unguarded moment after the Edict. "As well as can be," she said, carefully. "I trust you are well."

The Prince did not look at her. "I have three wives, and have been blessed with seven sons and three daughters."

That was no answer. "I see," Shinxie said. She laid her hand on the door, wondering why she felt so empty inside. "Let's see him, shall we?"

Gao's eyes flicked up when they entered, but he showed the Prince even less interest than he'd shown Shinxie. The Prince, if he was angered by this lack of protocol, showed nothing—sitting cross-legged on the floor with Shinxie by his side.

"Gao Tiegua," the Prince said. "Do you know why I am here?"

"This humble person would not presume," Gao said. His face was blank, the second-skin like gleaming cloth over his features. "Your Excellency." He used the wording and tone suitable for addressing a high-ranking member of the Imperial Court.

"Deference," the Prince said, as if pondering a particular problem. "That's something to work with."

Gao bowed his head. "I assume you'll ask me the same question the Honoured Abbess did."

The Prince inclined his head, looking at Gao. "No," he said, finally. "The wise man knows better than to travel well-worn roads. I'd find nothing more than she did."

"Enlighten me," Gao said, gravely.

"I'll give you a variant on the warning she's already given you, no doubt," the Prince went on, as if this were nothing more than a polite conversation. "A delicate balance maintains us all bound to each other: the workers in the factories, the merchants in their skiffs, the alchemists at their machines, the Emperor on his throne. You—upset this, Gao Tieguai."

"Because I fit nowhere?"

The Prince made a quick, dismissive gesture with his hands. "Everyone in White Horse is as you once were," he said, bending towards Gao Tieguai, as if imparting a particular secret between equals. "Dreamers. Troublemakers. Rebels who flee Earth, finding no other choice but to leave the world behind. So long as you bend your mind to transcending, you'll not upset anything. So long as your voyage is without return. Do you understand, Gao?"

"You are mistaken," Gao said. His face had not moved. "If I truly wanted to cause unrest, I could not have returned."

"I know what you told her," the Prince said. "About desire and care. I don't believe it."

"Whether you believe it or not will change nothing to what is." Gao spread his hands. "Consider dandelion seeds, Your Excellency. They go where the wind blows them, take root where the Earth welcomes them. If they flower in the cracks of some high mountain, it's not because they chose to ascend the mountain, or because they love heights."

The Prince pondered this for a while. Gao did not move; and Shinxie could feel his presence, the humours he radiated, like a weight on the palms of her hands—calm and balanced, so unlike the Prince's fierce, stormy aura.

Finally the Prince said, "Chance? I find it too convenient that you, of all people, should return."

"As you said—" Gao shook his head—"many people like me came to White Horse. You try to read too much into events."

The reproach was almost palpable, to a man whom only the Emperor or the Grand Secretary must have been in a position to correct. Surely the Prince would not tolerate it? But he merely shook his head, as if amused. "I see. If that is the way the game must be played, it would be inappropriate of me to refuse. Thank you for your answers, Venerable. I trust we will speak again."

Gao inclined his head; but it was Shinxie's gaze that he met when he looked up again. His presence was in his eyes, in the light the faceted covers caught and broke into a thousand sparkles. On impulse, Shinxie reached out to touch him—and stopped herself just before she breached his privacy.

Gao made a slow, graceful gesture, inviting her to go on. "There is no shame in this," he said.

His second-skin was metal-cold, as if remembering the frosty touch of Heaven—but then her implants connected, and all she could feel was the maelstrom of humours within him: fire and earth and water and metal and wood, generating each other, extinguishing each other in an endless dance, everything in perfect balance, no one humour dominating the others, no one feeling distinguishing itself from the endless cycle. He cared for nothing; loved nothing and no one; and even his courtesies towards her or the Prince were nothing more than bare civilities, doled out on a whim.

"I see," she whispered, standing on the edge of the abyss—feeling the wind howling in her ears, the cold that travelled up into her belly. "Thank you."

Back in the Corridor of Stone, the Prince turned to Shinxie, who had not said a word. "So?" he asked.

"Are you asking for my opinion?" Shinxie said.

The Prince made a quick, annoyed gesture with his right hand. "Who else would I ask?"

"When I touched him—" Shinxie shivered—"I knew that he was right. He's brought all five humours into perfect balance; he is one with the world. He feels nothing." Nothing stuck out from the mo-

ness within him; nothing ever would. Her first instinct when she had seen him had been correct: there was no descent. The Transcendents, their bodies changed by the alchemists, their minds shaped by the teachers and their hours of meditation, were everything they had been moulded into: beings who no longer had their place on Earth, who no longer belonged in the cycle of life and death and rebirth.

The Prince walked ahead of her, in perfect control of protocol. He did not look back. "I don't believe that," he said.

He didn't trust her, then—but he had made it clear what he thought of White Horse. "Even if you didn't," Shinxie said, wearily, "what does it change? He only indulges us by staying here."

"Exactly," the Prince said. "If he is innocent, then we have no right to take his life. But, if he turns out to be a danger to the Emperor's mandate... then we'll take what opportunity we can to strike at him."

Shinxie nodded—it made sense, although he was wrong about Gao. But, clearly, she would not dispel his worries on her own.

"What you told him about White Horse..." she said, slowly, carefully.

The Prince made a quick, stabbing gesture with his hands, in a swish of silk. "Don't be a fool, Yue. What I told him clearly doesn't apply to you."

Didn't it? Wasn't she, too, a dreamer, a troublemaker? Not all troubles were political, and the prolonged affair of a minor official with an Imperial Prince had disrupted enough of the Court's protocol. And who but a dreamer would remain for so long in exile?

The Prince, though he was insensitive to humours, must have felt her hesitation. "Yue," he said, turning so that his gaze met hers—his whole body softening to the pose between a man and his concubine. "Every place must have its hierarchy of officials in charge—someone to wield the authority of the court. And to impose order on chaos requires higher discipline than living in the midst of order. You're no troublemaker."

Just a jailer for a jail, Shinxie thought—and, suddenly, she wasn't sure she'd be able to contain her bitterness. To see him there—unchanged, radiating his usual, careless ease, the silk robes as out of place in the monastery as a scholar in the fields—bothered her more than she'd thought it would.

"No," she said, finally. "I'm no troublemaker."

That night, Shinxie could not sleep. Confused memories of the Imperial Court mingled in her mind with the monastery—the quiet of the meditation hour mingling with the gongs announcing the Tianshu Emperor's arrival, and the hum of the alchemists' machines becoming deeper and stronger, a memory from the huge contraptions at Pavilion of Going to War, hammering men into the elite of the army, with the ring of metal on metal, and the hiss of fire meeting water, and the thud-thud of metal striking earth...

She sat up with a start, an uneasy feeling of loss clenching her chest like a fist of ice. There was nothing around her but silence.

She got up, and stared for a while at the four chests that held her clothes—a vanity from her court days that she'd kept even here, at White Horse, where the only dress was white robes for alchemists, brown for teachers, and grey for students. Then she laid the palm of her hand on the Autumn chest, and pulled out a robe of silk embroidered with three-clawed dragons, watching it flow in her hands like sunlit water.

The Prince had seen her in this, once—with ceruse whitening her face, and her lined eyebrows joining in the shape of a moth. In another lifetime, he had asked for her in his chambers, and bent towards her as he served her tea, his lips wide and inviting in the shadows. He had—

Slowly, she folded the robe back inside the chest, and went for a walk.

In the Hall of Cultivating the Body and Mind, the students all sat in meditation, cross-legged on

the ledge which ran along the walls. Their eyes in the darkness were wide open, the facets catching and reflecting moonlight—their faces slack and smooth, though she could still feel the faint threads of emotion radiating from them, as if they were all sleeping. Dreaming.

Dreamers. Troublemakers. Was that all White Horse was to the Flowering Empire: a regulator, an escape valve—a place where the alchemists would take those who had erred, who could still err, and mould them into people who could no longer care enough to be a threat? And—if she searched her heart and mind long enough, would she remember that, when she sent them upwards into Penlai Station, she saw them as already dead?

"You look troubled," a voice said behind her.

Her heart leapt, painfully, into her throat. She turned; but even before she did, she knew whom she would see.

Gao stood where, a moment before, there had been only emptiness. She couldn't see the singularity that had brought him here; but, of course, they closed quickly. "Aren't you supposed to be in your holding cell?" Shinxie asked, but the heart wasn't in it.

Gao bowed his head, gravely. "And aren't you supposed to be in bed?"

"My own business," she said. She should have been irked, but his presence—his utter lack of salient emotions—was potent, a balm to her troubled spirits. "Just as being troubled is my own business."

"Remorse," Gao said, thoughtfully. His eyes seemed reflections of the students', blank and unmoving and utterly unreadable. "Regret. Lust."

Of course, he too could read humours.

"Not lust," Shinxie said, with a quick shake of her head. She should have told him—something else. To go back to his cell, perhaps? But, when no locked door would hold him, did that rigmarole still have any sense?

"No," Gao said. "Not lust. Love. Perhaps it's worse."

"There are those," Shinxie said, stiffly, "who'll tell you that love holds up the world."

"The followers of the Crucified Man?" Gao's hands moved, slightly. "Perhaps, in some other world, that is an inalterable truth—perhaps love does keep Earth under Heaven and the world on its axis. But consider—" He paused for a moment—not because he hesitated, Shinxie suspected, but solely for effect. "You long for this man, even now, even after so many years. You humiliate yourself for him. You would die for him. Perhaps, given enough time, you might even kill for him."

"That's nonsense," Shinxie said, abruptly. "I wouldn't do anything for him."

"Really? If he told you, tomorrow, that you could come back as his concubine, what would you do?"

She thought about it for a while. There was something about him that compelled honesty—or perhaps it was merely that she was tired of lies, hidden beneath the thin coat of makeup that was protocol. "I don't know," she said.

"That's what's wrong," Gao said. "By your love, you set him apart from other men."

"Do you believe that nonsense, then, that all men are equal?" Shinxie asked.

"All men are," Gao's lips stretched into what might have been a smile. "All men are born of a woman's womb: the Emperor, the labourers; even the foreigners. They do not choose the circumstances of their birth; but, sometimes, they may alter the course of their lives. And, of course, we die, all of us, at a time that is seldom of our own choosing."

Shinxie shivered. "I did not come here to hear philosophy."

"As you wish," Gao said. "I merely wished to point out some facts to you."

"Wished?" Shinxie said. "You have none of those, I'd have thought."

"No," Gao said, finally.

"Why are you here?" Shinxie asked, again. "Surely not for the pleasure of talking about my private life, Gao. Surely not for angering the Sixth Prince."

"I know the Sixth Prince," Gao said. "I know what he will do, and that is of little interest to me."

"I thought knowing everything was wrong."

"Some things you can know," Gao said.

She looked at him; at the expressionless face, the aura that was perfectly in balance. "Why are you here?"

"You know," Gao said, gravely.

She had heard his explanation about the dandelions--about going where the wind would carry them, flowering where the earth would have them. "No," she said. "If you came by whim, why aren't you leaving?"

"I might," Gao said. "Who knows what I will do tomorrow?"

"There is something, isn't it?" she asked. But, looking into the glint of his facets, feeling the perfect, oppressing balance of his elements, she knew that she was wrong, that the Prince was wrong: there was nothing more to him than this. He was the clouds, he was the storm: here one day, gone the next. He cared not about what he brought with him, or about what the Prince would do.

Oh, Celestials, she thought. What have we wrought here, in White Horse?

The Sixth Prince came into Shinxie's office two days later, looking pleased with himself--like a tiger who has just successfully stalked a man. He settled himself near the door, waiting for her to finish reading *Fai Meilin*--an unnerving presence at the edge of her field of vision.

Fai Meilin's aura was more subdued than usual, with none of the water that usually dominated her thoughts. She submitted herself meekly to Shinxie's examination, uncaring of the presence of a man in the room; and bowed to Shinxie when she was finished.

"Soon," Shinxie said. "One or two weeks, I'd think, if you keep this up."

Fai Meilin nodded, distantly--she had already reached the stage where it didn't truly matter anymore.

When she was gone, the Prince detached himself from the wall. "Come with me, Yue." He sounded almost eager, his aura roiling with fire. "I've found a way."

"A way?" Shinxie asked.

"A way to solve our problems," the Prince said, with a stab of his hands. "A way to beat him on his own ground."

"Gao Tieguaai?" Shinxie said. "Your Excellency, I humbly submit you are mistaken. I spoke with him yesterday--" she stopped then, but the Prince didn't question her further--"and I don't think he would do anything to harm the Flowering Empire." He wouldn't do anything, just drift through the monastery until he left--staring at students or at buildings with no real interest, as if knowing already how unreal all of this was, all bound to crumble.

The Prince's aura roiled more strongly, fire taking true precedence over the other four elements. But then he seemed to remember who he was talking to, and--for a bare moment--remorse and affection filled his eyes. Shinxie's heart tightened.

"Yue," he said. Unexpectedly, he stopped, facing her equal to equal--her eyes tingled with unexpected tears. "He may well be. I trust you, but I have to be sure. I can't face His Imperial Majesty without being sure. This goes higher than what's between us."

"I see," Shinxie said, slowly.

"You do?" the Prince looked at her for a while. "Don't worry. It will soon be over--and then we'll see. Perhaps you don't need to be at White Horse anymore. There are far better places in your future."

In our futures."

If he told you, tomorrow, that you could come back as his concubine, what would you do?

He took her, not to the Hall of Cultivating the Body and Mind, but to the World of the Celestials, one of the smallest courtyards in the monastery. On the short flight of stairs that led up to the Memorial Pavilion, Gao stood waiting for them, surrounded by a handful of Imperial soldiers.

Other soldiers were moving towards them, escorting two prisoners, their shoulders weighed under the metal frame of a cangue.

Shinxie looked from the prisoners to the Prince—and to Gao, whose face still had not changed.

The Prince said to Gao, when they reached the dais. "You'll know who they are."

The prisoners—a young man and middle-aged woman, their faces thin, emaciated—were forced to kneel. Their cangues were removed; they kept their gazes to the ground, not daring to look up at the Prince.

"Enlighten me," Gao said. He had not moved.

"Gao Yuhuan, Gao Jiajin," the Prince said. His voice, too, was low and even. "Your wife and son."

The woman started, and her aura roiled with the agitation of water—but when she made to move, one of the guards hit her in the back with the butt of his weapon, sending her sprawling to the ground.

"I see," Gao said. He might as well have been talking about the weather. "It has been a long time, Your Excellency."

The woman, Shinxie saw, was weeping; and her son held himself rigid. Both auras were shot through with metal—the element of anguish.

The soldiers moved into position, stretching the prisoners flat on the ground. Two of them hefted bamboo canes, looking thoughtfully at the bodies before them.

Shinxie had seen many such scenes, when she was a court official; it was common to be beaten. But, nevertheless, she couldn't help the shudder that ran through her.

"You will read him," the Prince said to Shinxie. His face was a mask, his own aura dominated by fire—but, when she brushed him on her way to Gao Tieguaai, she felt the other element: metal, anguish and disgust. He was doing his duty, and not caring much for it.

Gao Tieguaai extended his hand to her; she'd expected a little shrug, a little sign that he was also finding this distasteful, but there was nothing. "Gao," she said, but found all words had gone.

"Begin," the Prince said.

The canes rose, fell. The first blow tore the clothes from collar to hem; the second drew beads of blood; and each subsequent widened the wounds even further. Shinxie could see the bodies arch against the pain—could feel the anguish and pain of metal in the auras, roiling stronger and stronger—could hear the woman's quiet sobs, slowly rising into raw screams—could see the son's body, shuddering every time the blows came. And still it didn't stop—blood was flowing over the beaten earth of the courtyard, watering the earth, and neither of them could hide their suffering any more, neither of them could bear it any more...

Her hand tightened around Gao's, strongly enough to crush the fingers of a mere man.

"Again," the Prince said, his voice flat.

The soldiers nodded—and it went on, the even rise and fall of the canes, the little snap as the thin bamboo bent to strike the skin, the blows coming one after the other, the sheer repetition of it all...

And, throughout, Gao's aura never wavered, never tilted out of balance—all five elements, no anguish, no anger, no pain. Nothing. The canes rose and fell and the blood splashed, and once there was a crunch like bones breaking, and the son finally cried out, his leg sticking out at an awkward angle from his hip, his flesh glistening in the morning sun, and the canes rose and fell and there

was only blood and pain and a smell like charnel-houses, and still Gao said nothing, moved nothing, felt nothing.

At last, at long last, it stopped, and Shinxie drew in a shuddering breath, half-expecting the Prince to raise his hand again. But he didn't. He merely looked at her holding Gao's hand, as if she had the answers to everything.

The woman, lying in the stickiness of her own blood, tried to pull herself upwards, fell back with a cry. She was whispering something, over and over; and it was a while before Shinxie realised that it was Gao's personal name, only used by his intimates.

Gao looked at the woman, uninterested; his aura did not waver.

Shinxie shook her head at the Prince, willing this farce to be over.

"I see," the Prince said. He looked at the two pitiful, broken bodies below him. "I humbly apologise, in the name of the Tianshu Emperor, for this ill-treatment. The imperial alchemists here will see about your wounds. Come, Yue."

She followed, Gao's hand still in hers—cool, reassuring, unwavering.

As they walked out of the courtyard, the woman cried out, "Husband!" Her voice was a sob.

Gao turned, bowing to her—dragging Shinxie with him. "Guilin," he said, speaking her personal name.

"Lisai," the woman whispered. "Please..."

Gao shook his head, very gently. "It was a long time ago, Guilin. I am deeply sorry. You'll recover, and have a long, prosperous life." He glanced at the Sixth Prince, and added, "They'll make sure you lack for nothing."

But his aura was undisturbed, his second-skin cool under Shinxie's touch; and he meant none of it.

Later, the Prince came to her office, looking small and wan. "I'll be going back to the capital, Yue. I'll report that there's nothing to see here, nothing to threaten the Flowering Empire. My work is done."

"I see," Shinxie said. She was still hearing the sounds of the canes rising and falling—still smelling the sharp, animal tang of blood in the morning—and feeling Gao's aura, utterly unperturbed. A dandelion, going where the wind blew; a cloud, a storm. There was nothing more to him; not anymore—and she was the one who had shaped him, who had made hundreds like him.

The Prince's face was pale, and even his formal makeup couldn't quite disguise it. "I shouldn't have done it, should I?" he asked.

Something twisted within her. "You had to protect the Empire," she said. "You had to make sure."

The Prince's hands clenched, slightly. "The alchemists will repair the skin, and mend the broken bones. It will be as if it had never happened. I'll make sure they're compensated—that they're pardoned, with enough money to establish themselves. It will be as if it had never happened." His tone was that of one who didn't believe in what he said; and for the first time since she'd known him, his voice shook and broke.

Shinxie fought the crushing feeling that threatened to overwhelm her chest. "Go home," she said, gently. "You have wives and children. You have no reason to cling to any of this."

"Yue—" the Prince said, and stopped. "If I were to—" He stopped again, as if words would no longer come to him. "Come back with me," he said. "Please."

He had never asked. He had never begged. In all the days of their liaisons, even in the days since he'd come back into her life...

Oh, Your Excellency...

If he told you, tomorrow, that you could come back as his concubine, what would you do?

She hadn't been able to answer Gao, then. But now, in the quiet of her office, there was only one thing she could say, one answer that would make sense. "My place is here. My work is here. I am sorry. Go home. Forget about this place." Forget about me.

The Prince's face contracted, very slightly. Shinxie reached out, feeling nothing but a shadow of her old desire—stroked his hand, gently. "May you live long, and attain all five blessings, Your Excellency."

And, in that instant—looking at this small, hunched man who was no less broken than the prisoners he'd chosen to beat—she knew.

Gao was waiting for her in the Hall of Cultivating the Body and Mind—standing in the centre, amidst the students deep in their meditations. He bowed to her when she arrived.

It was the hour after dusk; the drum had been beaten, signalling the end of this day's teaching. The teachers had gone back to their rooms; the alchemists to their laboratories. The procession that accompanied the Sixth Prince was making its slow way down the mountain, taking with it Gao's wife and son in palanquins—pale and wan, their bodies repaired by the alchemists' painstaking work.

"I know how you came back," Shinxie said.

Gao's face turned towards her, the eye-facets gleaming with the first star. He said nothing.

"Balance," Shinxie whispered. "You can't open a singularity unless you care about nothing—but that's not how it works, is it?" That wasn't how... She took a deep, trembling breath, feeling the icy air go down, all the way into her lungs. Finally she said. "If you loved everything on this earth—the mountains and the valleys, the storms and the sunlight—the Emperor, the merchants and the labourers, the alchemists and the workers..." If nothing truly stood out, if everything was in balance...

Gao said, finally, "Then, if you've listened to what I told you, you'd know that wouldn't be love anymore."

No, not in the sense of desire or lust—it wouldn't set people apart, wouldn't tear away at the fabric of the world...

He did not move—and she was half-relieved, half-disappointed. Would he not even attempt to silence her?

"You needn't have come back here," she whispered, and then something came loose within her, some pent-up anger or frustration. "You needn't come back here and go through this pretence—there was no need—" Not for the Sixth Prince, not for the canes, not for the memory of blood clogging up her nostrils, the nausea that threatened to overwhelm her every time she paused...

"This is White Horse," Gao said, gravely. "A refuge for the Flowering Empire's dreamers; the only place where they can thrive. If you cannot grasp what this is about, then who will?" He tilted his head—and, with a growing, convulsive shiver, she remembered the conversation they'd had in the Hall, the students in meditation, his words about love and equality, nesting at the back of their minds like coiled snakes...

New teachings. He had come back there because of the students, because of what he thought he could give them. Because he meant to change them.


"You—" she whispered.

"There is so much blindness in this world," Gao said, and for the first time, she heard kindness in his voice. It did nothing to quell the tremors than ran up her arms. "So much misery to extinguish."

"And you'd change us?" she whispered. "To fit your rules? What gave you the right—?"

She swung her hand, clumsily, towards him; he caught it in his own, imprisoning the fingers in an unbreakable hold.

"Shinxie," he whispered, and in his voice was an echo of the Prince's need, of his aching tenderness. "The Tianshu Emperor shapes us to his needs. Do you think it's a better rule?"



The Imperial edict, sending her into her exile; White Horse, the gateway to a voyage of no return; the casual arrogance of the Sixth Prince, the faith that the Empire should be safeguarded, at all costs. "I don't know what your rule would be," she said.

"You know how I came back," Gao said. His aura washed over her, unchanging—all five elements, entwined into perfect balance; fire and wood, earth and water and metal generating each other, destroying each other, supporting each other in their endless cycle. "That's all I can offer you."

"I could call him back," Shinxie said. "The Prince. Tell him what happened, tell him what you did."

Gao said nothing. "If that is your wish, I will not gainsay it."

"You wouldn't?" She couldn't keep the bitterness out of her voice. "You let your wife and son be beaten rather than reveal anything, and you wouldn't stop me?"

"My wife and son were never in real danger," Gao said. "Many things are wrong in the Flowering Empire, but the death of two innocents is not yet condoned. But to stop you would require violence," Gao said. "Perhaps even killing you."

Shinxie laughed. She couldn't help herself—the sounds racked her, bitter sobs with nothing of joy. "You--"

He was still watching her, his head bent at an angle, like a curious bird; and suddenly she realised that everything he had ever said or done had led to this point—that every one of his acts had aimed to let her know, to put her in the position when she knew exactly what he felt—as if he still needed some kind of judgment passed on him, some reassurance that he was right.

No, that was not it.

He had come here, in White Horse, for a change that would start among the Flowering Empire's dreamers—among her students. A change she would witness; for she was Abbess of White Horse.

Of course he would want her to understand.

"Celestials take you," she whispered.

Gao's lips thinned into a smile. "You'll find that's impossible."

"I could stop you," Shinxie said—but she thought of the Prince's haunted face, and knew she couldn't. "But it wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be fair."

Gao inclined his head, and said nothing. His aura washed over her, with the regularity of waves on a calm morning—something she could cling to, even now.

"The others," she said. "On Penlai Station. Will they come back?"

"Who knows? I can't speak for them."

Gao made a slow, sweeping gesture with his hands; and the air started to sparkle around him. Slowly, the singularity came into being, blurring the edges of his being—layer after layer of his body slowly erasing itself from reality. "Goodbye, Yue Shinxie. I trust we will meet again."

After he was gone, she stood for a while, the silence of the Hall washing over her—the familiar sounds of nightingales singing, the crisp, biting air of the night on her fingers, the lights reflected in the facets of her students' eyes.

She wondered how he would fare, out into the Flowering Empire—what else he would do.

Whatever the case, things would never be the same again.

She wanted to laugh, or to weep, but even that seemed to be beyond her. Instead, she felt a slow, inexpressible feeling rise up in her: a desperate wish for the world to thrive, no matter what happened; for the Emperor, the merchants and the labourers, the alchemists and the workers to live and prosper and understand what was right—Gao's love for everything, strong enough to crush the bones of her chest.

And, standing shivering in the courtyard, she finally understood the gift he had left her.

The path to transcendence had shifted, away from the dry detachment of Penlai Station and the emptiness of Heaven: it now lay in the shadow of his footsteps, in the singularity that compassion had opened—wide and clear and ready to be followed.



About my short-story:

I wrote "The Wind-Blown Man" because I wanted to show a world that was fundamentally different. One thing that's not often talked about, and that fascinates me as a scientist, is how much the method, philosophy and findings of science have very clear roots in Western thought; and in writings from a particular tradition that spans Aristotle, Newton, Maxwell, Einstein... And I wondered what would happen if, instead of being the heir of Aristotle, the accepted science had been developed in China, a country that was developing in a very different direction at the time. Specifically, the Daoists engaged in alchemy were exploring a lot of scientific concepts, with a very different slant, and I wondered what would have happened if they had been the ones to come up with a model of the world that worked (for science, after all, is essentially a model that explains and predicts what we see of the world).

You see very little of this on the page, and that's because I buried my hours of worldbuilding very deep! But the science is ostensibly based on the interplay of the five elements--which I called "humours" because they're not so much ingredients as continuous movements, always generating and destroying each other in endless cycles. And, of course, the Transcendents are the posthuman equivalent of Daoist immortals, withdrawing from the modern world in the only place that is still safe from human reach--an unreachable space station, which bears the same name as the Island of the Immortals in Daoist tradition. Like most immortals, they're not meant to engage with the world again; but sometimes things don't work out as they should...



Alette de Bodard was born in the US, but grew up in France (in the gorgeous city of Paris, to be precise). Although French is her mother tongue, her parents insisted early on that she learn to speak English.

She first discovered SF through the works of Isaac Asimov, and then moved to fantasy when she happened upon a copy of Ursula Le Guin's "The Earthsea Quartet", which today remains one of her favorite books in the genre. She decided to write when her family moved to London for a few years: she found a copy of Orson Scott Card's "How to Write Fantasy and Science Fiction", which first made her realise that she could try her hand at writing. She studied in Paris in a classe préparatoire, a prep course for the competitive exams which would enable her to enter an engineering school. After two years of intensive classes, Alette was admitted into Ecole Polytechnique, one of France's top engineering schools. During her class préparatoire, she started writing regularly, which enabled her to find a distraction from science. She completed two novels during her studies.

Halfway through Ecole Polytechnique, she started writing short stories instead of novels, in order to improve faster--and went on writing those after she graduated.

In June 2006, Alette attended Orson Scott Card's Literary Bootcamp, which enabled her to sharpen her skills, as well as come back with a wealth of information about the craft and the business of writing.

Her writing took off after she won the *Writers of the Future* contest and got picked out of *Interzone's* slushpile by the inimitable Jetse de Vries; this marked the beginning of a growing number of sales, out of which several were made to semi-professional or professional markets. She was able to join SFWA as an Active Member in 2008, and became a finalist for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in 2009, narrowly losing to David Anthony Durham.

Her first novel, *Servant of the Underworld* sold to Harper Collins imprint Angry Robot following a lucky break involving an agent, an editor and a delayed flight (see full story here at the Angry Robot website).

Servant of the Underworld is a cross between a historical Aztec fantasy and a murder-mystery, featuring ghostly jaguars, bloodthirsty gods and fingernail-eating monsters. For more information, see the novels webpage.

Alette is currently working on an alt-SF thriller, *Foreign Ghosts*, which is set in the same universe as her Hugo and Nebula-nominated "The Jaguar House, in Shadow".

31.05.2012

A CONVERSATION WITH:
JUDIT LÖRINCZY
 BY CRISTIAN TAMAS

*„If the world SF can change again, and again, and again, then yes, it will have a future !”
 An interview with Judith Lőrinczy, author and painter, editor at SFmag.hu (Hungary) –
 Cristian Tamaş (Romanian Science Fiction & Fantasy Society, Romania)*

Cristian Tamaş: *Hi, Judit, thank you very much for accepting this interview. As I told you, I was impressed by your honesty and sincerity concerning the actual status of the Hungarian SF and Hungarian fandom. Objectivity is the first factor conducting to the understanding of the causes of the actual situation. You had proven that you care about the Hungarian SF&F and you mentioned that the first steps were made in order to change something. I would like to discuss about your artistic preoccupations and hobbies and afterwards we will continue with an overview of the Hungarian SF&F publishing landscape.*

Judit, I would like to ask you to present yourself to the international SF fandom and readers. So, please tell us something about you. Thank you.

Judith Lőrinczy : I was born in an average Hungarian town Szolnok in 1982. I went to school there, everything was usual (mostly), later my family moved to another town, Szeged, where I went to the university (at the faculty of law, and I graduated). Now I live at Pécs, Hungary, with the love of my life.

I am an editor of the SF & F SFmag.hu site and LFG.hu site (former RPG.hu) who was originally dedicated especially to role playing games but not only because many other people used to visit the site: SF & F fans, players with other preferences, SF & F writers and critics. Each year a stories competition was organized (I am not a fan of role playing in fact, but LFG is a very eclectic site and still the largest in the Hungary's SF & F domain).

I have a younger brother, András, who graduated in Budapest as a designer. We got our talent from our mother, who was a drawing and geography schoolteacher. She said that I draw earlier than I

started speaking. I didn't become a professional fine artist, but I think it would be hard to do that for a living – at least in Hungary. We never had any contact to the art-world, however I can learn drawing and painting, and paint and draw anything I want, when I want. I don't depend on other people's money and commission and wishes, but only on my mood and freetime. Sometimes it's not easy, because I work as a public prosecutor, and generally I have a lot of work to do. But I enjoy both my job and my „more-than-a-hobby”, too.

I had more than ten exhibitions since 1999 in various Hungarian towns, painted some book cover (for the Hungarian issue of Jo Walton's „Farthing”) but mostly I don't paint and draw for commission but for my pleasure. My themes are: inner travelling, surrealism, fantasy, sci-fi and the mix of these. It's impossible to paint every day, but I decided to go some artist's group to learn and practicing drawing and painting and it means that I have at least one occasion for painting every week. I really enjoy it. Not for money, so I can paint what I want having really all the freedom. I do not like to consider myself a writer, but I also like to write. I'm working on a novel and several stories also even if only some of my texts have been published so far.

Cristian Tamaş : What exactly is SFmag.hu and how come you joined them? What are your plans for the future with SFmag?

Judith Lőrinczy : SFmag was established in 2010 November, dedicated to speculative fiction. I was one of the establishers, at least I was also work in this project almost from the beginning. We refresh the site on every workday, sometimes we have thematic weeks, but in February we held thematic month (as for example, dystopy). Mostly we're

publishing articles about SF-F books, comics, sometimes interviews and essays. We have some contacts to Hungarian publishing houses, and sometimes we get some books for contests. We also have an english „division”, but it's not easy to refresh it. Our members are mostly hungarian SF-F writers, critics, film fans, editors, or just SF&F readers who want to tell their opinion. Mostly we write about foreign books, rarely about hungarian ones. The reason is that we don't want to generate conflict (however our existence makes a conflict), and the hungarian SF&F books are generally badly written (or not good enough, if your favorite writers are Ursula K. Le Guin, George R.R. Martin).

Our objective is that we want to show and celebrate the best SF&F books, films etc., to popularize them not only among the SF&F readers, but outside the „ghetto”. We also would like to make contacts to other countries' SF&F sites and „SF&F leaders”, we already have contacts with the World SF Blog, and if I can say, with SRSFF (Romanian Science Fiction&Fantasy Society), too.

Cristian Tamaş : When did you start to read SF&F ? Was it a SF book, or a SF magazine or a Fantasy novel ?

Judith Lőrinczy : My father likes SF, and when Asimov's stories were republished in Hungary again, he started to buy the series, and I started to read them. So... I started reading SF with Asimov's robot short stories. The first fantasy novel was Tolkien's classical epic trilogy, „Lord of the Rings”. The third loved one was G. R. R. Martin with the „Sandkings”, and I can mention Ursula K. Le Guin with the „Left Hand of Darkness”, Dan Simmons' „Hyperion”, and so on.

Cristian Tamaş : Who are your favourite hungarian SF&F writers ? And international SF&F writers ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Csilla Kleinheincz and Zoltán László, both of them had short stories published in english, but I like K.Varga Beáta's and Botond Markovics' (Brandon Hackett) stories, too.

Concerning the international SF&F writers, I had started with Asimov și Tolkien, then Dan Simmons, George R.R. Martin, Ursula K. Le Guin followed and actually I like Kelly Link, Peter S. Beagle, Frank Herbert, Ray Bradbury. And also, my preferred international writers are George R.R. Martin, Le Guin, Dan Simmons, Kelly Link,

Peter S. Beagle, Frank Herbert, Ray Bradbury.

Cristian Tamaş : When did you became a SF fan ?

Judith Lőrinczy : A few years passed when I realised it, maybe on that day, when I went back to the HungaroCon for the second time many years ago, and after it I noticed how many things should be changed, and I thought the change was possible. I was wrong, but now it doesn't bother me at all, I turned back to my art instead of organising without achievement, arguing with people who don't understand anything, or if they understand, they have a reason for not to change...

There are other revelations, eg. when I go into a bookstore my first way lead to the SF&F books. Or when I want to write something, the subject is always some kind of fantastical. It just came, I couldn't tell you a moment, when I became an SF fan.

With regard to SF & F fandom in Hungary (in which I'm included since 2005 ...), I must admit that I became pessimistic - there is endless sterile debate without any result.

Cristian Tamaş : You had started to paint as realist artist or you had started with fantastic subjects ?

Judith Lőrinczy : I always painted what was on my heart. I remember twilight skies and snowy mountains, faces and lights break through a window... Later the dragons came, but I don't know why and how. After a few years, dragons flew away and ships and caves appeared on the canvas...

Cristian Tamaş : What kind of speculative fiction are you writing ? SF, Fantasy, fantastic literature ? Have you been published ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Many short stories of mine were published since 2005, when I started to write them. (I worked on a novel earlier, but I think it wasn't good enough). I wrote clear science fiction, fantasy, too, but mostly I write a mixed kind of fantastic literature. It's not magical realism, but not clear fantasy, not even clear science fiction. I don't like categories, I leave the decision for the readers. My stories were published in various Hungarian SF magazines, like Galaktika (Galaxy) and Új Galaxis (New Galaxy), and hard covered

antologies. I plan to publish some of them in english, but it's not easy, first to find a translator... . I plan to publish some of them in english, but it's not easy, first to find a translator... And if you have a translated short story, you have to decide where to send it... There are a lot of opportunites, however you have to prepare for the common „no, thanks” answer. It has a lot of reason, maybe the story too long or too short or just don't fit with the subject of the magazine and so on. Maybe its only understandable for hungarians, and it's the same curse, we and also the Romanians and any other „non born English” writers have to face with. I also work on several novels, I already finished a huge one, which is a fantasy novel, the scene is one of the biggest battle of the second world war. I hope, I will be able to find a publishing house for it one day. Until then, I started an other one, because I write just for fun.

Cristian Tamaş : Your play, “Forty three seconds” was presented at the 2009 Hungaro-Con and afterwards awarded and staged by the Eyebrow Productions at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts from London. Please, tell us more about this subject.

Judith Lőrinczy : I think I almost told everything in my English account on the SFmag, you can use it.

<http://sfmag.hu/2011/05/31/my-five-minutes-o-fame/>

If you're interested in the writing circumstances, I can tell you, I had a big, never-come-back luck, or – what I think – God just wanted to give me a great present I can recall for the rest of my life. I also have some great friends who were so kind to check and help with the translation.

The hungarian presentation was earlier, however the play was originally written for the Eyebrow Productions competition. It was also a nice thing that some friend on the Hungarian SF Convention (HungaroCon) wanted to stage it.

Writing “Forty three seconds” was easy and hard, too. I've never written any play before, I didn't know how it goes, and I enjoyed the whole work on it.

I heard about the competition opportunity from a friend (actually from Romania), and I

wrote this play. I only knew there should be a big hit at the end, and it should contain some humor, and the most important thing: there must be a tension from the first line till the end.

Later I realized that I managed to draw two good characters, which is extremely hard in such a short extent. I think it's the secret of the short plays, not only the big hit – everyone can have a good idea – but what can you tell about the characters with a few fast sentences? Later I wrote two other plays, a short and a longer one, but I don't think I was succeed in this secret. And I'm not a play writer, mostly my themes fit to short stories or a novel, but not with the form of plays, because I really, really love writing descriptions.

It's not easy to accept, especially if a London theater director says right into your face: Judith, write and send us your next play. But I think playwriting is so, so different than writing a short story or a novel, and I felt I should start to learn everything from the start. I should start something I don't enjoy as much as writing short stories and novels.

I already knew it, when we decided to go to London for a few days and see the performance, which was one of the best days in my life, and I remember, after the show I was just lying on a bed, London, this great, great city was around me, and I couldn't fell asleep, and I said to the dark: thank you, God, even it was my only night. I wish this feeling for all the unknown writers at least once in their lifetime.

Cristian Tamaş : How many SF&F publishing houses are in Hungary or hungarian generalistic publishing houses that have SF&F collections ? Are there publishing houses dedicated only to the publishing of the hungarian SF&F titles ?

Judith Lőrinczy : There are about 15 publishing houses active in the SF&F domain, however some mainstream publishing houses rarely publish SF&F, but many titles are franchised universes books and not „typical” SF&F books. The best known genre publishing houses are: Delta Vision, Agave, Cherubion, Tuan, Beholder. The biggest publishing house (which is also the biggest and a monopolistic books distributor) is Alexandra. It has an SF&F division and they plan to publish more hungarian writers in the next few years. They already started a fantasy

fantasy book series called Zenit. The majority of their products are translations, very seldom hungarian titles. The publishers are preferring already launched authors (of novels, the short stories are considered useless).

The only publishing press that has hungarian titles is Cherubion, it's more than twenty year old, however the number of published Cherubion books and antologies falls back, and this publishing house is sadly well known for its low quality books.

Cristian Tamaş : Do you know for example, the yearly total number of SF&F titles published in Hungary ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Approximately, 100 SF&F titles in total and some 20 hungarian titles. Maybe a little bit more, but I think not so much.

Cristian Tamaş : What's the yearly ratio between SF&F translations and original hungarian SF&F volumes ?

Judith Lőrinczy : I don't have certain numbers, but the hungarian readers are mostly preferring the „paranormal romance” (do not ask anything J), and great epic fantasies (eg. George R.R. Martin, Steven Erikson). The readers also prefer the franchised universes books (like StarCraft, or the Hungarian RPG literature M.A.G.U.S.), many fans are buying just this kind of books, and they never try out any other SF&F (which is sad, because the franchised books are not so good generally and they don't have deep meanings).

Cristian Tamaş : Is the overall majority of the yearly foreign SF&F titles translated from english ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Absolutly, from english. Nevertheless, there are translations also from russian (Strugatsky brothers, Sergei Lukyanenko, Dmitri Glukhovsky, Vladimir Vasiliev) and german (Andreas Eschbach, Herbert W. Franke, Wolfgang Jeschke, Frank

Schätzing).

Cristian Tamaş : What's the average number of copies for the translated SF&F titles ? Average number of copies for the hungarian SF&F titles ? Are the SF&F books affordable to the average net income ?

Judith Lőrinczy : The average printed copies' number of a book is about 1500-2000, however they can sell less... Hungarian writers's book are published mostly in average 1500 copies, but they also sell less than 1000/year. Generally, at least. There are unobtainable books from the '90s, but there are books published in the past few years and you can still find so many in the stores.

The prices are different, I mentioned Zenit publishing house, which is almost extremely cheap, but Alexandra publishing house can afford their low selling prices (because of its monopolistic place on the hungarian bookmarket), and you can also find hard covered, huge and expensive books, too. So, it depends . But I noticed, all the hungarian self published books have extremely high prices.

Cristian Tamaş : Can you estimate the total number of the hungarian SF&F fans ? And the total number of the SF&F readers /SF&F books buyers from Hungary ?

Judith Lőrinczy : I think there are 4-5000 readers in Hungary, buying SF-F books, and maybe more than 2-3 SF&F books/year. However not everybody like the same books, which explain the number of the average sold copies. If it's a bestseller, like Martin's „Song of Ice and Fire”, there will be a second print and more sold copies... But I can't estimate it. ☺ And as I said, it is hard to reach the readers, many very good, award winner books are failing in Hungary due to the lack of advertisement, the bad cover art, the bad translation... Who knows.

The „fact”, there are 4-5000 readers, doesn't

mean that the hungarian SF&F (club) life and movement is in a very good situation. The SF events are poorly visited (the last one was the SF Day in Budapest, in 2011 November, with only 100 participants, which contains the organisers, too).

Cristian Tamaş : What is your opinion on Galaktika magazine ? Galaktika is celebrating 40 years of apparition, what do you think it's role and successes could be ? As far as you know how many copies per issue do they have ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Galaktika has at least 3000 copies/issue, but also I don't know a certain number (it's also a business secret, I think). SFmag is cooperating with some writers who published in Galaktika, I also has two short stories published there... But what about my opinion concerning this magazine? Well, I think it should be better, maybe the editor should be consequent. The short stories not only different, which is good, but they're different in quality, too. Galaktika - and all the hungarian genre publishing - suffers due to the „friendships” and hostility. You can publish, if you have a good relation with certain editor at a random publishing house, including Galaktika. Your manuscript will be read sooner (or at least someone will read your manuscript), than those ones, who never met and never make a relation with certain decision people. If you are known by sufficient people you have a better chance to be published. If you don't... well, miracles happen sometimes. So, not only Galaktika, but almost all the publishing houses in the SF&F genre mostly don't select by quality but select by acquaintance. Sometimes very good writers publish, sometimes the worst ones, which is not so good for the future of the Hungarian SF&F genre.

Cristian Tamaş : What's the difference between Galaktika, Meta Galaktika and Hiper Galaktika ? How is considered Galaktika's price per issue of 870HUF (2,95EUR) ? Affordable or expensive ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Meta and HiperGalaktika are all thematic ones, mostly they dedicate to some subject. The last Meta Galaktika was

dedicated to the Chinese SF. Galaktika promised more thematic Metas, dedicated to other countries, but since then only a Hungarian SF History issue was published... I think it's expensive if I see the content. Less literature, more advertising, more PC news and articles and films reviews and science articles, sometimes interviews... but I would like read more literature in it. (I already talked about the quality...).

Cristian Tamaş : Are there any other SF&F printed magazines ?

Judith Lőrinczy : No. There are some fanzines, but mostly they die after one or two issue (which sounds sad, but if I see the content it's predictable and well deserved, too).

Cristian Tamaş : What SF&F online site is the most popular in Hungary ? LFG, Avana, SFmag, Solaria, Galaktika, etc. ?

Judith Lőrinczy : One of the oldest site is the LFG (the former rpg.hu), dedicated mostly to the role playing gamers, but this site also publish short stories (after selection and edition), critics about genre films and novels and antologies and many other kind of articles, including hungarian history, news in the genre, RPG and PC games, events... LFG is still one of the most visited site in Hungary, so if a Hungarian writer get a good criticism or a bad criticism on LFG, it can cause huge debates, and also influence the sold copies... Avana is the site of the Avana Society with the news of the Society, but they don't invest much energy into it. Solaria is, I think, dead. There is SFportal, with news and socializing and sometimes they also publish criticism. SFmag celebrated its first birthday at 2011 November.

There are some other smaller sites, like Fictionkult (they have many interesting and valuable articles in the genre), or KIMTE (its a Fantasy Society), there is Karcolat dedicated to amateur and mostly bad

writers, Scifi.hu which has no original content. The SF&F publishing houses also have private sites, but their forums are for the books and their fans. There is Intergalaktika, too, which was established by Galaktika, and now its an independent Facebook-like site.

Cristian Tamaş : Is Avana SF Society the only remaining offline SF club from Hungary ? Are there other SF and/or Fantasy offline clubs ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Well, there is an other one, the Szírius Society, there is the Szegedi Fantasztikus Tábor (which is actually a camp near a town, Szeged), and there are many RPG communes. I don't know much about the Szíriusz, but I know Avana. Since I know its members and leadership, the Society has huge, unsolved problems, financial and human resources, too. There are debates inside and arguments outside, between the Society and the other SF&F fans who are not members, or they were... It's a difficult and long story, and I don't like it.

Cristian Tamaş : With the exception of HungaroCon, are there any other national SF&F conventions ? What about SF&F symposia or colloquiums, or any other reunions ?

Judith Lőrinczy : There is the Szefantor Camp held by the Szegedi Fantasztikus Tábor, at Szeged, in every Summer.

There are SFportal meetups, and sometimes other writer's societies meetings, and sometimes the SFportal organise bigger events, like it should have been in 2011 November, however we were only about 100...

Maybe this year will be a LFG Meeting, and if there will be, we expect much more participants than 100, however they won't be only SF&F fans, but mainly role playing gamers.

Csilla Kleinheincz - as an editor of a new Hungarian publishing house, Ad Astra - helped me to answer some questions.

What do you think are the chances of publication of foreign SF&F non-anglophone fiction in Hungary?

In this case I would recommend Galaktika magazine.

But if an author would try to publish a story in Hungary, first of all it should translate it's text/s in english or in hungarian (if it can get a good translator of Hungarian), but english translation is better because English language is worldwide known.

And then it can send a story to Galaktika Magazine. Other SF & F magazines are not existing only dying fanzines and low budget anthologies which are mainly publishing only amateur writers who are as average less than mediocre. (they don't have good editors and, of course, neither translators able to translate a story from english into hungarian). I mentioned a lot of publishers from Hungary. They are working with literary agents hunting well known authors from abroad, mostly from the Anglophone market, but they are also considering interesting Eastern European authors, who have had great success in their own country, such Russia, as Gluhovsky and Lukyanenko.

So unknown foreign non-anglophone authors should try to sell stories in Hungary in this way, for example at SFmag.hu.

Cristian Tamaş : What do you think of e-books and SF&F e-books ? Are those the future of the publishing ? The e-books will displace/replace the paper books ? Are you buying and reading e-books ?

Judith Lőrinczy : Oh, my God, I wrote a whole essay about it, so it's not an easy subject ! It will be the future but not tomorrow, and it can kill the most of the publishing houses, it can give an unhealthy freedom for everyone who think she or he is a born writer, but actually has no talent, in some ways it is already replacing paperbooks, but paperbooks still have some chance to survive. Everyone thought video killed the radio, but what do you hear when you

thought video killed the radio, but what do you hear when you ride a car? You can't see a monitor (normally). Radio, and I think, books can kill themselves, having lousy content. Get the readers, doesn't matter what the media is. (Actually, I don't have an e-reader yet, so I buy „normal” books, but I think, once I'll have an e-reader I'll have e-books, too. I already have e-books on my computer).

Cristian Tamaş : In your opinion, the world SF as literature, has a future ?

Judith Lőrinczy : If it can change again, and again, and again, then I say absolutely yes.

Cristian Tamaş: Want to say something to the SF & F fans?

Judith Lőrinczy: Be more kind to one another, do not take criticism seriously but follow the recommendations. SF is a game, it's time for us to have some fun. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this interview, I hope that answers were helpful, and I'm sorry if I talked too much. And I wish to thank Csilla Kleinheincz, editor of Ad Astra, which provided me with valuable information.

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The interview was conducted in english. The romanian translation made by Cristian Tamaş had been published in the romanian Nautilus online magazine :

<http://revistanautilus.ro/interviuri/daca-se-poate-schimba-din-nou-si-din-nou-si-din-nou-atunci-sf-ul-are-un-viitor/>

<http://revistanautilus.ro/interviuri/daca-se-poate-schimba-din-nou-si-din-nou-si-din-nou-atunci-sf-ul-are-un-viitor/>



Judit's paintings : <http://judlorin.deviantart.com/gallery/>

Judit's blog : <http://judlorin.blogspot.com/>

SFmag.hu

<http://sfmag.hu/category/english/>

<http://lfg.hu>



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GERSON LODI- RIBEIRO

THE ETHICS OF TREASON

1. Forced Move

The Brazilian side of the border at Itararé was swarming with activity.

Agents of the *Despacho General de Información*, who had infiltrated the Brazilian Federal Police, had spread the news of my attempt to escape through that town. Now hundreds of elite policemen in civilian clothes, many of them just arrived from their regional commands, were searching all the streets, railway stations, turbobus terminals and hotels. Their training at the Rio de Janeiro Academy and all their technical apparatus guaranteed my escape would fail.

It would have, obviously, if I had chosen that route.

I had been oriented at São Paulo by the consul of the Guarany Republic himself. A few hours after receiving the fake documents and donning the disguise that he kindly sent me, I boarded a nuclear *barcaza* due to make her customary run of cargo and passengers on the Paranapanema River.

The *Espírito Santo* took advantage of the Paranapanema's favorable current, going slowly westwards, with the twin turbines hardly pushing. She was about forty years old, constructed as part of an order from Brazilian government at a Paraguayan shipyard in *Montevideo*. Though long past her prime, she was still sturdy and reliable.

Bent over the ship's rail, I observed the left bank of the river. A Brazilian-Paraguayan team had worked on that part of the Paranapanema bed in the beginning of the century, enlarging it. As the natural border between the two more developed countries of the Southern hemisphere, the river possessed considerable economic and strategic importance. It was also the outlet for the grain produced in North Paraguay.

At the right bank, my country. I would be considered soon the most pusillanimous traitor there since D. Pedro II. I smiled. He also had no other choice.

I remembered the painting at the top of the Guarany embassy stairs, at Quinta da Boa Vista. It showed a worn out old man, whose well trimmed white beard contrasted with his sad and tired look. At the side of this last Brazilian emperor stood a middle-aged man with the insignia marshal of the *Gran República* on his rustic field uniform. Dark haired, and not very tall, he bent just a little over an impressive table to sign the treaty of peace. The historic event had happened at the very embassy, then the Imperial Palace.



I looked off to port. From that bank stretched out the lands of the most powerful nation on Earth. The country I had lived in during my doctorate and post-doctorate studies. Freedom.

Traitor... Perhaps I could really be called that. After all, I had deliberately prevented my country from becoming the largest power in South America. I can not plead ignorance, or that I didn't realize the consequences. I was in full control of my actions when I unconditionally destroyed the hopes of the Secretary of War and of those researchers who shared his ideas of greatness.

I can't even say I feel any kind of regret. Just sorrow with the knowledge that, in the future, my name will be a synonym for turn-coat. Will, someday, my compatriots know they owe me the future of their sons and grandsons? It would take only twenty-four hours or so, to complete the ruin of my reputation as a scientist and as a human being. Colleagues and friends, daughters and grandchildren, relatives and cherished beings, everybody will be ashamed of having known me.

And yet I would do everything all over again. Once, ten times, one million times.

There was no way to act differently. In chess, we call it a "forced move".

With an insane patriotism, that madman had proposed another type of forced move. An idea so absurd that if it been carried forward, it would have destroyed all civilization, transforming it beyond any possibility of recognition.

We had observed the holograms with the alterations. A disturbed and unjust world. It was not our Earth, but a planet in many ways much more alien than the Mars the Paraguayans and Germans are starting to colonize. A different Earth: inhabited by people that are physically like us, but with thoughts and actions which are strange and irrational. A planet full of conflicts, intolerance and disparities propelling millions of people into poverty and starvation.

Even knowing all this, the Secretary of War had intended to make our Earth become that strange world.

Forced move! I wanted to laugh. My desperate escape, leaving behind my native land, all my friends and everything I ever loved... that's a forced move!

This was the kind of thought that took over my spirit. I searched for consolation in the (irrefutable?) argument that unhappiness was preferable to non-existence. I have always had philosophical doubts about this question. Metaphysics suddenly turned into pragmatism: perhaps that had forced my hand. I finally had the courage to instruct the Project's master program to throw out a little more than sixty kilograms of chlorinated water.

* * *

The majority of the Brazilian people, deep in the bottom of their souls, feel an aching resentment for the Guarany Republic, caused by a steaming mixture of hate and envy. After all, the Republic had won the war against the Triple Alliance and had divided the Brazilian Empire into two distinct and sovereign nations. In addition, it had become a protectorate far larger than our remaining territory. This victory allowed the Paraguayan industrial revolution and the establishment of that country as the greatest power in all Americas, since the Great War in the beginning of the century.

I had always judged that if it were necessary to appoint fault to anything other than ourselves for the military wreck of the Empire, it would be British capitalism. The War of the Triple Alliance was encouraged – it is a matter of public knowledge nowadays – by the Englishmen, who feared the competition represented by a militarily strong, politically obstinate and economically independent

country. They were afraid of an industrialized Paraguay which was starting to build an economic system that was socialist in essence.

A maternal great-grandfather of mine, the son of Brazilian ex-slaves who had settled in the Guarany Republic, was an officer in the Paraguayan Army. He served in the troops that occupied some of the main Brazilian cities and towns from the fall of the Empire up to the first decade of the century. He used to go to Rio de Janeiro on his leaves. On one of these trips, he met a girl from a *carioca* family of blacks that had been freed before the War and whose agrobusiness activities had been successful with Abolition in 1876 – my great-grandmother Lucinda.

With this background, it's understandable that I was not prone to the wave of anti-Paraguayan prejudices that still lives today in the minds of Brazilian youths.

* * *

Espírito Santo had little cargo on her trip to the northwest. Mostly some tons of high quality Paulistan coffee in sacks, a delicacy appreciated by the citizens of the Guarany Republic. It was not much compared to the grain and electric tools from Paraguay, not to mention the newest silicon *micropastillas* which were released by *Despacho de Ciencia*, and eagerly imported by Paulistan and Mineiran super microcomputer assembling industries.

One cannot say the same about the passengers. There were more than a hundred tourists going back to their country, in addition to a dozen executives of the Brazilian branches of Paraguayan multinational companies. In order to ease the tension that weighed on my soul during those first hours I was on board, I tried to guess, from their attitudes, which of the executives were going to Paraguay on well-deserved vacations and which were going back to their head-quarters for cycles of hypnopedagogic updating.

There were two dozen Brazilians on board, most of them wealthy tourists. And a young German couple on their honeymoon.

Yet, two of my fellow-citizens couldn't disguise themselves as tourists, even though they tried hard to do so. Both were in their thirties and their hair was cut in typical military fashion. The white one was taller as well as corpulent. The colored one, almost as black as myself, had aquiline features, a pair of smooth glasses, and acted superior.

They were invariably together. They were always near me, or rather the Paulistan industrial I pretended to be. Possibly a coincidence, their cabin was next to mine.

I checked with the *barcaza* captain, an old retired officer of the Paraguayan Navy, and confirmed that the two men and I would sit at the same table during lunch. Fortunately, we would be in company of the young romantic German couple and of my contact.

Mayor Hernandez was an officer from D.G.I.. He was pretending to be an executive from *Compañia de Petróleo del Paraguay*, the powerful multinational company that extracted crude oil from Venezuelan territories, the sands of the Arabian Peninsula, the Indonesian jungles, the Pernambuco province of Recôncavo and, more recently, on the Brazilian continental platform of Campos Basin.

The fake executive was exactly the opposite of what I had imagined as the archetype of a secret agent. Slender, middle-aged and a little restless; a white man, but very tanned, with straight black hair. Ah, and he used a little mustache so obviously false it was laughable.

I had hardly spoken with my contact when he perceived the presence of the Brazilian federals. He decided we ought to stay away from each other, so we would not arouse suspicion. It was

comforting to know there was an officer, trained under the best and strongest secret service in the world, assigned to take me safe and sound to Paraguayan territory.

Because of Hernandez's hurried departure, I had no time to report to him the strange behavior of the German couple. Especially Inga Hoffmann's.

For a couple on their honeymoon, they stayed out of their especially reserved bridal cabin quite a lot. Given German morality, they hardly could have had opportunities for sexual intimacy when they were single. Their culture is very unlike our own, where it is not uncommon for couples to make love before marriage.

Second, that blonde woman (a real beauty for a German) kept pointing her holographic camera on me, probably thinking that I hadn't noticed. Well, I thought that a beautiful and healthy young lady on her honeymoon in South America should be aiming her camera on her husband or, at least, on the abundant fauna and flora of the region. Never on a strange man. After all, even with the disguise, I'm not so attractive. Even less, taking in consideration the German ideals of physical beauty.

Unless the young couple was not what it appeared to be.

I felt I was getting paranoid.

It seemed probable that she was just pointing the camera in my direction to adjust the focus, but not releasing the shutter.

I was jumpy. I thought there was a capable spy from the German Confederation where there was solely a young lady enthusiastic with her new toy. Probably a wedding gift from a wealthy relative.

2. "Um Ratón en el Almuerzo de los Gatos..."

The *barcaza* was a rectangle one hundred and ten meters long by eighteen wide and drew three meters. Her flat hull, without keel, was especially designed for river navigation.

The vessel had three decks. The one the captain called the "main deck" was the one with the cabins, restaurants, game rooms, movie theater, library and other rooms dedicated to the passengers' leisure. The upper deck had the crew lodges, the internal and external ship's rail and the bridge. The inferior deck ("underdeck" to the river sailors) had been rebuilt to receive perishable loads, although a large part of it was occupied by the nuclear and auxiliary propulsion systems.

The siren sounded, announcing lunch. Hernandez had told me that the *Espíritu Santo's* captain would sit at our table.

I walked along the upper deck, by the port rail, toward the stern.

While I walked to the little first class restaurant, I observed the growing fields on the Paraguayan bank of the river. I saw a tall mulatto countryman wearing a broad brimmed hat that in the distance seemed to be of leather. He was alone and walking amidst that vast extension of growing land, commanding with a firm voice I could hear from the *barcaza* more than a dozen automatic agricultural machines. Dutifully, the machines came and went. Sowing machines prepared part of the land for harvest, while tractors plowed up other parts, throwing bacterial fertilizers in the tilled soil, and harvest machines extracted the mature grain.

I saw corn, beans and cotton, three plants the Paraguayans had made resistant to the weather and practically immune to noxious weeds, due to the use of recombinant DNA techniques. More

to the south, in the *gaúcha* lowlands, farmers of the Guarany Republic produced wheat and soy, the surplus of which would be exported with subsidized prices for many of the new African and Asian nations.

There are also fine grapes, produced in the little familiar vineyards of the Paraguayan provinces of Uruguay and Rio Grande del Sur, which are transformed into the planet's best red wine.

On the other side of the Paranapanema, Brazilians were still working at coffee monocultivation, here and there dotted with soy.

At the stern, following the bright path of the upper deck bulkheads, I went down a spiral staircase that led me to the atrium of the first class restaurant.

Only two of the four long tables were set with plates, glasses and utensils. I saw the Hoffmann couple at one of the tables and I walked towards them. I sat in my appointed place, across from Hans Hoffmann, a white man in his late twenties, with very fair skin, blue eyes and brown hair. A waiter came from the kitchen, and took my fake ID. Since the agents had been following me all this time, they sat just after me. The strongest, Mr. Pereira, according to his card, sat by my right hand and across from Inga. The other agent, Mr. Silva, sat at his right hand and across from the chair the young lady had put her indefectible holocamera on.

D.G.I.'s *mayor*, who used the same name at lunch as when he met me, came a few minutes later, rescuing me from a boring conversation with the couple about the diversity of the remaining flora of Paranapanema riverside region. This subject, I can assure you, was not my preference.

The German couple spoke a *Español* as good as my own, not a real surprise. The great Paraguayan cultural influence was also present in Europe, at least since the end of the World War in 1927, and since the economic plan developed by Asunción to help the European nations after the war.

With a charming smile to the German couple, Hernandez sat down at the upper end of the table, with the athletic Silva at his left hand.

The captain was the last to come, about ten minutes after Hernandez. Sitting at the upper end at my left hand, the *tenente-de-corbeta* Ruiz Daross seemed to me less Paraguayan than Hans Hoffmann. During lunch, I confirmed what I had suspected: the retired officer was born in the Guarany town of Blumenau, a colony of German and Austrian immigrants in the Santa Catarina province, which was founded one decade after the end of the War of the Triple Alliance.

Blond, tall, with water-green eyes and a strong constitution, the captain seemed to have kept his vigor intact during middle-age. He spoke German, *Español*, Portuguese and, as I would find out later, Guarany with the same fluency. He appeared to be a very sympathetic, sincere and good-humored man. He told us that naval careers were a family tradition: his grandfather has fought in the World War for the Paraguayan Navy, protecting the convoys that transported food and weapons to his parents' country and for its Austro-Hungarian allies. An uncle had been naval attaché in the British Hawaiian Protectorate and acted as neutral observer during that long bloody, inconclusive war. Englishmen and Australians had fought in the Pacific Ocean against the Nipponese Empire.

We had our drinks while the waiters served delicious *filetes* of good Paraguayan beef. The young lady questioned me in *Español*:

"And what about the news in Brazil?"

I remembered that the German couple had come on board the *Espírito Santo* at Itararé, after a two-hour trip in the express turbobus. They had taken that express from inside the Rio de Janeiro International Airport, just after their arrival from the Berlin-Rio transorbital flight. They would be curious about the news of a country they had crossed so quickly.

I decided not to discuss anything technical or scientific, and I did not dare make any comments about politics. After all, as typical Europeans, the Hoffmanns would take for granted that a Brazilian wouldn't know anything about those subjects. It didn't matter that we were the fifth economy in the world.

To Germans, we would always be only “The Land of Soccer”. But this stereotype didn't upset me, unlike the majority of my fellow citizens.

“Rodrigues is the new selection's coach. I heard that the list of players going to the Japan Cup should be announced this month.”

Hernandez nodded almost imperceptibly. “But the '95 Cup is very far, almost two years!”

Hans Hoffmann smiled and looked at his wife smugly, as if he had won a bet. That was the wicked side of being the only five-time champion in the world, while Paraguay and the German Confederation had won only two times each. Paraguayans, our neighbors and losers, know very well our manners and style. But, under the astounded German eyes, every Brazilian is an expert in the rude Briton sport.

Very observant, the captain understood that my knowledge of soccer wasn't very wide and I knew little beyond the declaration about Rodrigues. Fortunately, he acted like a true *porteño* gentleman and saved me, answering the curiosity of the couple.

“The last great news from Brazil, my beautiful young lady, is the disappearance of an important physicist. He was the chief of a very large secret project which, it was rumored, the Brazilian government was developing at São Paulo University.”

I felt my blood freeze. My eyes searched Hernandez's, but he touched his bright mustache while looking at his beef, as if he intended to find on his plate a way out of the dangerous situation in which we found ourselves.

Pereira was upset. “But that story hasn't hit the papers yet!”

For a while Captain Daross analyzed the agent's face, like a strategist of an invading army, searching for a passage through the walls of a besieged citadel. He then relaxed and smiled, and said confidentially:

“Not yet. I received the news about an hour ago by telefax. They are keeping it secret, since there is suspicion that the whole case was a sabotage attempt, and this is the kind of matter that may turn into a diplomatic crisis. Anyway, the whole story will probably be in the newspapers tomorrow.”

“Señor *capitán*, do you know, by chance, the name of the scientist?” The young man seemed too interested for my taste. Hernandez looked at me with warning in his eyes.

“Sure. Professor Júlio César de Albuquerque Vieira. According to the fax, he got his undergraduate degree at Campinas University, his master's at USP's Astronomy and Geophysics Institute, doctorate at Instituto de Física Avanzada in Asunción and for many years he taught at Centro de Pesquisas Cosmológicas de la Ciudad de López. He was the Brazilian physicist who received the Nobel Prize in 1985.”

Hoffmann widened up his eyes and whistled. “Albuquerque, the great theoretician of the space-time warps! I didn't know he was working on a secret project...”

“If everybody knew, it wouldn't be secret.” Hernandez joked, revealing exceptionally cool blood.

* * *

Working on that project was, no doubt, a very bad idea.

However, five years ago, when the Government offered me a complete laboratory to try my theories, an internationally renowned experimental physicist team and an almost unlimited budget, I felt as if I was getting my second Nobel Prize. The conditions were at least equal to those offered by the Guarany Republic, the German Confederation or the Nipponese Empire.

A lot of foolish pride and a great deal of laziness mixed with blind patriotism almost made me involuntarily take part in the obliteration of the known world.

Since I earned my master's degree at IAG, I had dedicated myself to understanding the structure and behavior of space-time warps.

The equations I used in the study of this phenomena foresaw the theoretical possibility of tracing the flow of specific temporal perturbations of a fourth species warp. Which means, in layman's terms, the possibility of visualizing a set of past events in the vicinity of a massive object. In the case of an Earthlike mass, the maximum duration of a flow is about four hundred years.

When I went back to USP, after a long time teaching at Unicamp, to take over the scientific management of Project Chronos, I did not hope to construct a time machine.

At least not a Victorian mechanism, as that proposed by the English scientist, Herbert Wells...

I had thought, however, that perhaps we would be able to manufacture some kind of "temporal TV set", a device which would allow the visualization of past events. A powerful technical tool, not solely an auxiliary instrument for the Applied Historiography Department researches, but also a modifier of the human society as a whole, making our civilization more conscious of the complex day-to-day life of past cultures and, by comparison, of possible paths for a better future.

Ingenious.

Childish idealism. An incredibly foolish dream.

Finally -- after more than four years of calculations, computer simulations, numerical solutions and component manufacturing, some of which forcing the development of totally new technologies -- the tracer was ready. It took another year and eight months to adjust the equipment in order to ensure we could obtain clear holograms, and four more months for graduating the temporal penetration depth of the tracing beam.

Only then we understood something was wrong.

The tracer had worked perfectly. The programming was perfect in clarity and in depth graduation. However, the holograms, the very holograms, were wrong.

There was no fault in its makeup. Only the holograms, from a certain point on, did not match with the historic events as we knew they had occurred.

"Señor Oliveira, are you feeling OK? You hardly touched your *filete*. The meal is not to your taste?"

"It's delicious", I told the captain, whose face showed a little concern and some curiosity. "I'm just a little indisposed. Seasickness, I guess."

"But the river is so calm. The vessel is very steady..." Apparently upset with my high susceptibility to the movement of his vessel, he decided to change the subject. "So let's have the dessert."

I felt better not being the center of attention any more. My relief disappeared when I observed the veiled care with which the two agents, who had hardly spoken during lunch, were watching my behavior and reactions.

I tried the best I could to disguise the chill I felt in my bones.

I thought of what would happen if I were captured and returned to Brazil. I was not afraid of the judgment and execution. Much worse would be the public execration. Millions of furious people who, ignoring the real purpose of my acts, would pronounce the same hateful word which the old emperor had heard boarding his vessel for his exile in Europe: "Traitor!"

After the dessert, the captain proved once more to be an excellent host, for he ordered a simply superb *Amaretto*. Unfortunately, with my nerves already shattered, I had to commit the worst sacrilege: take that high quality digestive without the gustatory pleasure due to it. I drank the contents of the small glass in a gulp, hardly noticing the bouquet or the taste.

Excusing myself from the others, I stood up and walked hastily to my cabin. I didn't care if Mr. Silva or Mr. Pereira followed me.

3. A Very Strange Map

I felt a little more secure in my cabin. I figured the agents wouldn't have dared to install a sound locator there. Either way, I didn't risk taking off the biosynthetic mask that covered my face.

I turned on the cabin's microcomputer and put it on the teletext mode, accessing the headlines of the main Paraguayan and Brazilian newspapers. There wasn't any news about the escape. The newspapers' editions are updated every three hours. The last one had just finished. If everything went well, I thought, thirty minutes after the next updating I would be landing in the port of Baranquilla, on the Paraguayan side of the river.

I switched off the computer and turned the armchair from the console to look out the opposite bulkhead. There was a framed map on the wall. I had noticed it was a very old image when I had first come to the cabin, before the *barcaza* had even left port, to put some personal objects in the cabinet.

Observing the image more closely, I saw the map was very elaborate. A work of art: hand-made but perfect in its minute details and tones, as if it had been prepared by the newest graphics software.

A map of South America. Well defined, it showed the mountain chains, main rivers, islands, lakes and towns. As with all Brazilians, I had known the geopolitical maps of our subcontinent since childhood.

It's the second educational holo-software parents rent to run in their kids' systems. Just after Brazil's holo, in the beginning of the Geography module.

A very familiar figure and yet very strange.

At least that image had changed little since my childhood.

I've heard that in the most recent software packages, the South America holomaps label towns and natural formations in the regions taken over by Paraguay during the War of the Triple Alliance, in *Español* and no longer in Portuguese. Towns called now by the names their new masters have given them.

Ciudad de López instead of Porto Alegre? I don't know if I like that sort of map...

But some day, one of these years, Brazilians will have to face History. Our ancestors lost a war we've always thought they should have won. A war in which all advantages had been ours. We

don't need to be ashamed, after so many years, for the incompetence and strategic failing of Empire generals. We must accept facts and stop hiding behind "what-might-have-been-if-we-had-won-the-war".

I stopped philosophizing about the "ostrich politics" which had been an idiosyncrasy of Brazilian culture for more than a century, focusing my attention on the craftsman's work. I believe it was an unconscious subterfuge, something that could make me forget for a while the crisis that ended in my flight from Brazil after the sabotage of the Project.

The *Grande República del Paraguay* deserved this designation. In a rosé-wine hue, it was distinguished as the biggest nation in South America, even without the *Protetorado del Mato Grosso* under Paraguayan political and economic control. This vast territory spread, in soft red, up to the Amazon River's south bank. Despite being renamed in *Español*, Portuguese was still the language spoken by most of the people in the region, regardless of all the efforts and incentives of the Guarany authorities.

Eastwards, touched by the Atlantic Ocean, were the only two independent States left of what had once been the vast and proud Brazilian Empire, remains of an age before the War of the Triple Alliance. Bigger and to the north, in a very deep cobalt blue (not to be confounded with the pale blue of the ocean), there was our Portuguese-speaking neighbor, the *República de Pernambuco*, the last military dictatorship remaining on the subcontinent. To the south, smaller, but richer and more industrialized (mainly, I'm forced to admit, due to the economic reforms imposed during Occupation) is Brazil. In pale green, our territory, that in former days occupied almost half the subcontinent, now reduced to its present size of little more than 1,000,000 square kilometers.

The work of art made me remember that other map. A two-dimensional figure composed by one of Project's subprograms from holographs generated by the temporal tracer. A different South America. A Brazil with a territory even bigger than in its Empire period.

A country with dimensions of a continent, but weak even so. A very poor country... It was inhabited predominantly by a hungry and ignorant people. An inhuman country, whose economics were based in capitalism in many respects more savage than the British Empire's in the middle of the last century. A Brazil whose resources and wealth were concentrated in the hands of very few people, in a situation without parallel in any country of our present world.

Brazil of a Earth that hadn't benefited from almost seventy years of *Pax Paraguaya*.

My musing was interrupted by a dry click from the door. I had locked it, but the knob was turning.

I hardly had time to stand before Silva and Pereira came into my cabin. Silva had a little automatic pistol, while the other man had his hands occupied with a tiny object, probably the one which had allowed them to disable the door's electronic lock. He put the item in his trousers pocket, commenting casually:

"These old locks are harder to open. Imagine, man, almost ten seconds to unlock it!"

Silva glanced at him angrily. He moved the barrel of his gun away from my head and pointed it at the bulkhead some inches to my right. It was a deliberate gesture, probably intended to make me feel more comfortable. "We urge you to stay calm, Mr. Oliveira. There isn't the least reason for you to be afraid. Both of us are Federal Police officers on duty." With his free hand he showed me a metallic plastic ID card, with Brazil's national symbols in relief and his color photo with his officer's insignia on his shoulders. "We intend solely to examine you and your documents."

"It's a simple routine," Pereira explained, blinking while he stretched his hand to close the door.

Everything happened so quickly, I didn't even notice when Hernandez came into the cabin.

I only know he must have crossed the room in a jump, before Pereira had time to close the door. I was alone with the two agents, and, in the next second, the D.G.I. officer was in the center of the cabin.

With incredible agility, he jumped over Pereira, like David against Goliath. With a kick in the face of the giant man, he knocked him down onto the cabin's carpet, where the agent lay stretched out.

The Paraguayan didn't have time to enjoy that victory. The tenth of a second he gave me, to assure me with a brief smile that he had everything under control, was put to use by Silva. As fast as the Paraguayan had moved, the federal hit the back of Hernandez's head with the butt of his gun. Hernandez fell down on his knees and, with a groan, he fell over Pereira, also unconscious.

"A fake executive of a Paraguayan state company come to help a Brazilian industrial." The agent didn't even try to pretend. He pointed the barrel of his pistol at my head. "It all seems very strange. I believe that perhaps my suspicions were not so illogical, were they, Professor?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I will complain to the captain for this unjustifiable behavior!" I knew the threat was ridiculous. In my defense, I can only claim I kept cool under the circumstances. Which was, in itself, very difficult.

"Certainly you will complain." The agent's voice revealed all his disdain. "Collaborationist!"

Even more than eighty years after the end of the Occupation, that was still a heavy insult. I felt the blood rush to my face, under the mask.

"Would you like to complain now, my friend?"

Silva and I looked at the door at the same time.

The captain had come silently into the cabin. He had a Paraguayan-made semi-automatic pistol in his right hand. The weapon was leveled at the agent's chest. Behind the captain, also holding weapons, were Hans and Inga Hoffmann.

Surprised and furious, Silva almost reacted. But, fortunately, he also noticed the German couple behind the captain. After one or two seconds in an apparent stalemate, he saw the determination under Daross' calm expression.

With a muttered insult, he lowered the weapon. Inga came closer, cautiously, and took the automatic pistol. Hans took a roll of synthetic cord from his pocket. In less than a minute, Silva was immobilized, tied to the armchair.

Hans and the captain struggled to take Pereira from under the D.G.I. officer to put him on the bed, where he was also tied. During that strenuous operation, Inga kept her little revolver trained on me.

* * *

When Hans had finished his work with the *neolo* cord, the captain pointed to Hernandez, who was still unconscious, and gave an order in German.

That put an end to any doubt. A person could believe that Ruiz Daross would be capable of betraying his Brazilian employers in favor of Paraguay. After all, that was his homeland. But I had not imagined that he would double-cross both countries for the Germans.

He must be of high rank in the German Secret Service, since he could give orders to agents native to the very Confederation. He shouldn't be, as a result of their damned *jus sanguinis*...

Hans brought an armchair from the next cabin. The Paraguayan officer was also tied.

"You can take off your mask, Professor Albuquerque." Daross was still sympathetic and sincere, although I considered him a turn-coat. What was his motivation? "You're among friends."

I took off my disguise carefully. I sighed in relief, not for freedom from the uncomfortable mask, but because I wouldn't be forced, as I had thought some minutes before, to return to Brazil to be judged for high treason.

"Do you intend to restrain me?"

"Of course not!" The indignation of the Inga Hoffmann, or whoever she was, seemed authentic. "We just want you to clear up some details about Project Chronos. After that, if you agree, we'll take you to the Confederation. It won't be easy, we can assure you. But if we succeed, you will be treated worthy of a scientist of your status, and have the ability to distinguish yourself again in theoretical physics."

"And what details do you want?" I tried not to feel enthusiastic. Apart from the language barrier, the Confederation would be perhaps a better adopted homeland than the Guarany Republic. In addition to the idea of living in the most prosperous capitalist power, my fellow citizens wouldn't consider me a collaborationist.

"Let's start from the beginning." The captain turned to the young lady and said in *Español*: "Heidl, please, show him the photograph."

Inga slowly took out a little envelope from her coat pocket. She handed it to me. Hesitating, I took the radiophoto out its wrapping.

A South American map. I looked quickly to the work on the bulkhead and then to the photo again.

The political divisions were wrong. It made the continent seem different from the one which really existed. Brazil occupied half the land area, keeping the Guianas, Suriname, Venezuela and the biggest part of Colombia, northwards of equator. All the lands south of the São Paulo state and the southern region of the *Protetorado del Mato Grueso*, added by the Guarany Republic after the War of the Triple Alliance, were also inside those enlarged Brazilian borders.

In that map even Paraguay seemed insignificant. The Protectorate, as well as the *República de Pernambuco*, did not exist. On the other hand, there was a sovereign Uruguay to the south of that gigantic Brazil. As for secondary differences, I noticed that the *República del Peru* had lost almost half of its territory to our country. (That is, it hadn't won it. After all, those were the lands the Peruvians had taken from a dying Empire, when the Brazilian, or even the Paraguayan, Army could do nothing about it.). Colombia was there without its Central America extension. According to a Project's associate historian, this part of Colombia had become an independent country with the aid of the United States of America!

Bolivia and *Confederación Argentina* were there, their territories considerably bigger. The *Confederación* spread from the south of Bolivia, which in our world is part of Paraguay, down to *Tierra del Fuego*, which it was sharing, somehow, with Chile.

The German spy services had done good work. I knew the security scheme of the Project facilities. It couldn't have been easy to take that photo.

"We know you have oriented the construction of some kind of temporal TV set, Professor Albuquerque." Daross kept his voice as calm and pleasant as always. "A very big apparatus, capable of showing past events, according to the reports sent by some of our agents."

Hans scratched his head and looked at his "wife" inquisitively. Daross continued.

"We do not understand, however, the origin of this photograph. According to our transmitted reports, the photographed hologram showed the inner classroom of a Brazilian school where, thirty years ago, a Geography class was taught. Can you explain the discrepancies of the map?"

"Some of our researchers came up with the possibility that the hologram could be part of a *ciência fictícia* movie with an alternate history plot." The young German seemed to believe this hypothesis.

Touché!

When I was in my early teens, I read all my grandfather's old Paraguayan pulps of *ciência fictícia*. The plots based on alternate timelines – where the divergence from one or several historical events in the past completely transformed the present – were really very interesting. That kind of plot was one of my favorites. I still remember a novel in which Paraguayans and Germans had lost the World War, giving the British Empire a chance to expand and absorb the whole Afro-Eurasian continent; there was also another story about a major change in the U.S. political attitude: the North Americans didn't have adopted a backward isolationism, they had chosen to exert its influence abroad instead, becoming the greatest world superpower.

Unfortunately, reality had overcome the prodigious imaginations of the more brilliant and creative *ciência ficción* authors. And it had happened in a surprising way.

4. Destructive Interference

After a long sigh, I started to explain.

"The temporal tracer didn't tune the past events of our own reality. From the multicontinuum point of view, it was as if this other reality emitted temporal flux signals of a higher intensity. No matter how often I have tried to analyze the phenomenon, I do not have, at this point, a definitive explanation to what caused it."

"Wouldn't you have at least some idea of what caused this... interference?" The term the captain used worked, although it was far from what one might wish regarding scientific rigor.

"I have an idea. Apparently, although it may seem strange, that alternate reality had a probability of occurrence higher than our own reality. Absurdly higher."

Forgetting the scientific training he probably had, Hoffmann became vehement, starting the same argument I'd tired of hearing from three or four brilliant physicists at USP.

"But our reality is the only one that is true!"

"That's right." I didn't give him the ironic smile that almost touched my lips. "From our view point, surely. The citizens of that alternate reality also consider themselves very real..."

"And they are, aren't they?"

How many times had I asked myself Inga/Heidi's pertinent question?

"As much as we are. We don't know how many different realities there are, but each of them is no doubt real in its own space-time structure. Through the tracer we couldn't visualize any one of them, not even ours. Nothing, except that alternate reality. This is because it was extremely more probable, even in relation to our own continuum. Besides, it is very near the reality we inhabit."

"I understand." Daross gave a deep breath and stared at the ceiling as if he were making a minute inspection of the cabin. "This queer map represents the South American continent as it really is, in its own reality, doesn't it?"

“Exactly. It’s no kind of *ciência fictícia*. We had thought it was at first. But that was before we consulted some authors, critics and scholars of the genre. None of them knew about a plot like that.

“It’s only a school map. We certified it was used in an ordinary classroom, in a parochial school of an inland town of Minas Gerais State, in 1964 of that reality.”

“How is that other reality different from ours?”

“They’re absolutely the same, up to a crucial point, where the divergence occurred. The total coincidence between the two historical lines prior to the point of divergence was exhaustively checked, studying the past directly, either in classrooms or in public libraries. All the historical events were in their places. The Egyptian Old Kingdom; the Greek-Persian wars; Rome and Byzantium; the Renaissance; West Europe’s maritime expansion; the independence of America’s colonies; the French Revolution; the Napoleonic Age and the Congress of Vienna; British capitalist imperialism and everything else. All the same. At least up to one point of divergence in the War of the Triple Alliance.”

“Lieber Gott!” Hans Hoffmann finally understood. “The Triple Alliance defeated Paraguay!”

I nodded. The woman was not satisfied and asked for details. I suspected that history had been her area before she went into the Service.

“I’m not a professional historian. I fear I can’t satisfy your curiosity about the details. But I’ll try. I believe you have already heard about the naval Battle of Riachuelo River, in the beginning of the war.”

I had read a lot in the last year.

In our reality, Paraguay had overwhelmingly defeated the Imperial Fleet, despite being numerically inferior. They had succeeded due to the use of a millennia old tactic, similar to the one used by Athens captains to destroy the Persian fleet at Battle of Salamis.

After advancing downstream at night, the Guarany Navy ambushed the more powerful Brazilian naval forces. Being smaller, more agile and specifically designed for outmaneuvering large ships in shallow river waters, the armed Paraguayan *chatas* defeated the Brazilian fleet when it was in the shallow waters near one of the banks. There, between the fire from the *chatas*, and the Guarany artillery, installed at the river bank, the bigger ships struck the sand-banks and became easy prey for a crude attack, or for the fire the Paraguayan sailors set in their wood hulls. Several high ranking officers, including an admiral, were captured or killed during this battle.

“Wasn’t this the victory that allowed Paraguay to keep control of the river access to the Atlantic Ocean?” The question Ruiz Daross posed was merely rhetorical. As a Paraguayan Navy officer, he should know the great events of the naval history of his people better than me. “If I remember correctly, that is how the one hundred thousand new European rifles, and the large caliber guns Solano López ordered from Krupp came to Paraguay some months later.”

I nodded. The *Espírito Santo*’s captain took my gesture an invitation to continue his explanation to the German couple.

“The Paraguayan Army was never as numerous as the strategists of the Brazilian Empire claimed. But they were the best trained troops of the hemisphere. Their morale was, understandably, very high. They were free and well nourished men fighting for their homeland, facing hungry slaves and miserable armies. During the war more soldiers were added to the Paraguayan forces. After several defeats, the former slaves of the Empire forces also deserted. By then, the veteran Paraguayans had enough know-how of warfare to give them efficient military training.”

The eyes of the German-Paraguayan shone intensely. He could be a double-crosser, but he venerated the martial prowess of López's armies as much as the most ardent Guarany patriot. He seemed more and more enthusiastic.

"Tens of thousands of American repeating rifles and small ironclad warships, constructed in French shipyards, were purchased on credit, due to commercial agreements established with Washington and Paris, just after the end of the American Civil War.

"But most important was the rising of a strong ruling class from the ranks of Paraguayan military, whose strength was due to the War. These officers kept the post-war Great Republic united under the authoritarian command of López, at least during that two-year period after the end of the conflict."

"Everything happened as you said, captain. In our Earth. But, in that alternate reality, the fleet commanded by Barroso succeeded in Riachuelo, isolating the Guarany government from all the external aid it needed and otherwise would have obtained.

"Of course, Paraguay wasn't defeated without a fight. It took almost an entire decade for it to be completely beaten. Its industrial park was methodically dismantled under English supervision. Three quarters of its population was exterminated during the war, in a genocide operation conducted by Brazilian officers."

"Unbelievable!" After all these months, I still felt myself able to share the repulsion and incredulity I saw in the young lady's face. "The most progressive country in South America, the motherland of the humanized industrial revolution and of socialism, totally destroyed!"

"Destroyed is a euphemism that does not describe the post-war Paraguayan situation. With few people, and large parts of its territory under a cruel military occupation, totally different than the Guarany occupation we know in Brazil, that alternate Paraguay could never recover itself, as nation and people."

"It's hard to imagine the world without the Paraguayan influence." The captain seemed ready to ask a great deal of questions. But, he asked only one. "Did the Brazilian Empire become a superpower or fall prey to British capitalism?"

"It became a republic about two decades after the final victory against Paraguay. However, the country is subordinated by foreign capitalism. At first, British capitalism and then North American. However, with all its problems, Brazil is far from being the worst country in that world. Believe it or not, that whole Earth is much worse than ours."

I thought of the conditions in which the poorest parts of the Brazilian population lived. I remembered the holograms of miserable families, living in fragile *barracos* on *carioca* hillsides, small huts whose walls were almost diaphanous. I remembered also the chronic hunger of a million citizens, due to a government that pretended to be unable to end the drought devastating a vast Brazilian region, which in our world was the irrigated *caatinga* of the *República de Pernambuco*.

My God, they did not stop themselves with the genocide of the Paraguayan nation... No! They also destroyed the native cultures when they insisted on the abominable policy of "civilizing" the indigenous tribes through a quartet of religion, alcohol, prostitution and disease.

How can I explain such horrors to someone, when I myself would have doubted everything if I haven't seen it?

With a lump in my throat, I continued.

"In this alternate reality, Brazil is the eighth world economy, in a planet where the United States of America and Japan, the two richest capitalist powers, have per capita incomes that are lower than that of the country where I was born."

"I can accept Japan as a superpower. But the United States?" The German woman gave me a skeptical glance. "They have the largest internal market in the world, and the greatest industrial park too. But, with that isolationism of theirs, and their backward technology and methods... How did they accomplish it?"

"As far as I recall, after defeating Spain in a war on the eve of twentieth century, the U.S. annexed several former Spanish insular colonies both in the Pacific Ocean and in the Caribbean Sea. I guess those extraterritorial interests prevent the Americans from closing themselves inside their large continental borders. Besides, in that alternate timeline there was not a strong and democratic Paraguay in the last quarter of the nineteenth century neither ready to serve the American economic interests, nor eager to wage all those small hemispherical wars for the U.S..."

"A world dominated by the North American capitalism", Ruiz Daross seemed just thinking aloud, "it doesn't sound feasible. How about the other nations?"

"In most countries, the riches are concentrated in the hands of a few powerful people, the majority of whom -- consciously or not -- serve economic interests that are anathema to the population's well-being and the development of its societies. Few Brazilians have even their basic necessities attended to."

I sighed and gathered all my courage to reveal my worst trauma with that other reality. The vision that was largely responsible for my decision to destroy the Project.

"Black and *mulatto* citizens are discriminated against in that Brazil. Earning very small wages, they are unimportant. But, worst of all, they have to survive in subhuman conditions of health, living and education. They aren't even able to make use of the small welfare that the State tries to force on them. It is a State with an economic model very different than the one the Paraguayans fortunately forced us to accept, after our defeat in the War of the Triple Alliance.

"By the way, there they call this conflict the *Paraguayan War*."

Silva was silent during my explanation. He did not threaten me as I had expected when I revealed his precious secrets to the German spies. In a depressed dumbness, he was aware of the information I gave the agents. He seemed frightened and completely exhausted, drained of the purpose that had, until then, kept his motivation. His black eyes were wide open, as if he were in a paralyzing panic.

Pereira was still unconscious. I noticed that his lips were bleeding and that his lower jaw was distorted, probably dislocated, and in such a position it seemed the agent had a dreadful grimace.

The Paraguayan officer, however, was conscious. A thin thread of blood was coming down from the top of his head, but he didn't seem to notice. He started to deny what I had revealed about the Project to Daross and the Germans. The Captain turned to Hoffmann. "Gag him."

"If the Guarany Republic did not exist during the World War, who helped Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, balancing the North American aid to the enemy?" The young lady had the quickness of mind to see the obvious.

"Nobody."

"Germany would have lost the War." The captain was as depressed as if it had occurred in our reality. I knew exactly how he felt. "And the German Confederation?"

"With the German defeat in the First World War, the Confederation was never created."

"First World War?" There was surprise in Hans Hoffmann's voice. "Do you mean there were more?"

"There was a Second War. Worse, far worse than the first one."

“And did this First War correspond to the world conflict we knew?” Even with these horrible revelations, Heidl's curiosity was insatiable.

“More or less. It lasted only four years, but ended badly. With the defeat, Germany entered a serious economic crisis. This crisis led to the rise of a dictator, a man who rebuilt the nation and the pride of its people. He militarized the State and led it to a new conflict, a conflict of greater proportions than the one before. Tens of millions of people died. And most were civilians.”

“And the present Germany?”

“Very poor by our standards, although it is one of the most developed nations of that nightmare Earth. It was unified under one government, after almost half a century of being divided into two separate countries.”

“And how about the rest of the world?,” Hoffmann asked, but he did not pay attention to the answer. He was relieved that his country had been spared, at least in comparison to its traditional ally.

I answered just because of my need to talk.

“There are countries that are rich and those that are very poor, and they are divided by an ever increasing abyss of deep and mutual incomprehension. There are no treaties that establish planetary political and economic unification, another sign of the lack of the *Pax Paraguaya*. Presently there are many regional armed conflicts, some of them of a separatist, ethnic or religious character. Until a few years ago, there was still the possibility of a global thermonuclear conflict, which certainly would have extinguished the human race.”

Ruiz Daross looked at me incredulously. “They wouldn't be so foolish. Only the lunar colonies and the Martian bases would survive...”

“There are no human beings off of Earth, in that reality. You must understand, that is a poor world. That other humanity is very underdeveloped in space technology and in related areas.”

The captain paced the cabin. He stopped in front of the framed map, looking at it as if to be sure of its reality. He looked thoughtful when he turned around and faced me.

“I still don't understand one thing. Of course the discovery of this grotesque and deformed alternate timeline left you traumatized. The same is happening with all of us, although we have not personally seen the events you described. It is perfectly acceptable for you to abandon the Project. But why escape from your country this way? And why does the Brazilian military consider you a traitor?”

I looked at the cabin's carpet, lacking the courage to face my questioners. My voice was only a murmur when I spoke.

“Because I have destroyed the possibility of going back to the past to alter it, to allow Brazil to win the War of the Triple Alliance.”

5. Direct Approach

“What?” Daross seemed astonished. “More *ciência fictícia*? If I understood our physicist's reports, time travel is impossible. Even the tracer can only allow to us see the past.”

“Not exactly impossible. The tracer can't be used for seeing a future that still isn't there. It could, after a series of modifications, work as a one direction time machine, to make a futurewards trip.”

"But you talked about trips to the past", claimed the German young man.

"It's a completely different matter. As it was proved many years ago, to go back to the past is a physical impossibility. The proof of this was the *Principle of Infinite Paradoxes*."

"Albuquerque's Law!" Hoffmann's shout was terrifyingly enthusiastic. Perhaps it had been only my perception. The truth is, I have always hated that designation.

Without seeing myself as overly pretentious, I have agreed since the beginning of my academic life with the group of scientists who believe it is deeply selfish and constraining, if not actually unethical, to call natural principles by the names of human beings, whether living or dead.

"There is, however, a special case in which a trip to the past would be theoretically possible. It could happen when there is the superposition of two very near alternate realities..."

"What do you mean, very near?"

Happy to have been interrupted by Heidi, I sighed heavily. Hans Hoffmann took the chance to explain to his colleague.

"The more similar two distinct realities or alternate timelines are, the nearer they are, mathematically speaking."

"Quite so." I dried the sweat on my forehead, although it was not hot. "According to our calculations, the superposition we detected would permit the transference, from one reality to the other, of a quantity of energy equivalent to a mass of 63 kilograms. If this transference had occurred from our present to the alternate reality's past it wouldn't be a violation of the P.I.P., since they are distinct space-time *continua*. The construction of another tracer would be necessary, however. This second tracer would have to be sealed in the interior of an electromagnetic bottle and sent into the solar atmosphere, because the terrestrial gravitational field is too weak to proportionate the temporal impedance rupture, an essential phenomenon to the transference for the past. Once in the past, a material body would decay from one reality to other."

"I'm not sure I understand the process", said the young lady.

Well, her strong point was history. Not all German spies received training in physical sciences nor were lovers of *ciencia ficción*... I don't know why, but I felt this little imperfection of the Confederation agents' training was acceptable.

Her supposed husband once more helped her.

"It's more or less as if these two realities were parallel roads. One of them is obstructed. It's still possible to go from point A to point B of the obstructed road. We have only to get off near A and take the other road, the one not obstructed. We would follow this new road up to B. There we would return to the original road."

I admired the young man. I couldn't have thought of a better analogy.

"You must have received very good scientific training, before you joined the German Secret Service..."

"Not in physics, professor." For the first time since my cabin's invasion, I saw Ruiz Daross laugh openly. "Hans Hoffmann, or better, Marcel Klein, has a doctor's degree in Literature in the area of *ciencia ficción*. He teaches *ciencia ficción* at the World University in Berlin, as well as being a well established writer in this literary specialty, under the pseudonym of Daniel Alvarez."

Of course I had heard of Daniel Alvarez. I liked his ingenious plots. Strange, I always thought he would be Paraguayan...

But Heidi wasn't satisfied.

"I don't understand why the Brazilian government wants to alter our reality. Humanity would continue, surely, but all individuals would cease to exist, being replaced by other, different individuals."

"Our Secretary of War was perfectly aware of that. But he had a dream. He's a fanatical patriot. A mad man, in some aspects worse than that Hitler of yours."

"Who?"

"Forget it. I'm making a mess." When I noticed they hadn't understood, I translated. "I'm mixing up the two distinct realities. Hitler was the dictator I told you about. The one who led the alternate Germany to the Second World War."

"It still seems hard to believe."

The most tragic thing was, I recognized captain's words as my own.

In that point I resolved not to mention Lenin, Stalin and all those butchers much worse than Hitler. The men who had destroyed the very opportunity to create a world of socialist peace and prosperity even better than ours. Those idiot Russians had thought their absurd genocidal totalitarian regime was *socialism!*

I decided to clarify the matter.

"Many Brazilians would be called upon to sacrifice their own existence, and that of their already born and future offspring, to make their country the bigger power in the subcontinent."

"Absurd! That's irrational..." As German-Paraguayan, Captain Daross could never fully understand how hard Brazil's defeat in the War of the Triple Alliance had been.

The common Brazilian firmly believes that, if Brazil had won the conflict, it would occupy Paraguay's exact place as hegemonic power on the world scene.

"I know it sounds absurd. I saw what's going on in that Brazil and I didn't have the least desire to transform my country into that nation full of ignorant and hungry people. A country ruled for more than a century either by dictators or by corrupt and megalomaniac politicians that are intimately involved with the forces they swore to combat."

I observed the Germans to see if they had understood. I looked at Silva, who stayed silent, looking as if he had suffered a World Cup defeat. Hernandez was calm. His eyes sparkled, as he seemed to ponder the situation, but they were always fixed on me, even when I was not speaking.

But it was the Brazilian agent who asked me to continue. I nodded, surprised.

"The Secretary of War and his followers couldn't see the obvious. They only thought of a Portuguese-speaking country occupying more than eight million square kilometers. They dove into the dream, and were about to drown everything civilization had accomplished in the last one hundred and twenty years."

"We'll alert the Confederation leaders." Ruiz Daross seemed as if he had woken from a trance. "We'll prevent at any cost Brazil's launching space probes that can reach Mercury's orbit."

"There is no need to be afraid. The superposition between the two realities doesn't exist any longer. It was destroyed when I sent more than 60 kilograms of water from the sports center pool to the alternate future."

"How?", the history specialist asked. "Wasn't something near the Sun necessary to do this?"

"No. A tracer over the Sun would be necessary to emit mass to the alternate past. But, our facilities weren't capable of emitting anything. I knew a forced emission would probably destroy the majority of the equipment. The tracer itself was ruined. Five people died during the explosion that followed the transmission. Some were friends of mine. I feel sorry for all them, but can't regret what I've done."

"They can make another probe..." The young lady's statement reminded me of the persistence of my granddaughter, a precocious little child.

"It doesn't matter. If they make it again, they will only be able to focus on our reality's good old past. The very past that we could not see. As I've said, the superposition was eliminated. The direction of the energy emission didn't matter. Once the 60 kilograms were emitted, the two realities become impermeable one to another."

To help his fake wife, Hoffmann/Klein/Alvarez explained:

"The P.I.P. applies to our own reality, so that is impossible for any experiment to manipulate the past."

Silva sighed, relaxing. The three Confederation agents stayed silent during the longest five minutes of my life. They seemed to be slowly digesting the information. After a while, the two Germans looked at the captain and he nodded. He said apologetically.

"I hope you understand, Professor. To guarantee your security, we'll be forced to submit these two Brazilian federal policemen to a little brain washing. They will suffer permanent amnesia concerning the last two or three days."

"Is it really necessary? It seems so brutal."

"A drastic solution, doubtless. But it's preferable to simply killing them." Daross knew how to be persuasive.

"And how about *mayor Hernandez*?"

"The Gran República and the Confederation have been allies for more than eighty years. Besides, in this particular matter, we don't have conflicting interests." He made a gesture to Klein, ordering him to release the Paraguayan.

Hernandez stood up from the uncomfortable armchair, cautiously exercising his sleeping muscles. He put his left hand on his head, and it appeared that he had just noticed the wound he suffered from the Brazilian agent's weapon. He groaned very low, making an effort to keep his poise and dignity.

* * *

The Paraguayan officer cracked his knuckles. He started to say something, but was interrupted by a brusque gesture from the captain, who asked silence from the others.

Daross seemed to be trying to hear something. We could almost hear the soft breaks of the paddle-wheels in the Paranapanema waters...

"The motor is not running!" There was tension in the captain's voice. He looked at the Brazilian agent inquisitively and turned to the German agent. "Marcel, go and check what's happening."

"This is fishy, *Señor capitán*. It seems like a Brazilian scheme", said Hernandez, calmly smoothing down his little mustache. "I wouldn't doubt that there are marines on board."

Daross looked at him furiously, as if the Paraguayan were responsible for the stopping of his vessel.

But Hernandez was right.

Less than one minute later, Klein came back. He was escorted by two men, wearing *Espírito Santo* wine uniforms and a brunette woman, coldly beautiful, disguised as maid.

They had *Taurus* 9 millimeter pistols trained on us.

The men and the woman saluted the tied agent, but they never took their eyes off their five prisoners. The military posture of the three was more formal and rigid than that of the federal agents. They maintained an elaborately arrogant gait, clashing with their wet hair.

The woman pushed Klein and he tumbled over. She said in Portuguese:

“Put your weapons down. I suggest you don't try to resist. We have the situation under control.” She looked at each one of us, as if she were assuring we understood her. “Just for your information, there are marines on the bridge, in the propulsion room and on the starboard and port decks.”

The Germans looked at Daross and he nodded. The three put their revolver and pistols down, throwing them over the cabin carpet.

The “maid” made some gestures to her followers. One of the “stewards” collected the weapons and put them inside a bag he wore over his chest, which totally clashed with the rest of his disguise. She pointed to the German and to Silva.

Klein turned to the captain, who almost imperceptibly nodded.

When Silva at last stood up, the three new arrivals drew up into a line, their weapons still pointed at us. The brunette saluted again and shouted harshly:

“Major Gonçalves, sir. Lieutenant Ferret, Sergeant Avelar and Corporal Moura, Destruction Group Divers of Marine Corps at your command.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.” Silva responded to the salute calmly. He accepted a German pistol one of the marines handed him and turned to us, asking wearily: “Senhor. Oliveira and *Señor* Hernandez, please untie Lieutenant Marques.”

Hernandez and I exchanged glances, not understanding. Silva, Gonçalves or whoever he was, was using our fake names. While we untied the unconscious agent, the marine-lieutenant gave her superior a brief report.

“We are with the *Tietê* submarine moored at starboard, half-ship, one meter under the water line. We have all important posts of the vessel under control. Most of the crew have been subdued. The majority of the passengers are unaware of what's going on...”

The marine interrupted herself, absorbed, as if distracted by something. She put her finger tips to her right ear, listening to the low buzz of an unidirectional auricular. After some seconds, she continued:

“Captain Barbosa asks you to take the traitor aboard as soon as possible.”

My time had come. Deep in my heart I always knew I would be captured and returned to Brazil. There, before my trial, I would certainly be exposed to public castigation. I would pay for the crime of having saved civilization, not only with my existence, but with my honor. My untouched reputation would soon be reduced to debris.

"The Federal Police major looked at me. In his intense expression I saw an extreme effort to make a decision that perhaps would break his cultural conditioning concerning the concepts of right and wrong.

"Very good work, Ferret." His voice was calm and tranquil. But his eyes told another story. "There was, however, a mistake. This man isn't Professor Albuquerque Vieira."

I hardly believed what I heard.

"But, sir, he looks very much like the photographs we examined before the mission"

"Surely. That was precisely what made me transmit the message saying I found the turn-coat."

"Sir! Your report asserted that the suspect used a disguise." The marine was confused. What the major said didn't match the information she had received. However, Gonçalves was a Federal Police officer. He was above questioning. The rules were very explicit: his orders should not be pondered, only executed.

"Never mind now. It must have been a fault in your communication chain." Gonçalves gave additional force to his argument with an indifference that showed incredibly cool blood. "Later, we will find who was responsible for this mistake."

"Affirmative, sir. Of course." The marine lieutenant swallowed. "And what about these three? Why have they tied Lieutenant Marques?"

"The loving couple, as I suspected, belongs to the German Secret Service. The *barcaza's* captain is a double agent paid by the German Confederation. We had a small skirmish in this cabin and, as you can see, we lost. The others are *Senhor* Antonio de Oliveira, a Paulistan industrialist to whom we must apologize for all this confusion, and *Señor* José Hernandez, a *Compañía del Petróleo del Paraguay* official. I had already checked their identities. They are exactly what they seem."

"Very well, sir. Should we eliminate the Confederate spies?"

"That's our first instinct, isn't it?" I shuddered at Gonçalves' cold-blood. But he seemed to know the ground he was treading. "But we can't, at least in this case, act on it. It would draw attention to this boarding operation, an additional complication that could impair the hunting of the actual traitor.

"You're right, Major. I'll tell the brain washer to erase their memories of our presence."

"Negative, Lieutenant. We have already wasted too much time. Put all of them in the bathroom and lock the door. By the time they get out, we'll be on board your submarine. Let's leave to *Itamaraty* any possible diplomatic troubles."

"Good idea, sir." The Lieutenant ordered her men to put us in the small cabin bathroom. From inside, I could still hear her commands. "Moura, call someone to help you conduct Lieutenant Marques to *Tietê*."

"I can conduct him alone, Chief."

Before they closed the bathroom door, Gonçalves came near me and, pretending to respectfully push me to the bathroom as someone might apologize to a trustworthy fellow citizen, he put his hand over my shoulder and whispered in my ear:

"Take care of yourself, Professor. And never come back to Brazil."

"Thanks for everything," I whispered to a closed door.

* * *

"That Gonçalves wasn't a bad character", Hernandez commented while he tried to open the door with a piece of metallic plastic that Klein and Daross had taken off the bathroom cabinet.

"Really a man of character." The captain's agreement attracted the sneering look of his German subordinates. "For a Brazilian, I mean."

"The fact is, he set a price on his head for me." I felt it necessary to remind them.

"Oh, it seems the Professor doesn't know yet how Brazil is! He's gonna get out of this situation pretty easily... Am I saying it right?" While he was trying to play with a slangy Brazilian Portuguese, the *mayor* got the door to unlock. The lock turned and the door opened completely. Fortunately, it was not an electronic lock, just a mechanical one.

Once free, Heidi asked:

"And now, Professor? I believe *Señor* Hernandez won't argue if you decide to come with us to the Confederation."

I thought again of that terrible Brazil, in that world of nightmares. There, a black or a *mulatto* would be always a second class citizen.

In the German Confederation I would receive very different treatment.

But I did not have any illusions about it. They are usually irredeemable racists. But, in all modesty, I have a reputation strong enough to open all the doors of the academic and scientific worlds and let me access the majority of social circles.

I could, of course, close my eyes. To make a pact with the prejudice against other blacks. A prejudice not institutionalized, but always present. Doubtless they would give me due respect. Not because they would judge me as a human being and, in this way, someone who deserved it. But because they considered me a genius.

A genius?

If I were as intelligent as people thought, I wouldn't have gotten into the mess of Project Chronos.

After I saw those things in the tracer holograms, something had broken inside me. It was no longer possible for me to accept racial discrimination or any other form of prejudice that exists in our reality.

But people are not, nor have ever been, here or there, forced to close their eyes.

The Guarany Republic had accepted in its territory, enlarged after its victory in the War, all the black people that wanted to emigrate, after they had abolished slavery in the defeated nation. Once in their adopted country, the former slaves received territorial ownership attestations in fertile lands and, with those attests, they earned all the rights and duties inherent to full Paraguayan citizenship status.

Yes. I'd made my decision.

It didn't matter if my fellow citizens would consider me a traitor. I kept faithful to my personal ethics and always tried to do the right thing.

"I am very sorry. I consider myself rather honored by your invitation, but I can't accept it."

The Germans and the captain accepted my refusal with composed resignation. Hernandez smiled and flushed with joy, as a child who has just won a new computer game. He kept patting my back, a gesture he probably considered friendly.

"OK, Hernandez. Let's go to Porto Alegre."

"Ciudad de López!", he corrected, smiling.

"Whatever you say."

I think the Paraguayans are right when they say we have difficulty accepting a few historical *fait accompli*. The Secretary of War is only a severe case of this disease that affects, to a greater or lesser degree, all the Brazilian people. At least every Brazilian of our reality.

"I suppose I'll have to direct the construction of a new tracer, before your *gobierno* leaves me alone with my space-time warp equations..."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, my very dear Professor. But I have now noticed your knowledge and your celebrated intellect are not limited to theoretical physics."

"You know very well where to put this celebrated intellect, don't you?"

"Oh, the insuperable Brazilian sense of humor. What's the value of a mere victory in a past century's small war, before this wonder? An authentically holy gift!"

I was sure that it would be a very long trip.



Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro had two novelettes published in Brazilian Asimov's: hard SF "Mythic Aliens" and "The Ethics of Treason", the latter was the first alternative history story in Brazilian and Portuguese science fiction. His awarded SF novelette "The Daughter of the Predator" was published in *Sci Fi News Contos*. His

main short fiction collection are: *Other Histories...*, *The Vampire of New Holland*, *Other Brazils* and *Taikodom: Chronicles*. Gerson published two novels so far: alternative history *Xochiquetzal: An Aztec Princess Among the Incas* and erotic science fiction *The Guardian of Memory*. He edited four short fiction anthologies: *Phantastica Brasileira*, *How Lustful my Alien Girl Was!*, *Vaporpunk* and *Dieselpunk*.

About my short-story:

When I first conceived the alternate timeline of the novelette "The Ethics of Treason" in the late 1980's, there was not alternate history fiction written by Lusophone authors. In fact, there was not even the expression "alternate history" in Portuguese.

As I wished to write alternate history fiction, I should start from scratch. Being a lover of this subgenre, I contemplated the main themes of alternate history fiction in American and British literatures. Even without Uchronia (for this alternate history list didn't exist yet), I noticed that, besides World War II's alternative results, one of the most popular AH themes is the Alternate American Civil War. The choice of that theme makes sense from a North American standpoint, because the ACW was the major military conflict that changed everything and reformed the U.S.A. as a new and better nation.

So, I thought, mutatis mutandis, from a Brazilian viewpoint, as the greatest conflict in the South America history, the War of Paraguay could become a mother lode for Brazilian alternate history stories.

Well, in our timeline, Empire of Brazil, Republic of Argentina and Republic of Uruguay established a triple alliance to fight against expansionist Paraguay, then ruled by Francisco Solano López, a dictator who thought of himself as "Napoleon of the Americas". After some initial victories (in fact, Paraguayan armies invaded two Brazilian provinces fairly far from each other), the Allies succeeded in turning the tide of war against López. Even so, the conflict lasted more than five years (1864-1870) and, when it finally ended, Paraguay was severely depopulated and its

economy was utterly destroyed.

Back to the alternate history front, the most radical divergence in the War of Paraguay would be a Triple Alliance defeat, for its sheer improbability in real life. In fiction, however, implausibility usually generates very fine stories, provided that the writer succeeds in suspending his reader's disbelief. Considering these two issues, I postulated a hypothetical Paraguayan naval victory in the Battle of Riachuelo at 1865 as the point of divergence in my Pax Paraguaya alternate timeline. From that divergence, I built my alternate historical line to the 21st century.

*"The Ethics of Treason" is an alternate present novelette, in the sense that its action happens in 1994. It was published for the first time in a Portuguese science fiction anthology in 1992. In the following year, it was published in Brazilian edition of Asimov's. At last, in 2006, it appeared in my alternate history short fiction collection *Outros Brasis* ("Other Brazils").*

This alternate present story shows the moral dilemma of a Brazilian scientist on the run after being forced to choose between his patriotic duty and his compulsion to act ethically towards humankind as a whole.

Perhaps some prospective readers think "The Ethics of Treason" has a spoiler inside its very title. I tend to disagree with this view, because, as this particular issue is solved in the first paragraphs of the novelette, I don't consider it constitutes a spoiler at all.

Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro

Rio de Janeiro City, June, 2012.

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THE ISF TEAM

I'm a 24 years old Portuguese Trainee Lawyer with a tremendous passion for Speculative Fiction. I have created a Portuguese e-zine called "Correio do Fantástico" in 2008 and edited two Portuguese fanzines/magazines called "Dagon" and "Conto Fantástico". I also edited "Vollüspa", a recent anthology of Portuguese Speculative Fiction featuring 15 authors.



EDITOR IN CHIEF

Ricardo Loureiro (Portugal)

So, a phone call later and I was left with the dreaded mission of writing a bio and, worse, pick a photo of me.

Well, I wouldn't go so far as saying that along with watching paint dry and grass grow that may well be the most boring stuff anyone could ask of me but it surely it's not far away from being that.

Usually I take out my satirical hat and promptly make something up along the lines of being someone up to no good. Strangely for this project I felt that was not the right approach and after a lot of brainstorming with me and myself I came up with the solution.

Incredibly I decided to play it safe and, for once, tell the truth. Or at least as near to the truth as anyone will ever get from me.

So, without further ado here it is. Born in the year of the Monkey, anyone knows me can surely attest to the fact that from all the animals, monkey is the most suitable to describe me. Always swinging from tree to tree, always looking for another prank, always making fun of everything and making a habit of taking everything in superficially as possible. Well that describes me. As much as the iceberg we see above the waters describes the real iceberg beneath those same waters. Because, you see, being a cynical, satirical, incredibly nauseating son of a bitch is only a third of what I am. The other two thirds you'll have to discover through my work and what better place to judge it than right here at ISF?



FICTION EDITOR

Fábio Fernandes is a SFF writer and translator living in São Paulo, Brazil. His short fiction in Portuguese has won two Argos Awards in Brazil. In English, he has several stories published in online venues in the US, the UK, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, and Brazil. He also contributed to Steampunk Reloaded, Southern Weirdo: Reconstruction, and The Apex Book of World SF Vol. 2. Co-editor (with Djibril al-Ayad) of We See a Different Frontier, an upcoming anthology of colonialism-themed speculative fiction from outside the first-world viewpoint for The Future Fire Magazine. Fernandes translated to Brazilian Portuguese several SFF essential works, such as Neuromancer, Snow Crash, A Clockwork Orange, Boneshaker, The Steampunk Bible, and is currently working on the translation of Robert Jordan's A Wheel of Time. His articles and reviews have appeared in The Fix, Fantasy Book Critic, Tor.com, and SF Signal. Personal blog: The Cogsmith (<http://thecogsmith.blogspot.com/>). witter: @fabiofernandes



NONFICTION EDITOR

Joana Fernandes (Portugal) Since I was born, 27 years ago, I've been passionate by literature. Now I decided to use my professional skills spreading the work of unknown authors. I studied journalism and worked on a national Radio for a short time. Now, I'm Project Coordinator on a Communication and Events Agency. I'm currently working on a book that should be released by the end of this year and that I wish can be a very personal tourist guide of Rio de Janeiro.



POD CAST DIRECTOR

Cristian Tamaş is a romanian essayist, translator and SF fan active within the speculative fiction domain since the 80s. He was founding member of the Romanian Science Fiction & Fantasy Society (SRSFF = Societatea Română de Science Fiction & Fantasy, www.srsff.ro/) in January 2009, and coordinated the ProspectArt, the SRSFF's SF club relaunched in April 2009 in Bucharest (Romania), and the yearly Ion Hobana Colloquium. He is a member of the Ion Hobana and a SRSFF's jury Awards. He is also Editor of „Bella Proxima”, a trilingual croatian SF anthology, together with Antuza Genescu and Aleksandar Žiljak (Eagle Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012). He had interviewed David Brin, Prof. Rachel Haywood Ferreira (Division Head of the International Fantastic division of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, Iowa State University, USA ; research focus is Latin American science fiction), Prof. Arielle Saiber (Bowdoin College, USA; research focus : italian science fiction), Mariano Martín Rodríguez (SF scholar, Spain), Alexandre Babeanu (Solaris awarded canadian SF author), Ugo Bellagamba (french SF author awarded with Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire & Prix Rosny), and Judit Lörintzy, an interview that will be published in the first number of ISF magazine (hungarian SF author).



INTERVIEWER



Alexandra Rolo was born in the great year of 89, in Lisbon and is a history college student that always loved to try new things, to write poetry and, more recently, to write short stories. She is a bookworm and a blogger also known as Pantapuff. She was always curious about social networks, and manages several Facebook accounts, she also collaborates with a few other blogs besides her own. She might be the one who caused the death of some blogs, but, so far, there aren't any proofs of that. She is one of the founders of a Portuguese Webzine (Nanozine) and the author of a couple of poetry books. Usually she can be seen with phones in her ears and her kindle in one hand while the other has her cell phone, that one day might be seen flying out of some window.

EDITOR OF THE OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE:

Hi my name is Rafael Mendes, also known as Designed Head. I'm Portuguese and I'm 16 years old. I've been working as a freelance Digital Artist for 5 years now and I am about to graduate as a Digital Artist student. I love all about design, 3d models and cinematography. I have worked with Roberto in many projects, such as "Dagon Magazine", "Vollüspa – Anthology of Portuguese Speculative Fiction", "Conto Fantástico Magazine" and more. I'm happy to be invited to this project and I will surely give my best to bring success to it.



HEAD DESIGNER



João Paulo Sinal
I'm a 29 year old Communication Designer student and a corporal at the Portuguese Air Force. I was in the start team of "Correio do Fantástico" with Roberto Mendes but never got really into the Project due to massive life changing events. I like photography, digital painting and anything that relates with new Technologies. I'm very curious about everything and I'm a self teaching student in terms of software and hardware. Roberto invited me for this new Project and, although I'm dead with work from the degree, I'm going to do everything I can to contribute to the success of his new project.

HEAD DESIGNER

Ana Ferreira (Magazine Designer)
Ana Ferreira (also known around the internet as Adeselna Davies), is a Portuguese, English and German teacher that started in the magazine business as a slush reader for the Portuguese webzine "Nanzine". Eventually she took over the design section and is now preparing an edition dedicated to Steampunk. Besides designing, Ana writes mostly short-fiction as a hobby and keeps the tradition of starting stories, but refuses to finish them. She maintains her blog "Illusionary Pleasure" dedicated to book reviews of every genre written in Portuguese. As inspiration, a lesbian Swiss writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach is always mentioned, as well as the Pre-Raphaelite and German expressionism period.



MAGAZINE DESIGNER



I'm Ana Raquel (or Tomoyo, how some may know me from the Web) and I'm 21 years old. I have a degree in Education, but didn't fit in that area so I'm currently studying Communicational Science. My first contact with the magazine world was with "Waribashi", a Portuguese e-zine about Japanese culture (with which I'm completely passionate about). I wrote articles and helped in the organization. I love reading, specially the Fantastic and Historical Romance, but I'm not very good at writing (seeing as I never seem to be able to finish any story I start).

SLUSH READER

Ana Cristina Rodrigues (Brazil) also as slush reader

Ellen Datlow has been editing science fiction, fantasy, and horror short fiction for over thirty years. She was fiction editor of OMNI Magazine and SCIFICTION and has edited more than fifty anthologies, including the annual The Best Horror of the Year, Darkness: Two Decades of Modern Horror, Naked City: Tales of Urban Fantasy, Blood and Other Cravings, Supernatural Noir, Teeth: Vampire Tales, and After: Dystopian and Post-apocalyptic Tales (the latter two young adult anthologies with Terri Windling). She's has won nine World Fantasy Awards, and has also won multiple Locus Awards, Hugo Awards, Stoker Awards, International Horror Guild Awards, Shirley Jackson Awards, and the 2012 Il Posto Nero Black Spot Award for Excellence as Best Foreign Editor. Datlow was named recipient of the 2007 Karl Edward Wagner Award, given at the British Fantasy Convention for "outstanding contribution to the genre" and was honored with the Life Achievement Award given by the Horror Writers Association, in acknowledgment of superior achievement over an entire career.

She lives in New York. More information can be found at www.datlow.com or at her blog: <http://ellen-datlow.livejournal.com/>. You can also find her on twitter.



Paul Di Filippo began reading science fiction at the age of five, when he encountered his first Mighty Mouse comic. He published his first story in 1977, and has since become responsible for thirty books under his byline. He hopes to keep at this game for some time yet. His tastes in fantastika are omnivorous.

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Authors: Aliete de Bodard (France), Cristian Mihail Teodorescu (Romania), Cristian Tamas (Romania), Fábio Fernandes (Brazil), Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro (Brazil), Judit Lörinczy (Hungary).

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