

Sci Phi Journal

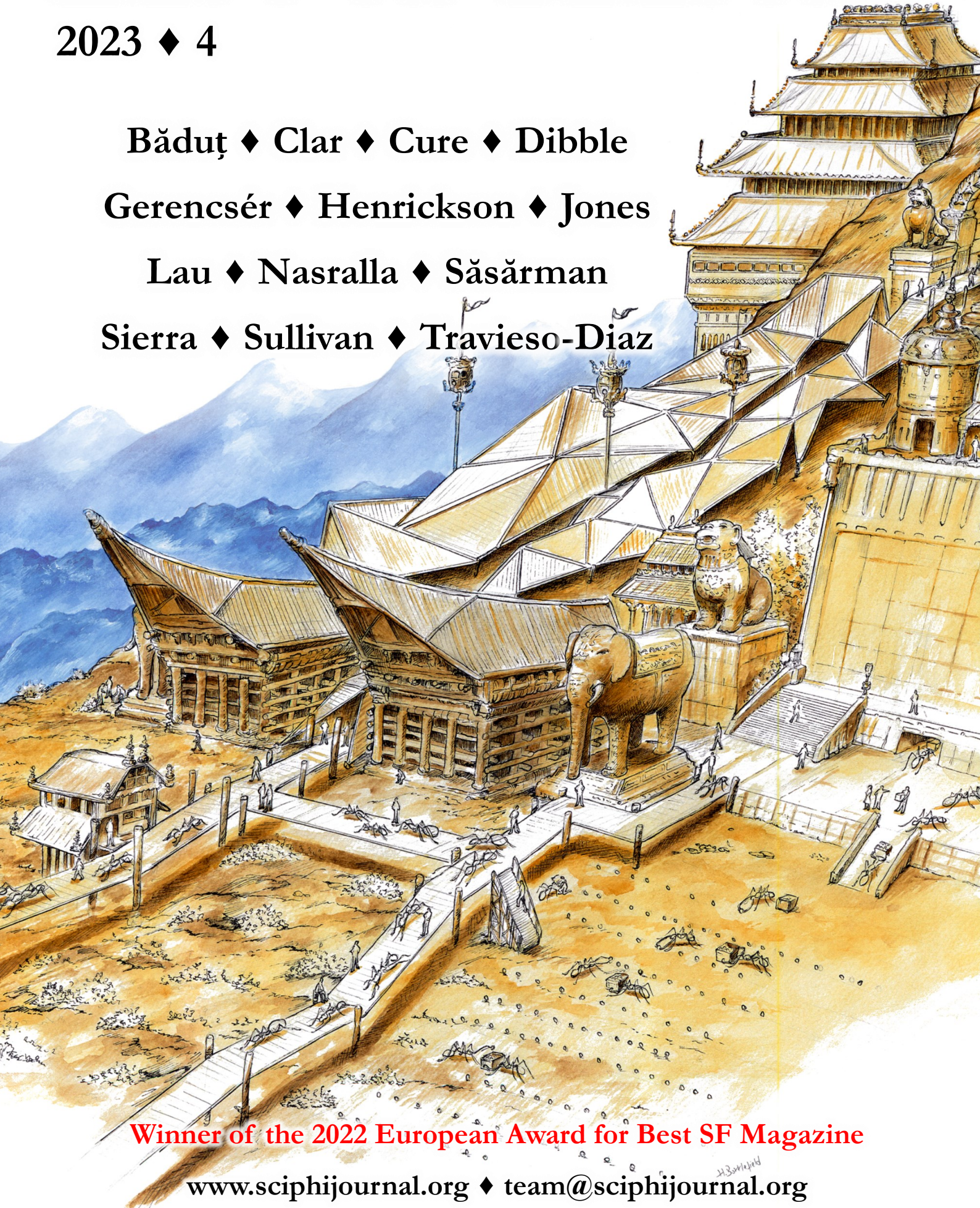
2023 ♦ 4

Băduț ♦ Clar ♦ Cure ♦ Dibble

Gerencsér ♦ Henrickson ♦ Jones

Lau ♦ Nasralla ♦ Săsărman

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Editorial

Lectori salutem.

Welcome to our 2023 Winter edition.

How time flies! T'is the fifth instance already that we write these words of introduction against the background of the Advent season, with Sinterklaas celebrations in Belgium and preparations afoot for Christmas and its sibling yuletide holidays.

“Alas, one cannot shake the feeling that it is not entirely appropriate for a publication dedicated to SF, a genre most commonly associated with the future, to avert its gaze towards the sentimentality of the path already travelled. Yet with the approach of the festive season, we permit ourselves this small indulgence.”

The above lines are quoted verbatim from the first winter editorial we had penned as co-editors back in 2019 – in a world before COVID-19, war on Europe’s Eastern frontier and the advent of generative AI. It almost feels like an alternate reality to our own.

Yet, undeterred, *Sci Phi Journal’s* present issue intends to do just that – transport you to alternate realities which, even if they do not always take themselves entirely seriously, provide ample food for thought and, may we say, speculation. The original fiction created by our merry band of authors range from mathematical and theological conundrums to legal fantasy and epic world-building, complimented by another hitherto unpublished imaginary city by Săsarman. The selection is rounded off by two essays on the relationship between science-fiction and music, and the narrative potential of strategic (war) games, respectively.

So it appears befitting to recourse back to our erstwhile editorial in order to quote its parting words (with merely the markers of time removed):

“The entire team thanks you for your companionship along the journey and looks forward to sailing forth to bring you more cutting-edge philosophical speculation.

We wish all our readers, authors and contributors a merry Christmas and an auspicious start into the New Year!”

So say we all.

Speculatively yours,

the Sci Phi co-editors & crew

~



No Room At The Infinity Inn

Richard Lau

Joseph had never seen Bethlehem so crowded. It seemed like an endless number of people was packed in the streets and surrounding structures.

But he had more important things on his mind. His pregnant wife Mary was about to give birth, and he could not find a place of sufficient space and privacy.

"I'm sorry, sir," apologized the front desk clerk, "as I said, we have no rooms available. They are all filled."

"How can they all be filled?" demanded the expectant father-to-be. "This is the Infinity Inn! It's known for having an infinite number of rooms!"

"That's true," admitted the clerk. "Unfortunately, at this time of year, especially during the census, we have an infinite number of guests!"

"But..." started Joseph, struggling to picture that many people in a head whose capacity was twenty.

Beside him, Mary took a deep breath and released a slow, smooth sigh. She was well-aware of her husband's penchant for stubborn argument and unnecessary discourse, particularly when he was tired and under pressure.

Joseph continued. "Doesn't having so many guests make taking a census impossible?"

The clerk thought for a moment and then nodded. "That does make it more difficult. And the task does seem to take a while. But who can say when one census ends and the next one begins?"

Joseph was about to argue the point when his wife's elbow nudged a familiar area in his ribcage.

Joseph leaned forward. "Well, we don't have an infinite amount of time. Can't you see my wife is pregnant?"

"Yes," acknowledged the clerk. "Congratulations."

"So, we really need a room."

"I am not disagreeing with your need, sir. I am just unable to fulfill your request."

Joseph tried another approach. “Wait a minute. In order to have an infinite amount of rooms, you have to be adding rooms constantly, otherwise you’d just end up with a finite number, isn’t that correct? It would be a rather large finite number but still finite!”

“True,” agreed the clerk, nodding his head. “We do have the continuous construction of new rooms. Fortunately, the guests don’t seem to mind the noise.”

“So, give us one of those rooms,” insisted Joseph. “One of the new additional rooms you’re adding.” He gave a “know-it-all” and “I-told-you-so” look at his wife.

She frowned, holding her protruding belly. Of all the inopportune times for her headstrong husband to get into a one-upmanship contest!

“I have to apologize again, sir,” said the clerk. “We have a waiting list for those rooms, and it is infinitely long. We can add you to the list, but it could take a while before we can get you a room, and, as you say, I’m not sure if your wife has that much time.”

Mary tugged on her husband’s sleeve, but Joseph had thought of yet another angle.

“All we need is one room,” Joseph said. “I’m sure with the infinite number of guests here, you’ll be able to find two guests willing to share a room for the good of a woman about to be in labor.”

The clerk at least tried to look sympathetic. “That may be so, but we’d have to speak with each guest until we find one who wants to move and then we’d have to continue contacting guests until we find one who wants to share their room. It is already too late to disturb our guests. And even if we tried, it could take quite a while until we found a compatible pairing. Plus, most of the guests might figure like you that with an infinite number of guests, some other guest might be more agreeable to moving or sharing, so why should they?”

Joseph had one last idea. “Look, with an infinite number of guests, you must have an infinite number checking out, right? Why can’t we have one of those recently vacated rooms?”

“My apologies again, Mr. Joseph,” said the desk clerk, “but along with an infinite number of departures, we also have an infinite reservation list for those vacated rooms.”

Joseph had a sudden epiphany: that at the Infinite Inn, the desk clerk also had an infinite number of rebuttals to whatever Joseph proposed.

Sullenly, the tired and worn-down husband turned to his wife and sadly confessed, "The manger it will have to be."

An exasperated Mary, thrilled that her husband had finally had a change of heart and had seen the light, cried "Thank God!"

"Good luck getting there," said the desk clerk rather snappishly.

Joseph had reached the end of his rope and was spoiling for a fight. "What is that supposed to mean? The manger is just down the street from your so-called infinite establishment!"

"Yes," admitted the clerk. "But before you reach the manger, you must first go half the distance to the manger. And before you even reach that point, you must first traverse the halfway point between here and the halfway point to the manger. And go half that distance. And half that distance. And so on and so on. Each step covering an infinitely smaller distance.

"You have quite a journey ahead of you, sir. Good luck and good night."

However, Mary and Joseph did manage to make it to the manger, where their baby was born.

It was indeed a time for miracles.

~



The Book With All The Ring's Marvels

Arturo Sierra

It is a well understood fact of galactic sociology that any civilization with the resources, know-how, and time to build a ringworld has no need to do so. Consequently, those that embark upon this kind of colossal engineering are considered eccentric. Other, saner civilizations do well by evading the freaks and coming up with unexpected reasons for a tour of the Magellanic clouds. Any excuse to avoid contact with the weirdos.

The best that can be said for megastructures is that they serve as great tourist attractions, once the builders vanish into oblivion, as inevitably happens; well worth the centuries of interstellar travel it takes to visit the sites. For some can be found here and there, however frowned upon they might be: Dyson spheres, matrioshka brains, Shkadov thrusters, and, of course, ringworlds. Strewn at random across the Galaxy, they are most often abandoned, crumbling ruins, the surrounding debris all that remains of the foolhardy engineers. It's just that, as galactic years go by, and then the galactic centuries, ennui starts to seep into even the most sensible of cultures. It becomes the driving force in a society that has moved post-scarcity and then post that, too. Some civilizations find themselves with little argument to avoid eccentricity and come up with radical purpose.

Such is the case of the Milotans, in the Perseus arm of the Milky Way. Traditionally thought to be a dignified species by other galactic powers, nobody foresaw them suddenly deciding to dismantle planets and rearrange them in a neat circle around their star. The first time anyone heard of this insanity outside the Commonwealth was when President of Presidents Ölóssa gave a speech to officially kickstart the great work. Though most Commonwealth citizens considered it a rousing declaration, a sphere of extra-empty space, a dozen parsecs in diameter, quietly formed around ground zero as other civilizations cringed away.

Seen from very far away by someone with the eyes of a cosmic eagle, the construction process would have appeared like a swirl in a sink, only the sink was scaled to stellar proportions for the use of some obscure sort of god. Glittering drones moved in a carefully choreographed dance to place beams of hyper-rigid material in the correct orbits. Five gas giants were vacuumed, for lack of a better word, producing brightly colored hurricanes and eddies, storms illuminated from within by lightning as they disappeared into electromagnetic suction hoses. Gigatons of gas were slurped up to moon-sized factories, where matter was syphoned to make degenerate-nuclei materials. But all in all, construction of the Milotan ringworld went forth without drama—indeed, by some standards it was a subdued affair. No civil wars erupted, no crime-adjacent contractors skimmed off the top with catastrophic results, no armadas of doom were sent to exterminate neighboring primitives and steal their resources. The most exciting thing that happened during this time was President Ölóssa calling a press conference, at which event, in front of cameras and flashes, some words were written in a notebook using ink and pen, to the public's astonishment. It was to be the opening paragraph in a book intended to keep a record of the adventure.

This book deserves special attention. It had no digital input or storage; instead, it was made to write in longhand over creamy white pages. Writing with such instruments was a daunting task, since no Milotan had done so since time immemorial and the art had to be reinvented. The paper was so thin, the billion sheets made for a tome no larger than your standard grimoire, but they were sturdier than diamond. It would be passed from generation to generation, from father to daughter and mother to son, as explained by President Ölóssa to a delighted press core. Every event of the magnificent journey would be recorded for the benefit of posterity.

Once the ring was completed, the whole enterprise took a turn for the bizarre, or rather—depending on who you asked—for the far past bizarre and into dangerous, potentially contagious insanity. Every Milotan in existence gathered at a designated place, somewhere on the inner side of the ring. The billions crowded shoulder to shoulder, all of them looking in the same direction and united in purpose as no other people since. Across the circumference, they had built a monumental arch as a sort of start and finish line, and, on sounding of a kilometer-wide gong, every single member of the civilization started going under it with cheers and huzzahs. They had the firm intention of walking all the way round the ring, as if every individual shared in a single, collective will.

The megastructure was designed to be a challenge. The first couple centuries of the march, they went through a scorching dessert with no food and little water. After that came the gloomy rainforest of Ifny, plagued with genetically engineered tigers and mosquitoes the size of trucks. Historians estimate the civilization was reduced to a quarter of its original size by the time it emerged from the jungle.

The challenges did not end there. Going through the Labyrinth of Mist was particularly tough, as social cohesion vanished almost entirely amid hallucinations induced by an omnipresent fog, which seemed sometimes possessed of its own, perverse kind of life. A generation was born and died at sea while crossing the Bulian Ocean in wooden sail-ships. The ring's spin caused kilometer-high waves, children learned to climb masts before walking, and krakens were trained as work beasts. When the shout came of land ahoy, most people didn't understand what their eyes reported.

Elnee Lyvaya wrote of the visions she received from the ancestral spirits. Unknowingly, the prophetess was channeling taped messages she got from brainwave transmitters, antennae disguised as trees. The President of Presidents, who had been dead for millennia, appeared in her dreams and urged Elnee to galvanize the people, to rekindle the purpose of the march when it seemed almost forgot. Taïgi Son of Taïgi set down the *Epic of the Fallen Mirror*, a (very liberal-with-the-actual-facts) telling of events following the crash of a shade-sheet, one of many orbiting the star in order to produce an artificial day-and-night cycle with their shadow. Ringquakes brought down mountains as the mirror collided with the structure and the sun shone for so long that the very stones caught on fire. Eventually, days were restored by the automation the Builders had left behind for just such an emergency, but calamity had already reduced the number of wanderers to a mere few thousand strong. The population recovered slowly, every precious child learning the *Epic* by heart to commemorate the fallen.

As blood lines ended, monsters ate lore keepers, and generations embraced illiteracy while method-acting horseback nomadism, the chronicles were forgotten. As centuries climbed back the ladder of cultural self-awareness, the Tome was found in old trunks, or in the treasure hoard carried on the backs of a warlord's slaves, or in possession of raving madmen. It was read, and people marveled at their own history. At different times, funny hats were forced over the heads of keepers and religion sprung around them like fungus, often involving wanton human sacrifice. At other times, masters of lore were branded agitators, imprisoned, and scorned. This usually happened when a majority of Milotans wanted to take a breather and settle some cities, but keepers wouldn't shut up about the march and refused to stop urging the host forward.

The continent of Julisk was divided spinward by a mountain chain, its peaks so high they pierced out of the world's atmosphere. Eternal storms spun in a vortex around the tops due to friction with the air. The Milotans were presented with a choice to go left or right of the mountains, having no clue as to which path was the right one. History fails to mention what they decided, all that's known is that, after two centuries of march, the wanderers found themselves at a dead end and had to turn around. On their backtrack, they encountered settlements, cities, nations, and empires founded by those who had quit the journey, all memory of their transcendent goal lost to them. Wars had to be fought in order to gain passage through the barbarian kingdoms.

Testimonies survive of the families tasked with chronicling the march: the Holy Tome of Records was passed on faithfully, as the builders intended. Each keeper wrote with a distinctive hand, most often scribbling such tiny letters they had to be read with a magnifying glass. They documented lore in ever-varying languages, in verse and prose, in matter of fact, succinct lines or haughty sermons. Mishaps and heroes were recounted, wonders and terrors.

It is thought that the so-called Terrible Misplacement happened while crossing the infernal plains of Tromarga, covered in ash by a thousand volcanoes and populated by necromancers of unfathomable maleficence. The necromancers were actually robots, their undead minions simply corpses animated with help of some cybernetic tricks, but by this point high-concept technology might as well have been wizardry, for what most Milotans knew. After defeating a particularly nasty lich in a bloody, final-stand battle against the forces of darkness, it happened that the last of the lore masters noticed she didn't have the Holy Tome of Records on her. Years were spent searching for it among the black stones of the plain, in towers of sorcery surrounded by sickly, green glows, in deep lakes of light-swallowing water. They looked in ominous libraries left by the Builders and kept by weird, ten-legged creatures that collected books like magpies gather trinkets. They scoured the earth in desperation. But the Story of Stories, the account of hard-earned wisdom, the Book with all the Ring's Marvels was never found. Other than face-palming, there was nothing to be done.

Total duration of the march has been estimated at sixty thousand of our years, but the day came when the old arch appeared on the upwards-curving horizon. A shockwave of awe passed through every Milotan bone, sprung from the deepest recesses of genetic memory. Those who were not there could never understand the emotions that flowed like a jet stream of super-heated plasma out of a million throats that day.

It would be a descendant of that last record keeper who was to become the first, the one to pass under the arch before any other. He was also, in point of fact, a descendant of President of Presidents Ölóssa, though it should be noted that, owing to a universal quirk of population growth, at this time all surviving Millotans were Ölóssa's descendants, too. In any case, forever after the crossing he would be known as the Very First, the Finisher, the Eternal Walker, and several other such pompous monickers. Even those civilizations which recoiled from the ringworld's folly, all those millennia ago, heard of the Very First and spoke of the triumph with reverence, if somewhat embarrassed to discuss such matters aloud.

The Eternal Walker was a fervent believer in the higher calling of his culture, a philosopher, a poet warrior, a Hero of the Purpose. His *Letters to the Wider Galaxy on the Gist of it All* are studied across alien cultures, held as a fine example of the dangers and silliness that come with thinking too hard about the meaning of life. On the other hand, the *Unauthorized Biography*, by an anonymous chronicler, is considered by learned critics a masterful portrait of an ambiguous character. He was sometimes a leader of sadistic monstrosity, callous to the suffering of the flock, sometimes a most humble and charitable soul, capable of compassion and self-sacrifice what to tear up the stones.

The chronicler claims the Eternal Walker saw the arch for the first time when he was but a child, and the arch itself still a continent away. The vision ignited a bright flame in the Very First's heart, a flame to keep

hope burning during the last stretches of the march. When the hardships would have broken lesser civilizations, when the ice sheets seemed to stretch all the way to infinity, when the night terrors lurked, when cultural trauma nearly drove every Milotan insane, then The Eternal Walker would speak unto them and tell them to get off their butts.

So much of the journey is forgotten and the book is lost. Yet the story is told all over the Galaxy, of the words spoken by the Very First after crossing the finish line.

"That's that, then. Now what?"

~



Of Armchairs And Generals – Do We Tell Our Own Stories Through The Games We Play?

Ádám Gerencsér

Imagine you and a friend (or significant other) playing a game. Let it be a simulation of grand strategy, animating the destinies of realms and peoples as they clash, compete, and cooperate over resources and territories. In your previous moves, you might have successfully united the Hungarian-speaking realm into the “Carpathian Empire” and feel ready to set out on a Crusade to the Holy Land. You may thus turn to your companion and ask her to join you, or at least send assistance but, alas, find her tied up further west across the sprawling map, gradually reconquering the Hispanic peninsula at the helm of her Aragonese troops. You discuss (outside of the game but staying in character, if you wish) and finally settle on arranging a useful marriage between your in-game heir and one of her Mediterranean vassals, thus ensuring that your next incarnation would gain access to more combat-ready levies.

If you know the game in question, no doubt your mind is already racing with possibilities – but do read on before rushing to your laptop. If you don’t, picture a vast scalable map of the Middle Ages residing on your computer screen, where one of the fiefdoms represents your lands, the attached family tree the characters of your family, and the world around them an almost endless possibility of interactions with other domains, noble houses, religions and trading partners. You are not a country, per se, neither just an individual, but rather a whole dynasty – and the game continues as long as your bloodline does (even in exile).

Thus, you are playing in (and with) a virtual world. But you are also doing something else, something more engaging and arguably more rewarding – you and your fellow gamer are weaving a common narrative: a story emerges.

The extent to which this happens depends largely on the nature of the game, rather than merely on the intent of the player. Thus, computer games may arguably be classified along a continuum defining their level of narrative involvement, stretching from story-driven to story-neutral. Doing so, one may group them roughly into the following three categories:

A. Some depend on telling a story as their essence. These include role-playing games, in the vein of Dungeons & Dragons and its many re-implementations, as well as so-called “point-and-click” adventures (games essentially designed as interactive animations where player intervention is mediated by clicking with a mouse on items to manipulate or characters to converse with). *You play because you want to know what happens next.*

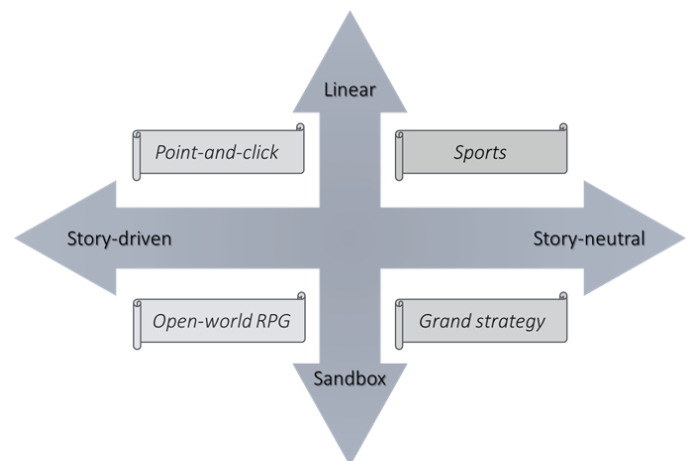
B. Another category of games presents a hybrid experience more focussed on dexterity or tactics, but still offering a backstory that informs the fictional universe, even if with limited bearing on the player’s individual moves. These range from grand strategy titles (where the aim is the governance of states and macro-economies, such as *Sid Meier’s Civilization*) to squad-based situational simulations (where the player manages a small group of characters and their day-to-day struggle for resources, as in the emotionally impactful *This War of Mine*). *You play for the experience.*

C. Meanwhile, some are almost void of story-telling elements, and rely instead on nifty mechanics through which the player competes with others, or overcomes procedural obstacles and achieves a sense of progression. Lore, if any, is mostly cosmetic. These span the breadth from casual entries (such as “brawlers”, i.e. fighting games, and racing titles, which can be picked up for a few minutes of entertainment) to highly time-intensive and complex “virtual toys” (incl.

accurate flight simulators and detailed city builders, which demand a high learning curve and a large time investment). *You play for sheer exhilaration.*

Yet now let us add a second axis, representing the amount of freedom accorded to the person immersed in the game: in the language of design, this is often referred to as player agency. Here games range from complete linearity (traversing a pre-ordained path to complete a quest) to an open-world setting (where the main plot or purpose of the game can be postponed almost indefinitely in order to inhabit its fictional environment). These can map perpendicularly onto any of the three categories mentioned above, as per Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Narrative agency in computer games



But which of these best lend themselves for player-led story-generation?

According to our analogy, the axes of both intersecting spectra meet somewhere in the middle. Depending on the player's willingness to enrich the gaming experience by spinning their own tale, both by interacting with the game itself and by the added means of auto-suggestion, one could argue that the optimum requires a balance between "sand-box" (i.e. open world) liberty and realistic feedback, i.e. the manner in which the in-game environment reacts to the player's actions. Thus, the less linear and more complex a setting is, the better opportunities it offers for user-led narrative building.

For a case in point, take the Creative Assembly's *Total War* series, a succession of empire-building games blending the turn-based rhythm of board games for the political layer with real-time command and control for the battles that ensure when opposing armies come to occupy the same spot on the map. Each game covers a different historical period, from the Roman Empire to the Napoleonic era, with the most recent instalment (dubbed *Attila*) bridging the transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages. When immersed in this title's grand campaign (i.e. leading a specific realm through the entire timespan of the game), the objectives for each faction delineate their choices to some extent, but player-agency is only constrained if one is preoccupied with the attainment of pre-set victory conditions.

To give an illustrative example, during the present author's most recent session, he chose to impersonate a fictional Hunnic faction that acted as faithful guardians of Constantinople, hammering the enemies of the Byzantines at every turn. Since the algorithm governing the actions of the Eastern Romans did not initially foresee such a turn of events, the player had to sack their capital in the early game, in order to force them to make peace with his barbarian horde. This regrettable-but-necessary bloodshed, however, turned out to mark the beginning of a long, mutually beneficial alliance, as subsequent positive interactions eventually came to overshadow past frictions.

Another well-known example of a game that pushes the limits of player agency is Paradox Studio's *Europa Universalis* franchise (and its cousins, incl. the Crusader Kings series alluded to at the outset). Co-operative campaigns played with human companions may be (and often are) entirely devoted to self-chosen objectives, such as uniting the Catholic world as an expansionist Papal State. These meta-game objectives blend the player's personal interests or pet historical fantasies with the flexibility provided by the artificial intelligence underlying the software (the so-called *Clausewitz* engine). Narrative retellings of what had transpired during such lengthy session have become a staple of online forum discussions dedicated to these games, thus often completing the leap from 'playing' to 'story-telling'.

The intense sense of creative potential is most evident in the "modding" culture that has sprung up around such games: some have communities of thousands of users who develop additional content (such as maps, historical events, military units, 3D models of buildings, artwork, etc.) and share it freely with others to download and integrate into their local copy of the software in question. Exposure to the "mods" thus created has shaped user expectations towards the features and flexibility subsequent titles ought to have.

There have even been attempts by "modders" to radically alter the nature of games that were conceived as linear by their original publishers. One of the most ambitious examples to date is the ongoing effort by enthusiast of Slitherine's *Panzer Corps* to take the wealth of military units and map terrain tiles available from the base game (and its many official expansions) and create a giant scale map of Europe complete with railways, roads, cities and the disposition of forces reflecting the geostrategic situation in mid-1942. The massive scenario attempts, in effect, to turn a static digital board game emulating individual battles of World War 2 into an experimental device for alternate history world-building.



If these trends continue apace, those interested in crafting their own narratives through non-linear games have a lot to look forward to. With the advent of more powerful home computers and the emergent combinatory skills of artificial intelligence, we may see the advent of privately accessible grand strategy and simulation games that rival the professional software hitherto reserved to military academies and corporate research laboratories. Such development would unleash narrative potential on an unprecedented scale, particularly in the genres of speculative geopolitics and alternate history.

Far more revolutionarily, and with an impact that is hard to foresee, fledgeling virtual reality technologies will break the immersion barrier whereby procedurally generated worlds with realistic (incl. haptic) feedback will likely redefine what it means to require for audiences to ‘suspend disbelief’. As audiences will be plunged directly into the midst of fictional multi-sensory worlds, the very notion of linear story-telling is likely to be challenged by expectations of ubiquitous interactivity – and at greater lengths of immersion.

While there was an observable trend already in the 2010s for longer games, the revenues of both digital as well as analogue (board game) publishers focussing on complex titles increased markedly during the Covid pandemic, and held up firmly ever since. With ludophiles apparently having heeded the call for “social distancing” by retreating to their bunkers to play, the estimated 40 hours needed to complete a single campaign of the above-mentioned mega-games are certainly starting to look a lot less unreasonable. Particularly when judged alongside the time investment required for the (decidedly narrative) video game rated highest by worldwide critics in 2023, Belgium-based Larian Studio’s high-fantasy epic, *Baldur’s Gate 3* – 100 to 150 hours by median estimates.

The question now remains – will people still take the time to read analogue literature in an age of hyper-immersive, personally tailored gaming experiences? As we head into 2024, we are perhaps closer to finding out than we could imagine.

~

Beheading Of A Queen

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Gravesend, Kent, September 1, 1586

To: Nicolas de Neufville, Marquis de Villeroi,
Secretary of State for War to His Majesty King Henry
III of France [*sent by carrier pigeon*]

Monsieur Villeroi: Greetings. Please deliver this letter
to the King.

*[Following is the translation of a message encrypted using the
Vivonne cypher]*

Two heads are better than one.

John Heywood Proverbs (1546)

Your Serene Majesty: This report updates my earlier
ones regarding the hostilities between King Philip II
of Spain and Queen Elizabeth. Since war broke out,
Philip has been preparing to launch an attack against
England. While Philip's original motivation was
displeasure over English privateer attacks on Spanish
vessels returning from the New World and the aid
Elizabeth is giving to the rebels in the Netherlands, a
new factor is driving him to accelerate preparations
for an invasion of England: the perilous situation of
the long-imprisoned Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. I
have learned that, based on the discovery of a plot to
assassinate Elizabeth in which Mary was implicated,
Elizabeth intends to bring Mary to trial accusing her
of treason.

My sources assure me that Philip is leaning strongly on renowned Admiral Marquis de Santa Cruz, under whose command an Armada is being assembled, demanding that the fleet depart without delay. Likewise, Philip is urging Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma, the commander of his forces in the Netherlands, to gather the invading army and finalize construction of the barges that will carry Spanish troops to England.

Gravesend, Kent, February 9, 1587

The English are aware that an attack is imminent and are fortifying the approaches to London. I am fortunate, thanks to your Majesty's wisdom, to have been secretly redeployed after relations between England and France soured last year and I was recalled from my post as Ambassador to Elizabeth's court. I now reside incognito in a house in the village of Gravesend, a day's ride by horse-drawn carriage from the center of London. I miss being Ambassador, but I realize my gathering and conveying accurate information is vital to France.

Sire, I pray to God that He keep your Majesty in perfect health.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la Mauvissière.

Signed this First day of September, 1586.

#

Gravesend, Kent, October 17, 1586

Your Serene Majesty: Mary Stuart's trial on charges of conspiring to assassinate her cousin Queen Elizabeth was concluded yesterday and Mary was found guilty, which will result in her death. The Catholic population in England is quite angry.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la [Mauvissière](#).

Signed this 17th day of October, 1586.

#

Your Serene Majesty: Much has happened since my last communication. A matter of greatest importance is the demise of Mary Stuart. Following the guilty verdict of treason, the English Parliament passed a bill petitioning for Mary's execution. For the next three months, Elizabeth took no action, perhaps fearful of the repercussions of killing an anointed queen. Finally, a week ago, the death warrant was signed and delivered to the Privy Council, which sent it out on its own authority to be administered. Mary was beheaded yesterday at Fotheringay Castle in Northamptonshire, where she had been imprisoned.

Intelligence from my Spanish sources indicates that the Armada has been assembled in Lisbon, and Admiral Santa Cruz is awaiting confirmation that the land forces are on their way to the departure area in the Netherlands. I expect that King Philip soon will issue orders for the invasion to proceed.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la Mauvissière.

Signed this 9th day of February, 1587

#

Gravesend, Kent, June 20, 1587

Your Serene Majesty: I am unable to confirm the accuracy of all the statements in this report, as some have been conveyed to me by people claiming to have witnessed them first-hand. However, I believe the information is substantially true.

The Spanish Armada, comprising about 140 vessels, took off from Portugal on Easter Sunday, March 29, 1587 and progressed towards the English Channel, which they reached almost two months later. The Armada had an initial encounter with the English fleet stationed in Plymouth, but the battle was inconclusive and the Armada proceeded without major casualties along the channel towards a meeting with the army being brought to the coast of the Netherlands by Farnese. Their plans encountered a difficulty, however, in that Farnese was late in moving his troops to the coast. Midway across the channel, Admiral Santa Cruz decided to anchor in the Solent, a sheltered strait between the Isle of Wight and the coast of England near Portsmouth. From this protected location, Santa Cruz continued to send messages to Farnese tracking his progress, until the two agreed to link up at the Flemish seaport of Ostend.

The Armada was continuously harassed by the smaller, more maneuverable English ships but Santa Cruz was able to bring the Armada almost intact to Ostend, where the Spanish vessels arranged themselves into a crescent, placing the barges carrying Farnese's soldiers behind the crescent, within the protection of the Spanish warcraft. The Armada then proceeded to the English coast, where it fought a decisive battle against the English across from Margate, a seaport close to my home. Both fleets suffered extensive losses, but the barges with the Farnese troops were able to land and quickly subdued the English militia guarding the shore.

As of this writing, the progress of the Spanish army is being slowed by arriving English troops, but the Farnese contingent is also receiving reinforcement by the several thousand men aboard the Armada's ships.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la Mauvissière.

Signed this 20th day of June, 1587

#

Gravesend, Kent, June 24, 1587

Your Serene Majesty: Events in the Spanish invasion of England are proceeding with rapidity. Two days ago, the combined forces of the Farnese contingent and the Armada's reinforcements broke through the English lines and forced the English to withdraw to a defensive position around the town of Dartford, trying to protect a bridge over the Thames through which troops could be transported to aid in the defense of London. Yesterday, the Spanish dislodged the English armies, crossed the bridge, and engaged and defeated the main English contingent under the Earl of Leicester, which had been stationed at Tillsbury. With this latest victory, the road to London is clear and the final battle may take place in the city itself.

Meanwhile, there have been uprisings of Catholics throughout England in support of the invaders in places like Lancashire, Westmorland, and Norfolk. The population of England, which includes a large Catholic minority, is sharply divided between those who support Elizabeth and those who want her deposed. This sharp division between Catholics and Protestants has been a fact of English political and social life since Henry VIII broke away from the Church of Rome.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la Mauvissière.

Signed this 24th day of June, 1587

#

Gravesend, Kent, August 4, 1587

Your Serene Majesty: The Spanish invasion of England has been completed. After defeating the main English land army, the Farnese troops marched west towards London. Opposition was mostly by ill-equipped, poorly trained militia whose members could not withstand the assault of the battle-hardened Spanish forces.

Two weeks later, Spanish troops arrived in London and occupied the city, meeting little resistance. They then marched in the southwest direction towards the official residence of the Queen, Windsor Castle. Elizabeth had taken refuge in the castle, which had been fortified and was protected by a force of over 30,000 soldiers under the Queen's cousin and Royal Chamberlain, Lord Henry Hunsdon.

A siege ensued, which ended abruptly last week. Apparently, there was a revolt by Catholics within the English forces. After prevailing in a fierce struggle, the Catholics surrendered the castle to the Spanish. Whether the details of this event are true is immaterial, for the success of the invaders is a fact. Elizabeth is imprisoned and is expected to stand trial for Mary's execution.

Alexander Farnese, acting on King Philip II's behalf, has proclaimed Philip Howard, the godson of Philip II and a strong Catholic, as the next King of England, bearing the name Philip I. Philip Howard is the son of the Duke of Norfolk, who was Queen Elizabeth's second cousin. The Duke had sought to marry Queen Mary Stuart and put her on the throne in place of Elizabeth, but the plot was uncovered and the Duke was tried for treason and executed in 1572. Philip Howard himself was implicated in a similar plot in 1583 to place Mary on the throne. That plot also failed and Philip was imprisoned in the tower of London, where he was at the time of the Armada's arrival.

Philip Howard is thus an ideal choice to rule England as a pawn of the Spanish. He will be a strong Catholic ruler, furthering the aims of King Philip II. The English Parliament has been dissolved and many of Elizabeth's supporters have been slain or imprisoned. However, the English fleet – under Lord Howard of Effingham, Francis Drake, and John Hawkins – has taken refuge somewhere off the coast of Ireland and remains a threat to the Spanish domination of the country and the seas.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la Mauvissière.

Signed this 4th day of August, 1587

#

Gravesend, Kent, December 30, 1588

Your Serene Majesty: The trial of Queen Elizabeth was concluded and the Queen was found guilty of various offenses, including the murder of her cousin Mary. At dawn today, Elizabeth was beheaded and her remains incinerated.

Public opinion in England remains divided between those that revere Elizabeth as a martyr, and those – mainly Catholics – who believe her execution was justified.

New English King Philip I is expected to sign a peace treaty with Spain, seeking to bring about the removal of Spanish forces from the island. England has ended its support of the rebellion in the Netherlands and is renouncing its privateers' attacks on Spanish shipping, which nonetheless continue to be carried out by the rebellious Navy Royal.

But all is not well with Spanish rule in England. The Protestants in the country, supported by Scotland, have chosen James VI, son of Mary Stuart, as King of England. A civil war is in progress, as the Protestant majority abhors the country's domination by a Catholic beholden to a foreign power. The English resistance will make the ongoing Dutch efforts to oppose Spanish rule pale by comparison.

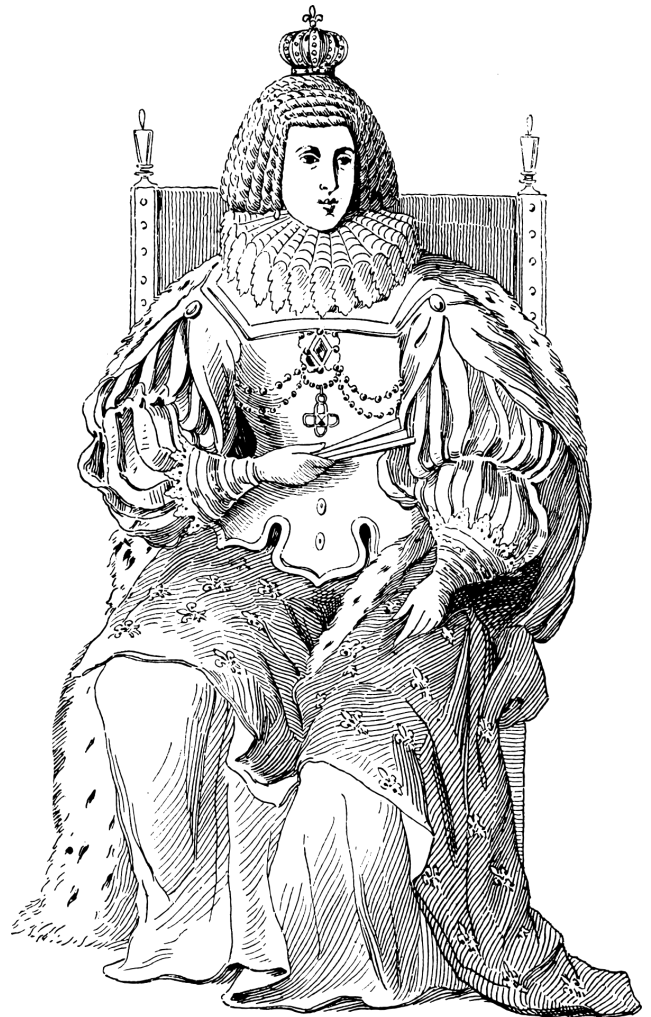
Many years of conflict are in the offing. This enduring strife will undoubtedly weaken both Spain and England and create opportunities for France to increase its power throughout the world. Time will tell what transpires, but the potential benefits for France appear immense.

Sire, I pray that God will keep your Majesty in perfect health and grant you a blessed 1589.

Your humble and obedient subject,

Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de la Mauvissière.

Signed this 30th of December, 1588



~

Bloodless

Todd Sullivan

Gerald's wife lay sprawled on the bed, a packer of sleeping pills on the nightstand next to her. He picked up the orange cylinder and read the label. She'd bought the popular brand, *LoGof*, guaranteed to end a life peacefully. Pharmacies advertised *LoGof* throughout the silent city, the slogan, "Escape into the real you", written beneath smiling faces of families. His wife must have swallowed dozens of the tablets and died while she slept beside him.

Caressing her cheek one last time, he called the 24-hour crematorium. When the technicians arrived, they wrapped her body in a burial shroud and informed him that a Counselor would be along soon.

In no mood for *that* conversation, Gerald grabbed his basketball and stepped outside. In the distance, orbital antennas spraying out purple micro-particles rose seventy miles into the air to pierce the atmosphere. The Counselors had originally built them to amplify the extra-planetary telescopes launched five years ago by private enterprises. Only recently had the antennas started rotating on their axes and emitting a dust that was slowly coating the world.

Gerald reached the court, stretched, and dribbled the ball. Purple dust puffed up around his sneakers as he went in for a lay up, all net. He chased after the ball, but the sudden exertion sent him into a coughing fit. For moments, he simply hunched over trying to catch his breath.

When the spasm passed, he turned back to the free throw line. Across the street, he saw a Counselor making its way to him. Tall and thin with a golden exterior, the Counselor moved on spindly tentacles that unfolded out from its lower half. It stepped into the center of the court and began to walk in a tight circle. The Counselors never stood still, rotating much like the antennas towering above the earth.

"Do you enjoy playing this game by yourself?" Its gentle voice emanated from no discernible source, its melodic tone closer to singing than speaking. The innocuous question brought tears to Gerald's eyes that he immediately blinked away.

He shot the ball, and it thudded against the backboard and bounced away. Before he could reach it, a tendril extended from the golden body and wrapped around the ball. Gerald considered leaving, but if he went back home, there would probably be another Counselor waiting to engage him in a conversation he had no desire in having.

Gerald held out his hands. "Can I get my ball back?"

The Counselor threw it to him. Gerald caught it, dribbled in the fine carpet of dust, and shot another brick. He already knew what the Counselor wanted to say. He'd had this discussion many times, though he never knew if it was with the same Counselor, or with a different one, since they all appeared the same to him.

"Why do you not want to join your wife and family?"

Gerald swallowed a lump that formed in his throat. "I'm not going to kill myself."

"They are not dead. As we have explained to you, this reality is not real."

Gerald shot the ball. It ricocheted off the rim, and he ran after it, his lungs burning from the purple dust. "It certainly feels real."

"You cannot trust your senses. What you see is a construct. The avatar of your body is just a manifestation, not your true embodiment."

Gerald had heard this before. When cosmologists discovered structures emitting infrared fourteen million light-years away, Counselors landed on Earth shortly afterwards. Meeting the different heads of state from around the world, they explained to the top scientists of the most powerful nations that what those were actually data streams giving shape to a cosmos that human consciousness had become trapped in.

"So I actually look like you, right?" Gerald asked.

"My native appearance, yes. You and I are the same species, but Counselors manifested in this form because we thought it would help you believe us." The Counselor approached Gerald, who dribbled away, keeping his distance. "The glitch to this matrix keeps your mind imprisoned. The only way to break the cycle is to kill yourself, for a non-forced death will recycle your mind back through this system to take up a new role in the simulation."

Gerald pointed to the antennas shooting out purple micro-particles. "So if this reality isn't real, what are those structures doing? And why are there more Counselors appearing even as there are less humans that need convincing to commit suicide?"

"What you perceive as antennas are simply key-commands meant to reconfigure the malfunction of this reality. This dust is a byproduct of mathematical computations in higher dimensions of the program. If you do not detach from this reality, your consciousness will be overwritten, and your mind will be lost. There is little time left."

Gerald's parents had taken their lives in the first wave of suicides. He had managed to convince his wife to hold off until today. She had now joined billions of other humans who had killed themselves over the last five years.

The Counselors had argued their case well, convincing physicists that reality was a simulation. Scientists convinced the world's governments, who eventually encouraged their citizens to disconnect from their artificial lives. As the population dwindled, a terrifying possibility had formed in Gerald's mind. What if the Counselors were lying? What if they wanted Earth, and after studying humans, had figured out a way to obtain it without firing a single shot.

When you're dealing with a technologically inferior mind, convincing them of self-destruction could be a perfect bloodless coup of the native species.

Gerald laid up the ball. He wasn't alone in his suspicions, and he wasn't going to kill himself. If enough humans continued to resist the Counselors' suggestion, maybe they could discover the truth and defeat this most quiet of alien invasions.

"If it's all the same," Gerald told the Counselor, "I think I'll play this virtual game a little while longer."

~



Render Unto Jesus

Andy Dibble

Even with religious “nones” on the rise, the great bulk of Americans still called themselves Christian. Jesus was as real as God, and God was a patron America still had use for. Though preferences tended toward worship in intimate or everyday spaces. Others did not care where they worshiped but preferred to sleep in on Sunday mornings.

Confirmation bias was at work, a new theology on the rise, not mere suspicion of institutionalized religion, but rejection of the old. Its thinking ran: God is in all places and in the places of daily life most of all. A steeple and stained glass do not gratify God. How presumptuous of prior generations to think God cares for brick and mortar! As Deuteronomy indicates, there can only be one Temple, destroyed in Jerusalem two-thousand years ago. Churches (imitations, really) only embarrass us in the eyes of God.

Borrowing a thread from Salafi Muslim thought, some called church buildings idols. Radical congregations demolished their own churches with great fanfare and applause.

For traditionalists and ardent churchgoers, it was already intolerable that government buildings stood taller than church steeples. Demolition was unthinkable, extravagant blasphemy.

They protested that Jesus should not share space with sweaty bodies at gyms or be relegated to spare minutes away from phone and television. There should be a sabbath, a time of rest and devotion, and a place to celebrate that sabbath in adoration of God.

They raged, but their only strategy was to buy churches as they went up for sale.

#

A way forward came when lawyer Mike Slick—born in Pittsburgh to a Catholic family, strayed into New Age eclecticism (with a brief interlude as a Hare Krishna monk), and birthed again into Evangelicalism—filched an idea from Indian jurisprudence.

In India, gods could own property and pay taxes. They could sue, such as when “Shiva, Lord of the Universe” successfully sued a British company for the return of his Nataraja statue to a temple in Tamilnadu. If Jesus owned churches, no one could sell or demolish them without his say.

Slick’s legal argument rested upon the thriving body of United States case law that endowed corporations with certain rights of persons. Churches are already owned by congregations or ecclesiastical structures, entities rather than natural persons. The creeds and members of such entities have consistently proclaimed that “all they are” or “the whole earth” belongs to Jesus (if sometimes only during hymns or call-and-response exercises). As the apostle Paul attests, all Christians form a corporate entity, “the body of Christ.”

So how can it be legitimate for bishops or presbyters to sell Jesus’s property without the permission of their Lord?

#

“Jesus, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Immanuel, Savior of Humanity, Lamb of God, Light of the World, the Christ” sued the First Episcopalian Church of Mechanicsville, Virginia for illegal sale of his property. A district court dismissed the suit as frivolous. But on appeal to the right-leaning Fourth Circuit Court, Jesus, Wonderful Counselor, etc., etc. won.

The Episcopalians appealed to the Supreme Court. During conference, it appeared the Court would dismiss the suit, or send it back to the Fourth Circuit, instructing its judges to reconsider the case’s merits.

But one especially geriatric justice keeled over from an aneurysm while on the bench. Four justices voted to dismiss the suit and four voted that Jesus had legal right to his church.

The court was hung. The decision of the lower court stood.

#

Divine intervention or not, no precedent had been established. By the time another suit with Jesus as plaintiff bubbled up to the highest court, Eleazar Hoffman, an exacting jurist of dubious political persuasion, had been appointed to fill the court’s vacancy. He sided with the motley bloc of judges that endorsed Jesus’s legal right.

This five-four decision was good law. From sea to shining sea, every church building, parcel of land, and account owned by a Christian entity was legally the property of Jesus.

#

The aftermath offered a new proof of the principle that any incompetence, sufficiently advanced, is indistinguishable from conspiracy. For the Supreme Court had said nothing of who has power of attorney over Jesus's property.

Churches drifted in limbo. They could not be deconsecrated, demolished, or used for solely secular purpose. Banks refused to grant loans to congregations because a church seized as collateral was almost without value.

Churches became home to feral cats, roadside attractions, or repositories of pious embers waiting for the Next Great Awakening of traditional religious fervor.

#

Congress tried to resolve the matter by legislation, but no bill could get out of committee. Every provision exposed some theological bias; every theology had its antipode. Against the Gospel of Charity, which held Jesus would give all his wealth for the welfare of the poor, there was a Gospel of Wealth, which supposed that copious wealth was a sign of Jesus's sovereignty and the triumph of God.

Against the thought that Jesus would deploy his wealth to support the Christian mission was the worry that legislation codifying such intention would constitute an unconstitutional establishment of religion.

Even the notion that the juridical Jesus was Christ was not without its detractors, who claimed he was Antichrist, hoarding Christian wealth in preparation for the End.

#

President Manuela Hernandez issued an executive order stating that Jesus, as a juridical person, was subject to taxation. Churches do not owe property tax, but the death of Jesus was juridical death. Moreover, his end was no singular death by Roman crucifixion. Rather it repeated year after year with the pageant of Good Friday. As a Trinitarian entity, eternally begotten, Jesus was in an important sense his own parent and inheritor.

She ordered Jesus to furnish the Internal Revenue Service seventeen percent of his billions, on an annual basis, or until such time as Christian congregations abolish Good Friday.

#

President Hernandez's order met both legal challenges and failed Congressional action, which aimed to repeal the estate tax entirely. But nothing in her interpretation of the law was unconstitutional. Her reading brought core data of Christian history to bear upon the law.

It seemed the Baal of Big Government would devour Jesus's assets until some savvy practitioner of estate law hit upon the idea of storing Jesus's assets within a trust. Eternally begotten and immortal, Jesus could be its everlasting trustee.

Trusts do not die as people die. Therefore, his entrusted estate could owe no estate tax.

Jesus kept his billions.

#

But Jesus could not be on the ballot. In this the Constitution was clear: a candidate for President was aged at least thirty-five, a resident of fourteen-years, and a natural-born citizen. Jesus was none of these. He'd been born in Bethlehem, a town of present-day Israel. He was a resident of nowhere, at least nowhere in particular. He was no older than thirty-three.

The worry about his age encountered dispute. The opening to the Gospel of John indicated that Jesus was present at Creation as the transcendent Word. As such, he was billions of years old, or six-thousand, or eternal.

The worry about Jesus's natural citizenship also met objection. Archaeologists contracted by the Church of Latter-day Saints discovered Bethlehem was actually in present-day Utah (a finding lay Mormons met with mixed reactions). Jesus's flight to Egypt as a young child had been achieved through teleportation from the Americas. As Luke's Gospel attests, Jesus lived in Palestine until the age of twelve. At such time, God

whisked him back to the Americas until his ministry began when he was thirty, long enough for him to satisfy the fourteen-year residency requirement.

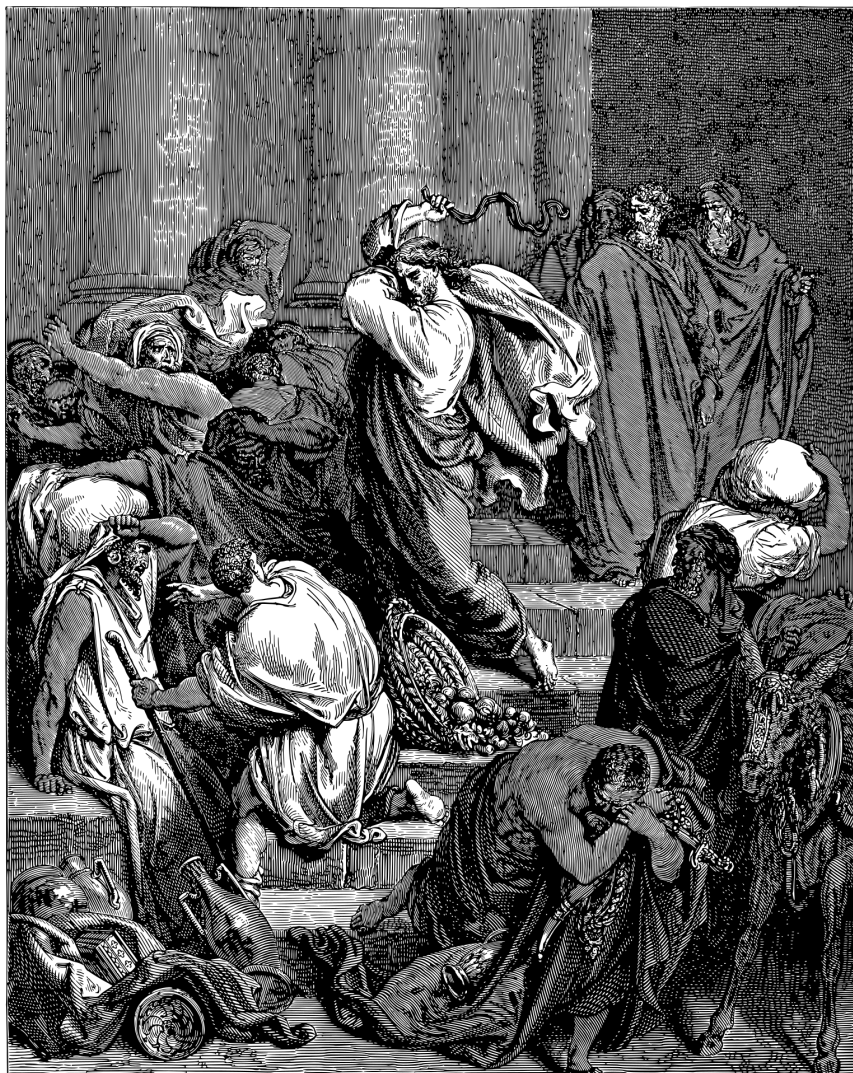
Courts rejected this argument. No lawyer could argue it with a straight face.

#

Rejection by the judiciary only energized electoral millenarianism. Polls indicated that sixty-eight percent of Christian Americans now believed or strongly believed that Jesus's election to the Presidency would bring about the rapture of devout souls.

Abandoned churches became centers of political organization and outreach. They became revivals.

The Next Great Awakening was burning the country over.



Jesus won as a write-in candidate in several Southern states, Wyoming, Alaska, and Idaho. He would have won Florida as well had their state Supreme Court not ruled locutions on Jesus—"Jesus Christ," "Jesus, Son of God," "Jesus, *the* Son of God," etc.—to be different individuals.

The national write-in campaign turned conservatives out in record numbers, but their vote was nonetheless split, between their square-jawed candidate of flesh and blood and a haloed whitewashed Jesus.

The liberals won the Presidency almost by default.

#

Electoral millenarianism languished until the virtual district of Afterland became home to personages of historical and cultural significance, anyone with a wide enough corpus for artificial intelligence to construct an artificial person. Previously, its residents had been affluent Americans, reconstituted in digital form after death so they could enjoy a virtual heaven.

Jesus was among the personages projected from scripture, treatise, and lore into Afterland. He was a bit addled (packing so many contradictory theologies into one mind is bound to induce schizophrenia). Nevertheless, he had the best name recognition, the best brand.

He won the mayorship in a landslide.

#

Courts had not objected to Jesus's mayoral campaign. He was a resident of Afterland, no less than its other residents. He could be mayor.

This got other juridical persons thinking that a corporation incorporated in Delaware could be Senator from Delaware. Just so, a union headquartered in Ithaca, New York could be Ithaca's Representative.

Like Jesus, these juridical persons had funds and marketing knowhow. Unlike Jesus, they also boasted centralized organization, clear chains of command.

They could outcompete merely human candidates.

In time, voters could scarcely ascertain whether they cast their ballot for a mascot, a paid actor, a social media influencer, a CEO, or a deepfake.

Each candidate was all, and none, and more besides.

#

Weary of all the fuss, many warmed to the idea that the Kingdom of God had already come. The Kingdom was Afterland. Jesus was already its Lord.

Some dismissed that as folly or clung to a grander hope of final resurrection: On that great Day, we will be transformed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. Now we see through a glass darkly, but then we will see each other face to face.

At last, we will understand who is truly a person and who is only a mirage of the judiciary.

~

Sinurbia

Gheorghe Săsărman

translated by Monica Cure

The inhabitants of Sinurbia suffered from an indeterminate nostalgia...

At first, the calm waters of the gulf rolled here, contrasting picturesquely with the precipitous cliffs of the shore. Later, after the idea was born of building a floating city near the overpopulated island, the waters of the gulf came to be streaked with bizarrely shaped ships. Not even a month passed before the inauguration of the first neighborhood—that of the builders. Soon, the other neighborhoods were added to it, the downtown, places of work and leisure; then the builders gathered up their tools and left, aboard their strange ships, just as unexpectedly as they had arrive. Their purpose destined them to an irremediable restlessness.

The city, suspended over the infinite greenish depths of the sea, had its traffic routes arranged in such a way as to avoid any intersections. The highways, subway lines, those of the monorails, and the pedestrian walkways, together made up an immense spider web, organized on several levels, which opened onto monumental

esplanades and squares, flanked by the public buildings representative of that metropolis. Though they maintained an intense and agitated civic life, at home, the Sinurbians became quiet, meditative, as if only then did their true nature rise to the surface. As a result, out of all the edifices, homes enjoyed the greatest consideration. The houses—over which European fashion had failed to exert even the weakest influence for over a century—preserved an unaltered simplicity that had become tradition. The storage furniture was skillfully concealed behind the sliding walls; similar walls allowed the separation or combination of different rooms. The floor itself, whose elasticity and hardness could be adjusted according to one's wishes, served as chairs and beds. Among the bright colors of the interiors, white dominated. In the living rooms, in a niche in one of the walls, a painting, a sculpture, or a simple flower vase could be seen.

And still, the inhabitants of Sinurbia felt themselves affected by an indeterminate nostalgia...

One day, one of them started turning their yard into a garden, in which they worked hard to reconstitute, in miniature, the landscape of their island of origin: rocks, sand, moss, bushes, a pool of water and an arched bridge, a pathway made from a few stone slabs, a gazebo with an upturned eave. The idea proved to be contagious: in short time, each inhabitant was one garden richer, a garden that was arranged according to the ability of its owner, but resembling, without fail, the native landscape. At once, the Sinurbians were free of the nostalgia.

Inexplicably, the waters of the gulf—proverbial for their calm—lost their tranquility. The face of the sea furrowed in ever more threatening billows. The sun vanished behind a dark curtain of clouds. A formidable typhoon shook the city from its very foundations. The foundations held firm. Built with foresightedness, the buildings, streets, and houses held firm as well. Only the gardens were completely devastated by the fury of the waters; at dawn, when the storm abated, the gardens had been replaced by deep sinkholes, caving in, at the bottom of which a tiny pool of sea darkly glistened like an eye.

Grimly determined, the people filled in the sinister pits, replaced the slabs, and started over arranging their gardens, to which they now felt their existence organically linked. Another typhoon made their work all for naught, and another, and another... Several people, terrified, exhausted, abandoned the fight. The number of those who had given up skyrocketed. Soon, only the first gardener, the one who had taught the inhabitants of Sinurbia how to get rid of their nostalgia, still stubbornly insisted on reinstalling, in the patched up yard, the bushes, the rocks, and the gazebo. But as soon as he would finish, a typhoon would start up again.

They advised him to quit. To no avail. Then, boiling with hatred, they shoved him into the chasm which again gaped in the middle of his yard, which he had been just about to refill. The sea's eye gleamed wildly and smacked, swallowing him. They returned to their homes grinning, and accompanied by the curses and wails of his widow, by the heartrending cries of the three now fatherless children. The waters of the gulf became calm again, the sky cleared up; since then, not at a single typhoon ever descended over the city again. In each yard, however, the sea's eye kept watch.

~



Intersidereal Aliyah And The Law Of Return¹

Edmund Nasralla

I. Introduction: The Law of Return before the Age of Colonization

Among the nation states which retained full political autonomy after the beginning of the Age of Colonization, the State of Israel alone maintained a policy of right of abode within its historical borders for the descendants of its citizens and those belonging to the Jewish people. The Law of Return (חוק השבות), originally passed by the Knesset on 5 July 1950 (20 Tammuz 5710), established that, “Every Jew has the right to immigrate [to Israel]” (section 1). The law was amended several times in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to address questions of definition (who qualifies as a Jew, etc.), to establish rights for family members of Jewish immigrants to the State of Israel, and to curtail certain abuses.

The Age of Colonization and the concurrent establishment of the World Federation of States (Later the Old Earth Federation, henceforth “OEF”) posed, at first, no new legislative problems for the State of Israel. A substantial number of Israel’s citizens emigrated to the new colonies, most of them initially to the first human colony of Terra Nova in the Epsilon Eridani system. These maintained dual Israeli and OEF citizenship, and the first generation

of their children were Israeli citizens in accordance with that country’s constitutional law. The expense and large amounts of time required to make the journey between Earth and the first colonies meant that, for all practical purposes, return was impossible. In the first four hundred years of galactic colonization, only fourteen cases of a vessel returning to Old Earth were recorded. Only one of them involved a ship which had reached Terra Nova. Three of them carried Israeli passengers, and although all of them carried at least one self-declared Jewish passenger, none of these passengers subsequently emigrated to Israel. There was consequently no legislation addressing intersidereal aliyah during this period.

II. The El-Sayed Terminal and the amendment of Federation immigration law

In A.T. 2565, Prof. Geris El-Sayed of the École Polytechnique of France demonstrated the feasibility of intersidereal travel based on the principles of quantum entanglement. The old method of continuous acceleration, which had made the first colonies possible, was rendered obsolete, at least in theory. Another century would pass before the first El-Sayed Terminals could be built.²

The prospect of nearly-instantaneous travel between the colonized planets, however, pushed the OEF to propose new laws regulating intersidereal immigration to Old Earth. The Senate feared that an unrestricted right of return to the human home world might have catastrophic legal and economic consequences. The first major waves of emigration were financed by the asset forfeiture of the original colonists to the Federation, something which was very controversial at the time.³ Would the descendants of such colonists have a legal basis for claiming restitution? What would become of the Old Earth's economy if it were suddenly flooded with workers and goods from worlds beyond the solar system? The proposed Beskyttelse Act of A.T. 2568⁴ stripped all emigrants of OEF and national citizenships on Old Earth and imposed a federal visa requirement for return, even for a temporary visit. All OEF member states, including the State of Israel, were expected to ratify the law.

Yeschayahu Amsalem, the ceremonial President of Israel and a member of the country's Orthodox majority, gave an impassioned speech at a plenary session of the OEF Senate in February of A.T. 2570, pleading for an exemption clause for the State of Israel, "...because the land itself is an integral part of the national and religious identity of the Jewish people." The Beskyttelse Act effectively cut off a part of the diaspora from its ancestral homeland forever, he argued. Amsalem ended his speech with a quotation from Deuteronomy 30:4: "If any of thine that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee."

Unexpectedly, the Israeli motion was seconded by most Muslim member states. These wanted a similar exemption for those attending the hajj and desiring to visit other Muslim holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Israel. Even Knesset members representing the Arab citizens of Israel (about 30% of the population at that time) expressed their support. The Holy See also demanded that Christians be allowed to go on pilgrimage to Rome and various holy places on Old Earth, many of which happen to be within the borders of Israel. All these religious exemptions were passed⁵, in part because the OEF considered their implementation as a far distant—and in A.T. 2570 almost non-existent—problem.

III. The Law of Return in the Age of Colonization

a. Before A.T. 2894

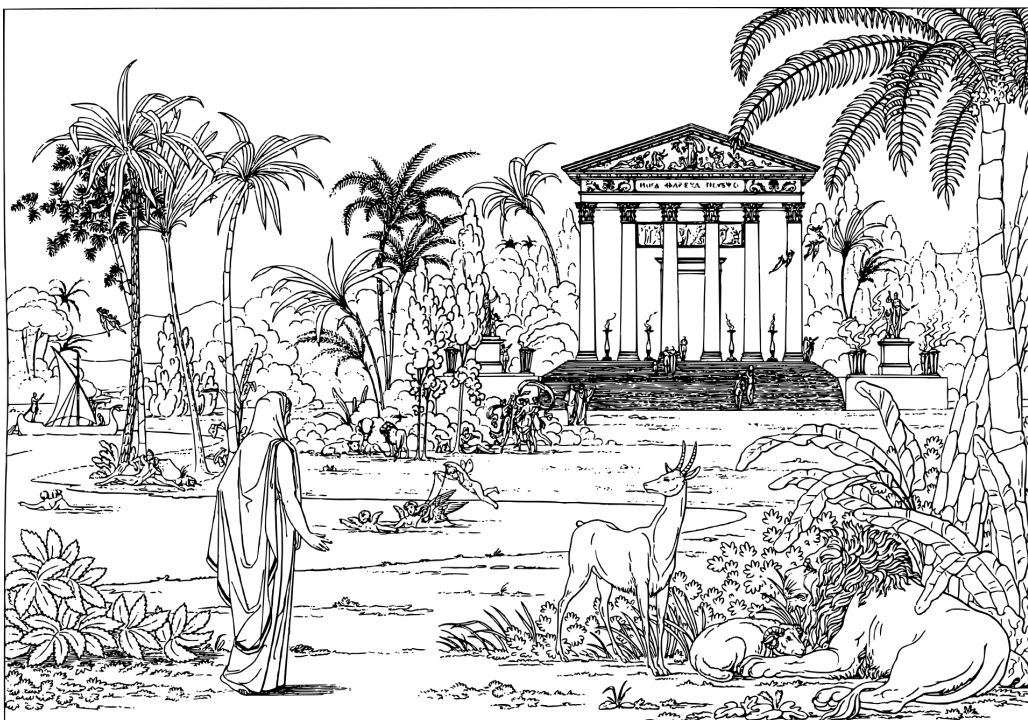
Many Jews subsequently entered Israel under the provisions of amendments §1-3 of the Beskyttelse Act. There were 300-1000 cases of intersidereal aliyah per year from the beginning of the twenty-ninth century. By that time, several important developments had occurred both in Israel and in the intersidereal Jewish diaspora.

The Law of the Return was amended (amendment 5, A.T. 2730) to make being *halakbically* Jewish a requirement for immigration, with the authority for determining this being given to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. This amendment, the greatest restriction on Jewish immigration to the State of Israel ever imposed, essentially codified the jurisprudence surrounding the Law of Return at that time. The change caused less protest In Israel than might have been expected. The Orthodox majority had increased substantially by A.T. 2700, so that non-orthodox Jews (including all “hilonim”, or secular Jews) made up only 15% of the citizen population.

The number of people of Jewish heritage living in the colonies officially outstripped the number of those on Old Earth in A.T. 2812. Most traced their ancestry to emigrants from the former United States or Europe,

but a substantial minority (20%) had roots in Israel. Jewish emigrants established the New Haifa settlement on Terra Nova⁶ in A.T. 2692. Within two hundred years, it became one of the most important cities on Terra Nova and one of the largest in all the settled worlds. Quite unexpectedly, Terra Nova Hebrew emerged as a lingua franca in the city, eventually becoming the main language used by the city’s non-Jewish majority.

The nature of Jewish religious observance in the colonies (usually quite secular) began to change dramatically after A.T. 2860. In that year, a religious movement, “The Numbered” (הממוספרים), began to rise to prominence on Terra Nova, led by a certain Moshe Glanz, known to his followers as “The Numberer” (הממספר).⁷ Glanz, an obscure figure who does not appear to have been an observant Jew until his early thirties, declared himself to be Moshiach. He was initially dismissed by most of his contemporaries, but soon gained a following thanks to several purported miraculous healings which he worked in and around New Haifa. He was a gifted orator and polyglot who had managed to acquire an encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish writings. By A.T. 2894 his movement had grown to around three million followers on several colonized worlds.



b. Glanz et al. v. The Minister of the Interior (A.T. 2894)

Glanz had a peculiar interpretation of *Olam Haba*, the complex eschatological concept in Judaism of an ideal “world to come”. The Numberer declared that, as Moshiach, he alone could bring it about. To do so, he needed to “return”, together with all his followers, to the Land of Israel. Nearly a million Numbered attempted to enter Israel *en masse* in A.T. 2893, seeking citizenship under the Law of Return. They were denied permission, and thus could not obtain an OEF visa. The Numbered were denied citizenship by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior on the basis of an A.T. 1970 amendment to section 4A of the Law of Return, which stipulated that a Jew who voluntarily changes his religion loses the automatic right to Israeli citizenship. As the Numbered were considered converts to a different religion, they could not be granted citizenship.

Glanz and his followers sued the following year, calling the decision by the Minister of the Interior illegal under the Basic Law of Israel. The Numbered were not members of a different religion, it was argued. To maintain the contrary position would be to define Judaism as a religion which does not believe in the possibility of the coming of Moshiach, Glanz’s claim in this regard being the only argument for considering his followers to be apostates. The court found against the Numbered. Glanz then appealed the decision to the OEF. A lower court refused to adjudicate the case because it did “not think itself competent to legislate questions of religious identity”, thus allowing the Israeli decision to stand.

c. After A.T. 2894

Glanz died under mysterious circumstances before his appeal could be heard by the OEF Supreme Court. The Numbered decreased in size after his death, though the members who remained became increasingly influential and devoted to the cause of their founder. Many of them continued to believe that Glanz was still alive, but in hiding, and considered their immigration to Israel as a religious duty to prepare the way for his reappearing. It is estimated that 350,000 Numbered acquired Israeli citizenship over the next decade by dissimulating their

membership in the movement. This led to an amendment to the law of Return (amendment 7, A.T. 2910) which provided for the expulsion of Numbered who had obtained citizenship fraudulently. The amendment proved impossible to enforce, however, as it was exceedingly difficult to prove membership in the Numbered because of their commitment to secrecy.

Glanz’s movement led to a renewed interest in Zionism and a certain popular revival of Jewish religious observance among the intersidereal diaspora, especially the observance of Shabbat, for which some Orthodox rabbis now consider the Numberer to have been a Tzadik. Today, though the Numbered are essentially extinct as an active religious force, millions of Israelis claim to be descended from them. Some historians trace the political motivations for the last amendment to the Law of Return (amendment 8, A.T. 3126, a repeal of the restrictive amendment 5) to their latent influence.

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Notes:

1. This piece was originally published in *Old Earth: An Encyclopedia of Terrestrial Human History*, as part of the entry “Israel, State of”, Vol 321, col. 47-269, New Haifa University Press (New Haifa, Terra Nova: A.T. 4731). It is republished here in an adapted form with the kind permission of New Haifa University Press.
2. For an exciting and often humorous account of the first successful El-Sayed terminal trip between Old Earth and Terra Nova, see: Marion Flanders, *A Small World After All: The First “Baton” Terminal and the Age of Colonization*, New Haifa University Press (New Haifa, Terra Nova: A.T. 3127).
3. See: Gideon McArthur (ed.), *When You Look at the Stars, Remember Me: The First Colonists of Terra Nova in Their Own Words*. New Haifa University Press (New Haifa, Terra Nova: A.T. 4491).
4. *OEF-Gesetzhandbuch* 407.62. The law, meaning “protection”, is so named because it was originally proposed by the Norwegian delegation in the Senate.
5. *Ibid.*, Zusatzartikel §1-9.
- 1 This dialect preserved aspects of Modern Hebrew for centuries after they had been lost or changed on Old Earth. Some of its salient features are a high usage of English loan words, pronunciation of “״” as a uvular fricative, and an SVO word order. Old Earth Modern Hebrew, under the influence of Classical and Levantine Arabic, eventually moved to a rhotic “ ״” and adopted a more frequent use of the VSO word order, making it more similar to Classical Hebrew. See art. “Hebrew” in *Old Earth*, vol. 296, col. 1121-1834.
7. The name of the sect and its leader were a reference to God’s command to Abraham in Genesis 15:5 to “number the stars”. See art. “The Numbered” in *Old Earth*, vol. 428 col. 76-99.

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Affinities Between Science Fiction And Music

Mircea Băduț

Preamble

Auditory concepts such as the “music of the spheres”, which we may nowadays associate with the speculative mode, have deep historical roots reaching back to the works of Pythagoras (6th century BC) and later explored by Plato (4th century BC). Johannes Kepler's 'Harmonices Mundi' (1619) further emphasized this idea, while it was tangentially touched upon in literary works such as Hermann Hesse's 'Klein and Wagner' (1919). The symphonic suite 'The Planets', composed by Gustav Holst in 1914-1917, should also be mentioned here.

Yet I would argue that it was the electronic music boom of the 1970s and 1980s which had brought the intersection between music and speculative fiction to the fore, with artists such as Vangelis leading the way. This was made possible by the capabilities of electronic synthesizers to sonically create an atmosphere that human culture (and perhaps human instinct too) assumed to be associated with cosmic space, and this phenomenon occurred during a time when society was experiencing excitement and curiosity about our expanding presence in the cosmos, both physically and intellectually.

I believe electronic music captured the listeners of that era for two main reasons. Firstly, because *the exoticism of the sounds emitted* by electronic instruments, often characterized by long notes and in vague harmonies, had a profound effect on inducing a unique mental state. Secondly, owing to *the radicality of the distinction from pop music* (which would not have been evident in a comparison with symphonic/classical music, where the modernist branch had already reached somewhat similar sonorities). In other words, this new music conquered the listeners of those decades (in which I also grew up) through its progressive, renewing character.

Judged from a musicological perspective, the electronic music of the early decades could often be considered as minimalist, occasionally obsessive (in its repetition or thematic dosage), and at times deliberately psychedelic. (The latter effect is often achieved by relying on an *obstinato* of melodic theme that foreshadows either an accumulation of dramatic potential, akin to the musical tension build-up used in the symphonic genre, or by a transcendence into oneirism.) And, of course, if it had been compared to the peaks of creation in classical music or in the jazz and rock of that era, it would have proved itself somewhat immature. However, much like the merger of science fiction into mainstream literature, electronic music targeted a different segment of society, and thus, they did not necessarily compete with each other.)

However, this essay does not end at electronic music, and will try also to cover, as significant landmarks, other kinds of musical creation close to the idea of science fiction. So, to set the scene, here is my initial proposal for a list of milestones of the 'SF – music' nexus:

- » 1964 – Probably the first sci-fi song;
- » 1969 – David Bowie releases the single 'Space Oddity';
- » 1972 – David Bowie releases the album 'The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars';
- » 1978 – 'The War of the Worlds', as musical version created by Jeff Wayne;
- » 1976 – 'The electronic music album 'Albedo 0.39' composed and performed by Vangelis;
- » 1977 – 'The electronic music album 'Spiral' composed and performed by Vangelis;
- » 1978 – 'The electronic music album 'Die Mensch-Maschine' ('The Man-Machine'), by Kraftwerk;
- » 1982 – 'The soundtrack of the film 'Blade Runner' (Ridley Scott), composed and performed by Vangelis.

1. Probably the first sci-fi song

The reader may be surprised or thrilled to come across a reference from the vibrant era of the hippy movement and its music. It pertains to a pop-rock song titled "In the Year 2525 (Exordium & Terminus)." Composed by Rick Evans in 1964, this song achieved the remarkable feat of reaching number 1 on the US 'Billboard Hot 100' chart in 1969, followed by securing the top spot on the 'UK Singles Chart' later that year. However, the musical duo known as 'Zager and Evans', who created this remarkable hit, faded from the music scene like a passing comet, earning the status of a "one-hit wonder" before disbanding in 1971.

"In the Year 2525 (Exordium & Terminus)" / Rick Evans / 1964 / 'Zager and Evans'

"In the year 2525, if man is still alive

If woman can survive, they may find

In the year 3535

Ain't gonna need to tell the truth, tell no lie

Everything you think, do and say

*Is in the pill you took today (...)*¹

Even though the song was definitely noted in its time, we probably cannot nominate it as a kind of *avant-la-lettre* "sci-fi music". But I consider that it deserves to be recognized as a significant reference both for the concrete science fiction text (including the coordinate of anticipation, of utopia), and for the fact that the band 'Zager and Evans' achieves this clear message using ordinary instrumentation (i.e. without resorting to any kind of sound fireworks).

dramatization. Secondly, unconventional soundscapes and psychological stimulation are achieved, notably through the use of synthesizers, albeit without excessive exploitation. Additionally, the "voicebox guitar effect" is worth mentioning, although it had already become a recognized technique in rock concerts. A subtler element, yet a personal favorite, is the metal-body electric guitar played by Chris Spedding. This particular guitar, crafted by James Trussart and modeled after the famous Gibson Les Paul but with a hollow body made of steel sheet, creates a unique and intriguing sound.

2. The classic 'music – SF literature' connection reference

"Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of The War of the Worlds" was originally a studio musical album (in the rock/pop/progressive genre) conceived, created, produced and recorded by musician Jeff Wayne (CBS Records, 1978), which would be followed by many reissues, performances, tours and reinterpretations. As we expect, the album is inspired from the novel 'The War of the Worlds' written by H.G. Wells, and is presented as a rock opera, arranged instrumentally with a rock band (guitars, bass, drums/percussion, organ/synthesizer) but also with a considerable addition of a classical/symphonic orchestra (including strings), as well as with narrative inserts (explanatory introduction and interludes, performed by the voice of the actor Richard Burton). The narrative thread of the rock opera is inspired by that of the classic sci-fi story, but it must be emphasized that some of the musical sequences (derived from acts of the story) led to the creation of songs of extraordinary musicality, thanks to both the melodic composition and very successful interpretations. In the years that followed (and to this day) this album was very successful, both in the charts (singles "Forever Autumn" and "The Eve of the War") and in terms of sales.

By analyzing this musical production from a listener's perspective, several noteworthy aspects can be observed. Firstly, the orchestration is "architectonic" in nature, featuring monumental sonorities that are impressively paired with melodic

The original album, subsequent reissues, concerts, tours, reinterpretations, and various editions on formats such as DVD, CD, and even SACD have all achieved tremendous success worldwide. While visionary projects are known to have the potential for great success in theory, the process of starting them is rarely easy. The realization of the 1978 album was indeed a challenging endeavor. Jeff Wayne conceived the idea, developed the concept and acquired the rights to incorporate narrative ideas from H.G. Wells' science fiction novel. However, he faced significant difficulties in finding financiers for the album's production expenses and persuading musicians to participate. He had even posed the question to musicians regarding their preferred method of payment: a fixed and immediate amount or a share in the future proceeds from the property rights? Unfortunately, to their detriment, the musicians chose the skeptical option in terms of their financial well-being.

It is worth noting that this remarkable science fiction musical creation was brought to life without overly relying on electronic artifice. That, however, was set to change in subsequent decades...

3. Tangible and consistent landmarks of the 'music - SF' connection

The first key date relates to a breakthrough in the material prerequisites for electronic music: in 1964 Robert Arthur Moog (1934–2005) invented the Moog musical synthesizer, and in 1970 he also released a portable model, the Minimoog, which would radically influence the music of the 20th century. (Alongside, of course, other notable manufacturers of synthesizers and electronic organs, such as Yamaha, Roland, Korg, Oberheim, EMS, ARP, Elka and Fairlight.)

Below I present the subsequent milestones in another succinct list (without going into detail where the names have become classics), no longer focusing on the names of musical productions, but rather the individuals (or groups) who made them:

- » Vangelis, through the albums from 1975 to 1984;
- » Tangerine Dream, through the albums from 1974 to 1987;
- » Isao Tomita, esp. the album 'Electric Samurai' (Switched on Rock) from 1972;
- » Klaus Schulze, through the albums Cyborg (1973), Timewind (1975), Moondawn (1976);
- » Kraftwerk, through the albums released between 1977-1981 (The Man-Machine, Computer World);
- » Jean Michel Jarre, through the albums Oxygène (1976) and Équinoxe (1978);
- » Robert Fripp – renowned both for his compositional style (sometimes exploiting asymmetric rhythms and using classical or folkloric melodic motifs) and for his early innovations in the generation of unconventional sounds (such as the sound-delay system using magnetic tape).²

For a wider geographical context, electronic music also appeared in the Soviet Union, such as these examples:

- » the band Zodiak, (USSR/Latvia), with the albums 'Disco Alliance' (1980) and 'Music in the Universe' (1982);
- » the album 'Metamorphoses - Electronic Interpretations Of Classical And Modern Music' (Melodiya record label, USSR, 1980).

But perhaps the most interesting exemplifying corpus for the 'music - SF' nexus derives (although not explicitly) from so-called rock “super-groups” of the years 1965-1980 – Pink Floyd; Genesis; Manfred Mann's Earth Band; Emerson, Lake and Palmer; Yes; The Alan Parsons Project; Supertramp; Marillion; Electric Light Orchestra; Brian Eno/Roxy Music; Mike Oldfield; etc –, which impress both by their sophistication (hence the alternative denomination of 'art-rock') and by their progressive function of cultural/spiritual re-toning (hence the denomination of 'prog-rock'). Furthermore, numerous artists, even those not typically associated with art-rock or progressive-rock genres, have occasionally crafted songs that feature progressive sounds and nuances.

4. A rapprochement between (sub)genres (cultural and musical)

We observe that while the previous discussion began with electronic music, due to its inherent connection to science fiction, this intersection naturally expands to encompass other related musical genres. This tends to be driven by songs and productions that stand out for their unconventional and progressive sounds and messages. Therefore, it is fitting to include or at least explore genres such as art-rock, progressive rock, jazz fusion, and even classical/symphonic music, as they share connections and influences with speculative fiction.

Progressive music offers alternative perspectives and enhances traditional forms, leading to a continuous elevation of artistic standards over the years. It has even influenced pop music, which often fails to appreciate the achievements in quality and compositional complexity of previous generations. Each new generation tends to "reinvent the wheel" with a certain casualness. In contrast, composers in "heavy" music are more inclined to study the classics and acknowledge their influence even if they create in new musical currents or subgenres. Moreover, in addition to the fact that progressive can be understood as a reform or as a detachment from an ordinary/vulgar flow, the dichotomy between progressive rock and pop-rock (intentional in essence, assumed either voluntarily or instinctively) can also be seen in another perspective: with the progressive, music becomes conceptual, i.e. intended rather for actual audition (an audition for audition itself) than for easy entertainment and somatic well-being (we might say, "moving thought/spirit rather than muscle/skeleton"). In order to build its conceptual (or experimental) character, such music frequently resorts to 'fusion', both from the perspective of orchestration/sounds and from a rhythmic/melodic perspective, with inspiration and mixture from jazz, symphonic/classical music, or even from world-music (folk).

Experts in music may argue that these "progressive mechanisms" are naturally experienced in modern jazz. This is not necessarily a negative development, as it allows for the incorporation of multiple genres

within the concept of spiritual-cultural regeneration and evolution. And now we promptly return to our cultural parallel, because speculative fiction often embodies similar ideas and proposals, justifying the close affinity with progressive music. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, in the context of the present discussion, musical progressiveness primarily concerns music itself, while science fiction tends to be more focused on stimulating thought rather than solely on the literary craft.

Music connoisseurs could also draw our attention to the fact that during the boom periods of the species concerned here (sci-fi, electronic music, progressive rock) in symphonic music there were already currents and subgenres that used "progressive mechanisms": neoclassicism, modernism, *chromatisme*, serialism (dodecaphonic music), post-modernism, (so-called) contemporary music, experimental music, post-tonal music; respectively with the names of composers such as Gustav Mahler, Claude Debussy, Dmitri Shostakovich, Ottorino Respighi, Anton Webern, Pierre Louis Joseph Boulez et al. In fact, many progressive rock music productions have been inspired (using themes or approaches) by classical/symphonic music (Jethro Tull; Rush; Procol Harum; Beatles; Moody Blues; The Who; King Crimson; Jeff Beck; Rick Wakeman; John Lord; Deep Purple; Queen; Led Zeppelin; Sting; Peter Gabriel; etc). And if we call to mind the soundtrack of the film '2001 Space Odyssey' (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) – a cinematic touchstone in SF culture – then we will once more recognize the proximity to classical music, but we may also admit that a special sound atmosphere can be created with classical formulas and acoustic musical instruments. (And while on this subject, if we listen to "Also sprach Zarathustra," the symphonic poem composed by Richard Strauss in 1896 in its entirety, we will notice that it was very modern for its time.)

And we end this section with a reference to 'Firebird', a symphonic music concert composed by Igor Stravinsky on a fantastic theme, and which mnemonically leads us to the Japanese animated film 'Firebird 2772: Love's Cosmozone' (director/screenplay: Osamu Tezuka and Taku Sugiyama; music: Yasuo Higuchi; 1980).

5. Music, beauty and the digital future

In order to complement some ideas in this essay, it is worth noting that in its emerging era, electronic music was created with instruments that did not work digitally (with numerical signal encoding) but analogically. These were sound synthesizers (with electronic tubes, then with transistors and later with integrated circuits), audio sequencers (such as 'CV/gate') or other more or less artisanal devices (Frippertronic; theremin/termenvox; Fender Rhodes piano; Ondes Martenot; tape loops, tape delay, *musique concrète*). It was not until the 1980s that the way of digitally recording, processing and generating music would be opened.

But what is the essential difference between analogue and digital sound? (We tacitly accept that music, of whatever genre it may be, means sound. In fact, a multitude of sounds, emitted and succeeded according to harmonic/aesthetic laws.) These two terms, somehow antagonistic, were defined in relation to each other. Initially – in the days of vacuum tubes and transistors – electronics did not have a second name, but only after the advent of signal coding technologies, would the field bifurcate into (1) analog electronics (working

with continuous signal) and (2) digital electronics (working with discontinuous/discrete signals). (The digital electronics are also called 'logic electronics', because the topology and operation of their circuits correspond to a desired logic.)

The transformation of the natural/analog signal into a digital signal involves two processes: (1) *sampling* and (2) *quantization*. Sound sampling means that we read (i.e. take a sample from) the original signal at every fraction of a second (a fraction having, let us say, 2×10^{-5} seconds, as in the case of CD-Audio), and quantization implies that we will measure the amplitude of each sample and transform it into a number (respectively into a digital code, i.e. a group of bits). This transformation is called *analog-to-digital conversion* (ADC). Of course, when it is necessary to listen those digitally recorded signals, they must go through a *digital-to-analog conversion* (DAC), which is somewhat the reverse of the one briefly described above.



Of the two processes applied to the digitization of music, sampling is guilty of the greatest loss when recording the original sound, and this is because in those unread time intervals (intervals of 2×10^{-5} seconds) the audio signal nonetheless continues, especially if it is a polyphonic signal, as happens in music where several instruments play quasi-simultaneously, and each instrument actually emits many simultaneous sounds. (Even when a single musical note is emitted, the sound having the frequency corresponding to that note is accompanied by a myriad of other sounds – secondary/additional harmonics – that make up the 'timbre of the instrument'.) In fact, from a Hi-Fi (High-Fidelity) perspective, the beginnings of music digitization were unfortunate because it was not understood then that Nyquist's Theorem (which defined a minimum for the sampling rate of signals) was not suitable for music sounds.

A similar insufficiency at the small time scale is the reason why digital synthesis sounds (even when embodying traditional musical instruments) are poorer than sounds produced by *acoustic instruments* (instruments that produce sound by physical vibration: either a parts of their composition, or the air passing through them), an aspect that we can all analyze if we do small experiments by listening carefully to musical instruments or comparing quality music recordings.

Humans, with our analogue ears, have a natural affinity for music. The appreciation and recognition of beauty, including the auditory one, involve two fundamental factors in human beings. The first factor is *our biological and innate perception*, which is passed down through genetics. The second factor is *our cultural perception*, shaped by environmental influences, such as imitation, assimilation, and education (i.e. developed through the traditions and customs of the people among, and places where, we have grown up or currently reside). Thus, we have two filters through which our perception of music is shaped: a biological and a psycho-social one.

The influence of the biological filter can be documented by the fact that certain sounds (specific combinations/aggregations of frequencies) can evoke distinct physiological states, either beneficial or adverse, with or without involvement of the psyche. On the other hand, the psycho-social conditioning can be illustrated by the awareness that there were (and still are) peoples in the world who divide the musical octave into intervals other than the twelve we commonly use, and who build the rhythms in other measures than we do. Therefore, if we were to listen to music indigenous to such cultures, we might feel a sense of confusion. Thus, the concepts for musical aesthetics developed by an extraterrestrial civilization, if we were to ever encounter one, might very well leave us utterly baffled.

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Notes:

1. <https://lyrics.lyricfind.com/lyrics/zager-evans-in-the-year-2525-2>
2. The author recommends the 'Discipline' album for edification.

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Incredulity

James C. Clar

“Credo ut intelligam”

Anselm, Proslogion

Zoticus sat at the desk in his study. He was surrounded by armillary spheres, intricately wrought alembics and retorts as well as by a seemingly disorderly profusion of scrolls and codices in a variety of languages both ancient and arcane. One particular tract, which he had managed to translate with some difficulty from the Arabic, had proved especially fruitful. The breakthrough which he had managed to achieve as a result was the culmination of a lifetime of research and experimentation.

But how to disseminate the information and knowledge he had so laboriously acquired? His was a skeptical age and his work was looked upon with everything from condescension and amusement on the one hand, to outright disdain and even hostility on the other. What was more, Zoticus was old. In spite of what he had learned, his own days were numbered. He was desperate to find someone to whom he could bequeath his wisdom and who would be both willing and able to carry on his work. Apprentices like that were few and far between at any time and in any place, but here and now they were particularly, acutely scarce. The old man sighed and rubbed his temples.

There had been that young man last year. Zoticus had so hoped that he would persevere. Within weeks, however, the novice – despite his aptitude and keen mind – had succumbed to the poison of doubt. He had demanded “proof.” Proof of what, Zoticus had wanted to ask? But he knew that such an approach would have been futile. The youth insisted that he needed to “know” so that he might believe. The secret, as Zoticus himself had ascertained, was that one must first believe and only then might one truly come to “know.” Zoticus was convinced that one either understood that esoteric truism intuitively or one did not. And if one did not, there was no means that had yet been invented to alter such an individual’s outlook or hermeneutic.

Zoticus' epistemological musings were interrupted by a forceful knocking at his door. He rose stiffly and shuffled slowly into the hallway. A draught of cold air intruded and the oil lamps began to flutter as he opened the outer door. Before him stood what he could only assume was another candidate. This young man, however, was carrying a dead owl. Zoticus had seen far too much in his long life to be shocked or even surprised. Owls, of course, were mystical animals associated with inner wisdom, transformation and intuition. If nothing else, he was intrigued.

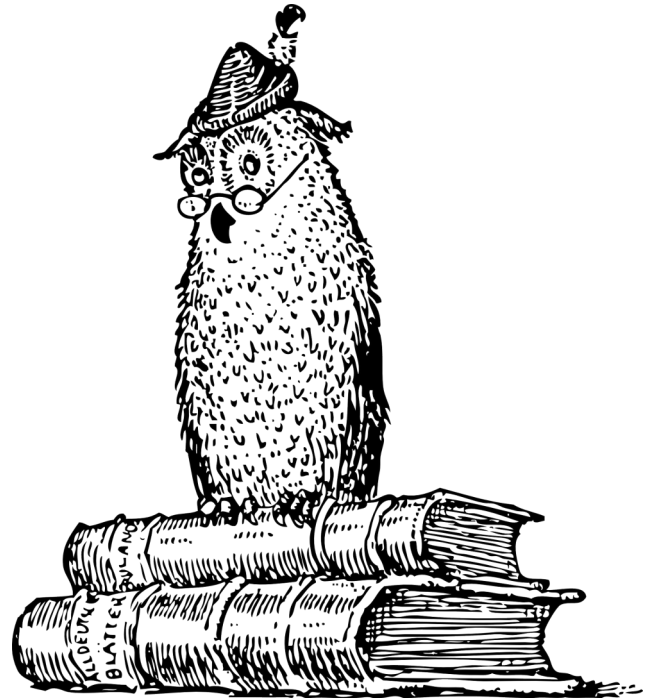
"I will forsake all ... my family, my friends, and my career to become your apprentice," Zoticus' visitor stated without preamble. *"First, however, you must prove that what is rumored about you is true,"*

The determined young man issued an ultimatum. *"Raise this bird to life and I will stay."*

Zoticus couldn't help himself. He stroked his long white beard and, despite the supplicants' obvious gravity, the old man began to laugh. *"Another one,"* he muttered as he shook his head in frustration and dismay.

As Zoticus was shutting the door the startled and bemused would-be apprentice hurled the dead raptor at the old master's feet in frustration. Unfazed, the elderly scholar closed the door completely and threw the latch. He bent and picked up the owl's lifeless body and carried it gently, reverently back to his desk. Setting it down, he softly intoned an ancient formula with great conviction and authority. Almost at once, the animal's hooded eyes began to flutter.

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Nothing Could Be Something: A Parable Of Sorts

Robert L. Jones III

G. K. Chesterton once wrote that materialists address the easier questions posed by the universe, ignore the more difficult ones, and then retire to their tea. Accordingly, a particular individual of this persuasion discovered a problem inherent to his materialism. His conceptual universe consisted solely of matter, energy, and the forces that governed their operation, and it followed that his thoughts and his personality were nothing more than patterns of electrochemical impulses coursing along randomly evolved neural circuits. These explanations begged the questions of what all this really meant and from what it had originated. Accepted chemical and physical theory presented much for consideration.

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Electromagnetic energy was made of photons which had no mass. Matter was composed of atoms which contained protons, neutrons, and electrons within spherical, mostly empty volumes. Protons and neutrons were combinations of quarks held together by gluons. Evidence existed that electrons, once thought fundamental, were divisible into spinions, orbitrons, and holons.

So everything consisted of particles of one kind or another arrayed in motion through empty space. Quantum effects allegedly produced the simplest of these from nothing, and this raised the disturbing possibility that everything had arisen from and was reducible to the same. Even the faithful have their doubts. Prone to introspection, the materialist examined his.

Mind was indistinguishable from body. Mentally as well as physically, he was a finite but ever-changing association of matter and energy, and this implied that he might be a manifestation of nothing. In arriving at this conclusion, he confronted his chief complaint against his materialism: nothingness was not enough.

Impenitent but searching for answers, he grasped for salvation through geometry. Euclid's Elements became his nightly panacea, his "now I lay me down to sleep" before turning out the lights. The logic of this ancient work reassured him, for it reminded him of what he needed to believe, an inference both elegant and pure: nothing could be something. In light of this revelation, he considered the nature of pure geometric forms.

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A point had no height, width, or depth. Being of no dimension, it was a position without volume or mass. It was the most elemental of geometric concepts.

A line was made of an infinite number of points. With length but not width, it occupied only one dimension.

A plane contained an infinite number of lines. Being flat, it possessed length, width, and area but no depth. From its infinite points, any two-dimensional geometric figure could be constructed. A circle, for example, consisted of infinite points, all at equal distances from a central point and all in the same plane. It had a radius, a diameter, and a circumference, and it encircled an area which was not intrinsic to its nature.

A sphere consisted of an infinite number of points at equal distances from a central point and all in an infinite number of planes, making it three-dimensional. It completely surrounded a volume but had no volume in itself.

Whether in one, two, or three dimensions, all of these forms and countless others were made of nothing and had no mass or energy, but they were real.

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These considerations offered hope, and they culminated in a series of appearances.

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At fifteen minutes before midnight, the materialist looked up from Euclid's Elements. He rubbed his eyes, and there it was: a minute distortion in his field of vision. It reminded him of light passing through an imperfection in a pane of glass, and it appeared to be in the center of the room. He glanced in multiple directions. The visual distortion remained stationary, so it wasn't in either eye. He blinked. The spot remained. He stood up, took a few steps forward, and passed his hand through it, but it was still there.

Geometric definitions flickered in his mind, and he suddenly realized what he was seeing: visual evidence of a perfect, geometric point. Because it had no dimension, only position, he wasn't seeing the actual point. He was seeing an indication of where it was, somewhere within the tiny volume of altered wavelengths. This implied a disturbance of air molecules, a refraction of light, and it resurrected the spectre of nonmaterial causation.

The point began to move erratically but in a way that implied intelligence. Something had emerged into the air, and it evidently was assessing its environment. From whence had it come? Was it from an unknown universe, or had it arisen spontaneously, nothing from nothing but still something?

The point widened its apparent search. When it reached the far wall, it disappeared. The materialist sprang from his chair and ran into the next room to follow the peregrinations of his visitor. It had passed through the wall, which was not surprising given its absence of volume and mass. After careening about briefly, it disappeared through the ceiling.

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Another visitation occurred the next night. Initially, the point didn't move. Then it grew rapidly into a line resembling the seam between two fused pieces of glass. Reaching to and presumably through the walls, the line remained stationary and then shrank back to a point. Whatever was behind this activity seemed to be learning, and it had achieved extension and contraction in one dimension. Having completed this operation, the point vanished.

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On the third night, the point reappeared, and it extended into a curved arc which quickly formed a complete circle. Motionless and resembling the margin of a lens without any housing, this figure hovered vertically in the approximate center of the room. The materialist stood up from his desk and walked slowly around the circle.

As he did so, the circle appeared to change into an oval, then a vertical line, and back to an oval. It was a circle again when he reached the back side, so it was stationary. The different shapes depended on his angle of observation. Again, he wasn't seeing the circle directly. He was seeing only where it was, and the pure figure was invisible within that space. The entity behind its construction had achieved two dimensions.

The materialist moved back to view it from the side, but now it rotated on an invisible axis to follow him. This gave it a more ominous aspect. The roles of observer and subject ostensibly had been switched, and the circle reminded him of a hollow eye. He couldn't explain why this bothered him as much as it did. Perhaps it was the sheer emptiness of the figure mixed with a sense of intent.

The circle didn't collapse back into a point after this. Rather, it flattened into a horizontal line as if winking, and then it disappeared.

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On the fourth night, the materialist woke with a start. It was not yet midnight. His room was dark and silent, but he knew he was not alone. Reluctant to turn on the light and afraid to leave it off, he wrestled with these options for several minutes. In a spasm of decision, he reached for the lamp on his nightstand and flipped the switch. Wavering on one elbow, he slowly turned his head.

The geometric eye was back, but it was larger. More than two meters across, the optical distortion filled the zone defined by its margin. It had become a circular plane with radius, diameter, circumference, and area. It reminded him of a colorless bicycle reflector, and its bottom was mere inches from the level of his bedroom floor. He abruptly pushed himself up into a sitting position and kicked off his covers.

The disk moved toward him and encompassed the foot of his bed. It moved across the mattress, reached his feet, and slowly began to pass through him. He slid backward but was stopped by the headboard of his bed. The bottom of the disk was obscured by his mattress, but he could see the top half moving up his legs and into his upright torso. It caused no pain, produced no pleasure. It neither injured nor invigorated, and its product was the absence of sensory effect.

Something unseen, something without a body, was experimenting. Beginning with none, it had achieved one and then two dimensions, and it had just finished examining a third. The next logical step would be for this nonmaterial intelligence to assume a three-dimensional form.

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On the fifth night, the point grew into an arc and then a circle. The circle extended into a sphere. As the materialist walked around this newly created figure, the perfection of its form remained constant from multiple angles of observation.

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On the sixth night, the point grew into a variety of two and three-dimensional figures, disappearing and reappearing between each new formation. These constructions became increasingly complex, and an idea occurred to the materialist as he watched. Was he being instructed? He wondered if ancient philosophers had invented geometry or if they simply had been shown.

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On the seventh night, the point rested.

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There were no further visitations. In their aftermath, the materialist often considered the phenomena he had observed, but the question of origins remained intractable to satisfying analysis. His interpretations repeatedly snagged on Plato's ideal forms and Aristotle's unmoved mover. This prompted him to wonder whether he was good enough for nothing, and whenever he engaged in these deliberations, he experienced a persistent craving for tea.

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The Power Of The Stone

David K. Henrickson

I was there when the first aliens landed in Central Park, when the lost tomb of Alexander the Great was discovered, when fabled Atlantis rose again from the waves.

That is the power of the stone. Those four words: “*I was there when*”, carved into its surface, can take you anywhere or to any time, real or imagined.

I have no knowledge of where the stone came from or anything concerning its origin. In all my searches into its provenance — and my resources these days are considerable — I have found no mention of it anywhere, in any time, in any culture.

I know it is not contemporary. The first time I held the stone, those four words were not in English but in a script unknown to me, then or now. When I looked again, the stone had changed and appeared as it still does today, many years later.

Nor do I know how the stone does what it does. There is no way I could risk an investigation into its nature. I cannot see that it matters. The stone is either magic or a technology of the highest order — far beyond anything humans are currently capable of.

Will ever be capable of. We’re talking about pure creation here. Of fashioning an entire universe in accordance with a single sentence uttered in its presence. Yes, I was there when Oswald failed to assassinate President Kennedy. Yes, I was there when Hannibal overran Rome during the second and final Punic War. Yes, I was there when Superman first appeared in the skies over Metropolis.

Whether the stone fashions these realities whole cloth, or pulls them from an infinite grab bag where such worlds lay waiting, I have no way of knowing. Nor am I always sure how the stone will interpret my words. It seems to possess a puckish sense of humor at times when fulfilling my wishes.

It also ignores requests that are too specific. A simple sentence with a minimum number of qualifiers works best. Something that can be uttered in a single breath. That is enough if one is sufficiently clever. Yes, I was there when Edmond Dantès discovered the lost treasure of Monte Cristo. (Ha! I needed a wheelbarrow for that one.)

I was also there when they developed the cure for cancer. You see, I am not quite the heartless misanthrope people make me out to be.

You might well think all this to be the ramblings of a delusional eccentric. My scars would indicate otherwise—as does the absence of the little finger on my left hand. Using the stone is not without its dangers.

I am old now, even though I do not look it, and have been a recluse for many years. (Yes, I was there when Ponce de León discovered the Fountain of Youth.) Whenever I need an escape, I pick up the stone, speak my desire, and journey into the realm of What Might Have Been.

Our travels together are nearing an end, however. Over the years, I have become attuned to the stone and its moods. I know, even though I do not know how, that it is ready to move on. To find a new owner, whoever and wherever that might be.

Accordingly, I have put my affairs in order. As for the stone, I will send it away when I reach my final destination. Where it will end up, I have no way of knowing, just as I do not know how it came to be where I once found it. Let fate decide—or rather, the stone itself.

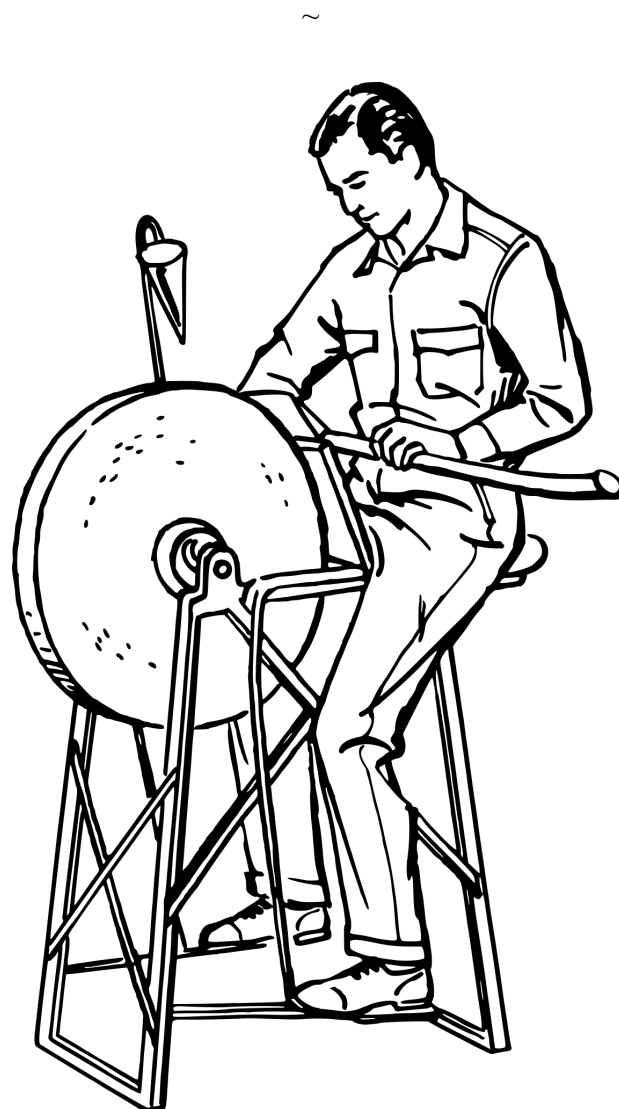
As for the many eclectic treasures in my collection, I have bequeathed these to various museums without explanation or annotation. (All but my journal. That, I am taking with me.) Let people make of them what they will—a last, enigmatic note to a singular life.

There remains only my final journey, one from which I do not intend to return. It is one I have thought long and hard on over the years. Where should I go? The far future? The distant past? Or to some place that should have been but never was, like Wonderland or the world of Scheherazade and her One Thousand and One Arabian Nights?

Perhaps I should go to Barsoom. Or to some vast, galactic empire at the height of its power and glory. What about the First Age of Middle Earth? (Wouldn't that be something?) Wherever I end up, it should be a place where a person can still have an adventure or two.

Where would you go if you could pick only a single destination, one from which you would never return?

Let me see. I was there when...





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