

# Fandom Forever

*A Danish science fiction fanzine!*

*No. 1 / 2012*

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## FANDOM FOREVER No. 1 /2012

- a Danish science fiction fanzine -

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# Introductions

There are many ways to introduce a new publication on the market. Even on the science fiction market. One can do it the Gernsback way, and announce a new and bright future: "This remarkable publication in front of you will definitely change your reading habits, the way you think about the future, and will introduce you to completely new voices in the genre!" For that it most likely will... One could do it the school-magazine-type personal way: "Hello, all! Welcome to my newest creation, an internationally oriented science fiction fanzine, in English, from Scandinavia – who of you had seen THAT coming?" Or one could do it the almost traditional fanzine way: "Sorry, about the delay. This issue SHOULD have been out on January 1<sup>st</sup>, but due to <this and that> we are now almost four months late..." *Let me just put it this way:* Hi there, this is a fanzine by and for the science fiction family on the little blue dot we call home planet. If you like it, read it! If you want it to be better, then make it so! Write for it! If you just do not care for one more fanzine, then rest assured: I understand you! But tell me what else you read! And if you really hate it and its very existence: Write me LoC and tell me. Yes, I dare you! A LoC! *En garde!*

In either way an editor should use this place to present the idea of it all, the concept behind the efforts. So the reader can evaluate if this is something they would like to support or not, and so a poor reviewer with a good heart and a tight deadline can write a quick mash-up for his/hers/(its?) media. I love reviewers; they produce the very air that fanzine editors breathe: Reviews, listings, comments... *So here it is:* This fanzine is just like its name, a celebration of science fiction fandom from one who came very late to the party. I love science fiction fanzines and science fiction fandom, and I have spent a considerable time (actually more than three decades now) finding and reading what went before me, from the beginnings in Europe and America with the H.G. Wells and Jules Verne Reading Clubs (Copenhagen actually had one of the largest and earliest Private Reading Clubs for fantastic fiction), over the first five stages of semi-organized fandom (and their loves and feuds), to the current clubs, societies, and conventions (in all the "branches" of science fiction fandom today).

Science Fiction Fandom hit Scandinavia from the 1950s onwards – though we had to wait until 1974 for our first Danish organization. Recently I compiled a listing of all the actifans in Denmark since then, and reached a remarkable 110 individuals who had made a difference. Add to this the 30.000 pages of printed fanzines so far published in Danish, and the steady appearance of 10-20 new genre books per year; and we end up with something like the fandom of a larger urban area, maybe London, Berlin, or New York. So we HAVE a voice, also a genre voice. It is just not speaking in an international tongue... This fanzine is

quite simply an attempt to cross that line, presenting a Danish voice in a readable language to you all☺.

Now, since only the select few will ever search out a fanzine from Denmark – in whatever language it presents itself – I obviously need to spice it up with goodies “on your side of the fence”, to make you want it. To that effect, I shall be printing first publications of “your” writers, articles from “your” analysts, etc. To be found only, or at least first, in these pages...

A special segment, at least to me, will be the poetry. I think there is much too little poetry in science fiction fanzines today – they were a quite mainstream content 70 years ago, but now it is getting harder and harder to find it outside poetry journals and professional magazines. To me all forms of expression forms their own crucial part of the family discussions, and I am happy to provide pages for good and interesting science fiction poetry. I am hoping to include our songs, our cartoons, and our favourite quotations as well, as they might appear from you in my mailbox...

*As for publishing methods, well:* Reading through all the larger Amateur Press Associations bundles of fanzines I began piling up, it struck me that this (the APAs) would be the best way to introduce Scandinavian genre writers to the fandom world. Much simpler than attempting to build a subscriber list from scratch. This way, this fanzine *begins* its journey with 500+ readers. Since we live in a transcending world, with exploding social media, ever-expanding internet, and a growing number of people who will simply not pay for their amusement, this fanzine will be available outside the APAs as a free, downloadable, pdf – a pdfanzine as it were. I *will* request full information (name, postal address, and email) for all free pdfs – I simply want to know who reads it, in which countries, and the writers will want to know at least the number of readers per country, as it might boost their possibility for a sale to that country if they can refer to it. Of course a lot of people will just forward the pdf to friends, but they will – technically – be angering The International Gods of Copyright. Why risk that, when the pdf is freely available from me? *For the record:* No, I will not sell, distribute, or in any other way publish you personal info without your prior active consent.

And so we arrive here, now: A new fanzine. A science fiction fanzine. A Danish science fiction fanzine. In English. Popping up in your APA; on your doorstep; in your mailbox. I have added individuals from other fanzines’ writers & readers, when known, as well as my entire personal knowledge of active fans in the international family. Some of you will get the print copy, others the pdf. Just let me know if you want to get off the reading list – and you will not see a copy again☺. Promise!

It is also custom at this place for the editor to present the contents of the issue, again for the benefit of the reader (why has this been chosen?; will it be like this the next time too?) and for the stressed reviewer in feverous need of reasons... I thought I might begin by setting the scene for current Danish genre writing, and to my luck, Danish Big Name Fan Niels Dalsgaard had just delivered one of his major articles in a Danish magazine. So we open the issue with a look at novels published in Denmark between 2000 and 2009. Should give a fair presentation of the current state of affairs in my end of the world.

Dispersed throughout this issue are three magnificent poets that I really enjoy reading: Mike Allen, Bruce Boston, and Peter Payack. Each with five good examples of their work, and with several first publications between them – just to ensure that this inaugural issue becomes a collectors item© I hope you will agree with me that such fine poems are any bit as good as a short story in conveying the sense-of-wonder?

A good example of current Danish genre writing is included in Manfred Christiansen's little story Thunderegg. Christiansen is currently competing (with a different story) for the yearly Niels Klim Award – the new national Danish science fiction award for best science fiction story. He is flanked by two other short story writers, Israeli writer Lavie Tidhar – presenting his funny multiple choice story Zero Game, and American writer Tobias S Buckell – presenting his thoughtful piece "Io, Robot". Both authors, though international, are seen to little in the greater scheme of things...

In the little regular feature, the FanNewsDenmark, I shall attempt to brief you all about events in our small part of Fandom, the Fanmark as we call it Conventions, awards, and stuff. And over time maybe even making you familiar with this remote branch of the family...

Finally, the obvious disclaimer: This is a fanzine. It is not a professional publication. It is severely limited by my own personal limitations, in financial options, in formal editing, in actual writing, in assessing translations. So be gentle. It is made *con amore*, with the heart, for both my and your amusement. Smile, do not sneer! For in the eternal youth of Fandom, even I, a 47 year old, seasoned, armchair traveller, can look to the (rainy) skies outside my window, raise my glass, and yell out the battle-cry: FANDOM FOREVER!

Knud Larn

# A Worried People?

## Danish Science Fiction Novels from the Naughts

### By Niels Dalgaard (Denmark)

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*Niels Dalgaard (born in 1956) holds a PhD. in Scandinavian Literature, with a special emphasis on Science Fiction. Over a period of 12 years he taught at Copenhagen University, at The Institute for Scandinavian Philology.*

*Besides being the author of a whole score of book-length studies of our genre, he has edited and translated numerous anthologies of science fiction into Danish. He is also the writer of the only history of science fiction in Danish, as well as a seminal history of Danish Fandom. However, his maybe most significant life's work is being the long-time editor of Proxima, the Danish academic magazine about science fiction, published since 1974 by Science Fiction Cirklen ([www.sciencefiction.dk](http://www.sciencefiction.dk)), and currently in its 93<sup>rd</sup> issue.*

*This article was first published as "Et bekymret folk? Nullernes danske science fiction-romaner" in Proxima, issue 92, 2010, and it is translated by the author himself.*

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In order to say something meaningful about what uses Danish writers make of the science fiction genre, it's necessary to delineate the subject. Dealing only with novels, published originally within the years 2000-2009, written by Danish authors and aimed at an adult audience, we arrive at the following number of publications each year:

2000: 13  
2001: 5  
2002: 1  
2003: 2  
2004: 3  
2005: 9  
2006: 11  
2007: 12  
2008: 12  
2009: 8

These numbers may seem comparatively small; but considering the Danish book market in general, they are not so bad. The 76 novels represent a doubling compared to the 38 published in 1990-1999.

Of course, the figures must be taken with all kinds of caveats. The present author is limited to works that he knows of (through reading of newspapers, use of library databases etcetera) and that he considers to be science fiction for adults. Given that the border between YA and grown-up literature is at best diffuse, others are bound to disagree on a few (but not many) specifics. Likewise, an insistence that metaphysical dream-stories are not SF excludes a few (but not many) novels that others might have included.

There are basically two reasons for the increased numbers of novels published. The first is that the noughts is the decade in which print on demand and various forms of do-it-yourself publishing made a serious impact on the book market. This did not only affect SF, of course, but the genre benefited alongside other forms of literature from the fact that it basically became possible for most people to have a book published. This new liberty quickly turned out to be a double-edged sword, on the one hand liberating manuscripts that the established publishers did not want to publish because they were considered marginal and uncommercial, on the other releasing a minor flood of vanity publications that would have been better left unpublished.

The other trend to be taken into consideration is the increasing tendency of mainstream novelists, as well as writers of genre material such as crime fiction and thrillers, to use elements from SF in their works. Cross-over between genres flourished this decade, which also means that a traditional classification of the works according to theme or motif – space travel, time travel etc. – is less useful than it would have been in earlier days.

### **Crime fiction and techno-thrillers**

One of the most radical developments in fiction publishing in general has been the increased popularity of the crime novel as well as the closely related thriller. As large numbers of these novels are published (by Danish authors as well as translations from other languages), writers try to vary the somewhat rigid plot schemes of these forms by introducing elements from other genres, among them SF.

The border between crime novels using SF elements and SF novels with crime-fiction elements is fluid, and many gradations exist. The main difference is a matter of how well integrated the SF novum is in the story; if it is only loosely connected to the universe presented in the narrative, and its presence doesn't make all that much difference, it becomes rather a MacGuffin, an arbitrary thing to be chased, interchangeable because it is the chase in itself that is the story.

There are rather few "straight" crime novels from the period with this kind of loosely integrated nova. The best examples are Susanne Staun's novels about profiling expert Fanny Fiske, set either in a relatively close future or in a kind of parallel universe. So far, five novels have been published about this ice-cold supporter of the death penalty and loveless consumer of random sex partners; the first was *Som arvesynden* [As Sin] (1999). It

is characteristic for these novels that the SF elements most of the time remain in the background and do not play a central role for the plots that are rather traditional crime plots. Among the more drastic of these elements appear in *Mine piger* [My Girls] (2008), where Copenhagen Airport is blown up by terrorists.

Peter Dürfeld's *En sikker kreds* [A Safe Constituency] (2001) is an example of writers more often using the crime novel with SF elements for political satire set in a near-future more or less dystopic setting. In this case, the year is 2012, the prime minister has been sitting for twelve years, and while all the political parties have changed their names, they are immediately recognizable. Although there is a murder and it is central to the novel, it is the political satire that is really the central subject. Many other Danish SF novels from the decade contain elements from crime fiction (notably murders), but generally these elements are subordinate to others, notably satirical and political.

The techno-thriller, on the other hand, is normally without satirical intentions. It may be thought of as a thriller in which the central element is a scientific discovery or technical invention, preferably one whose implications for the world at large is huge. Since it's the thriller part that is dominant, the plot is rather narrowly defined: Somebody who doesn't know about the central element, gets involved in something which turns out to have much larger consequences than he or she thought at the outset, and solving the crisis becomes a race against time – a race that should preferably take place in secret, and possibly with various secret police forces as opponents along the way. As with crime fiction proper, there are techno-thrillers where the discovery or invention in itself is of so little importance that it is hard to distinguish them from any other kind of thriller, while on the other hand there are novels that use the form to debate contemporary problems and leave the reader with food for thought after the thrill has worn off.

A couple of Danish SF novels from the nineties dealt with genetic engineering, a subject that in various forms continues to occupy writers (and readers), almost to the exclusion of other scientific or technical challenges. Among the rare examples of these other motifs is the invention of a pollution-free, hydrogen-based engine in Nis Jakob's *Imidis Vand* [Imidi's Water] (2001). Not surprisingly, the bad guys turn out to be a multinational energy consortium.

This lack of trust in big business is widespread in the genre, generally confirming the reader's experience of a world controlled by powers beyond his or her control. This is also the case in Per Helge Sørensen's *Mailstorm* (2000), where an engineering Ph.D. student accidentally witnesses – via a webcam – the murder of one of his colleagues. In this case, the crime turns out to be that the US will force the European Union to apply a mandatory encryption routine in all software – a routine to which the Americans keep a key. It also transpires that the Danish government couldn't care less about the alleged crime prevention that is the reason given for this system; it knows and approves of the fact that the real object is surveillance of normal, law-abiding citizens.

Genetic engineering and gene splicing plays a marked role within this kind of literature, which it already did in the nineties in Denmark as well as abroad, and which is also



marked within SF that is not designed according to the technothriller model, such as Svend Åge Madsens *Genspejlet* (2000), which will be discussed below. But if we assume that technothillers are read by a broader audience than “fine literature”, then the widespread appearance of gene-related scenarios within the technothriller can be taken as a sign that a great many people have heard about possible developments of the technology within this field – and that they generally are worried.

Jesper Lemmich's *Den tabte by* [The Lost City] (2007) is a technothriller of this kind. At the outset, it's a story about genetically engineered tomatoes, intended as a sort of ongoing vaccination of Ecuadorean indians in hard-to-reach areas, making them independent of the international medicinal industry – which already suggests one possible underlying conflict, albeit one that doesn't get to be played out in full. Instead, the book is part of the debate on ethics among medicinal researchers. When freshly minted Ph.D. Josef gets sent to Ecuador in order to find out what happened to the young doctor Nikolaj, who was in charge of the research there until he suddenly disappeared, both Josef and the reader is thrown into a whirl of events and turns of plot, constantly bringing up new suspects (as it should be in any decent thriller). While the genetically engineered tomatoes really are there, they actually serve as a cover for a cynical project, where one of Josef's former thesis advisers purportedly inflict the local populace with HIV. The aim is to prove the existence between that monkey virus, from which HIV is believed to have evolved, and the form of the virus actually present in humans. The researcher just didn't have the patience to find it in nature, and instead gene-spliced it himself – with the unintended result, that the new form is exceedingly virulent, and that infected persons die very quickly.

From a certain perspective, genetic manipulation smells like racialism. Pia Kate Bock's *Det blå folk* [The Blue People] (2005) describes a secret institute in Switzerland, where attempts are made to develop a race of superhumans. This is done partly by selective breeding, partly by having the subjects ingest a drug that make them strong and long-lived, but at the same time gives their skin a blueish tinge. Here science, or rather its institutionalized incarnation, is definitely evil. The blue people are cynical abusers of power, and while there are individual differences between them as to how they are influenced by the drug, many of them are violent and unpleasant. The institute also has ordinary, non-modified people working for it, but they are really slaves, and the guards, among others, regularly amuse themselves by torturing them. The breeding programme means that children are removed from their mother shortly after birth, which strongly bothers the two young employees Darvino and Ditte. Darvino plans an escape, but it takes a long time before it can be put into effect. Meanwhile, he is forced to engage in an affair with the otherwise cold-as-ice professor Benedicte Bana, which bothers his conscience considerably. But thanks to a Danish truck driver who is frequently delivering goods to the institute, he as well as a bunch of others succeed in escaping. The institute is reported to the police, which (perhaps surprisingly) closes it down immediately – only the professor and a psychopathic guard get away. A few months later, they appear at the fugitive's hideaway in Denmark, and Darvino and the professor are killed in a final confrontation.

Considering the widespread concern about this subject, it is surprising to note authors that do not in the least consider genetic engineering and the production of designer babies a problem. In Ole Clifford's *Troldmanden fra Waterloo* [The Wizard of Waterloo] (2009), that sort of thing is seen as quite all right. The protagonist is Buck Frazier, the CEO of a major American medicinal company. The company is in a crisis, and when he's offered a number of patents for production methods based on genetic engineering, he's inclined to accept. First, however, he needs to know more about the secretive contacts, so he gets a hacker as well as a private eye on the case. In the course of a traditional thriller plot it gradually appears that there is a clinic in Belgium who helps people get designer babies – including babies based on genetic material from past geniuses, acquired through simple grave robbing – but who also is working on the production of superhumans. It all ends happily, when Buck gets excited about the idea, his firm survives the AGM, and a joint venture with the Belgian operation is established. In other words, the “mad scientist” who's been under suspicion throughout the novel, turns out to be on the good side, just like the blustering oldfashioned capitalist who's been portrayed with open-mouthed admiration by the author all the way.

### **Dan Brown imitations and disaster novels**

Related to the technothriller *per se* are thriller novels based on more or less occult ideas about secret societies, hidden civilizations with unfathomable powers and code writings that only the specially equipped heroes of the novel are able to read. It's hardly been to the disadvantage of this sort of novel that Dan Brown got such an immense commercial success with his (not very well written) *The Da Vinci Code* (which is not SF). If you mention a “secret message”, you've almost automatically gotten a thriller plot for free. Among other novels, it is the case in Ole Clifford's *Det 11. bud* [The Eleventh Commandment] (2004), where an archaeological dig in Italy turns up a clay tablet containing part of the tenth commandment along with an astronomical location. Indicating that God came from space, this activates hidden forces who aim to protect the world religions against this truth. Why well-established religious hierarchies should fear this kind of discovery is not clear (they've been doing fine in the face of all physical evidence for centuries); but not only thriller writers draw on this idea, is it also present in e.g. Svend Åge Madsens *Mange særeting for* (discussed below).

Also Steffen Nohr's *Det 14. punkt* [The Fourteenth Point] (2009) deals with mysterious writing in a hard-to-get-to place – a 4000 year old stone tablet deep in the Marianer Trench – resulting, after a lot of cloak and dagger, in the discovery of one of the special points on the globe which, according to an esoteric theory (explained by the writer in an afterword), opens up for secret powers and hidden worlds. For a number of reasons these powers are not engaged with closer, as it is feared that they cannot be controlled, and so the world is saved once more.

Many of the hidden objects and messages in books of this kind are religious and metaphysical rather than scientific, and the genre thus is jumping back and forth across

the border to science fiction proper. This is not too much of a problem, as it is the thriller plot which dominates the construction, but it's nevertheless prominent enough that a number of books falling outside the frame of this article still can provide fine experiences for thrill seekers willing to suspend their disbelief even further than demanded by the genre in general. Just inside the borders of the SF genre we find Ann Fortier's *Hyrder på bjerget* [Shepherds on the Mountain] (2005), which mixes satire of the university world with a plot full of mystical spies, secret societies, Atlantis and whatnot. Despite everything, there's a certain method to the madness, albeit at times well hidden – and one's allowed to register a mystical bent, when the two protagonists on a Christmas Eve (after having found Noah's brain, no less) discovers a boat on a mountain, and it becomes clear that it's not Adam and Eve who're to repopulate the world this time, but the two young persons, who incidentally are named Josef and Maria [Joseph and Mary].

In other words, an element of apocalypse and resurrection is often present in these mystical novels, in which respect they're like another group of novels that are, however, rather less marked by mysticism – the disaster novels. Depictions of the end of the world through floods, comets, global epidemics or other disasters from without (as opposed to man-made ones, like e.g. a nuclear war) are by no means a new thing in literature, neither in Denmark nor in the world at large. A couple of examples would be Camille Flammarion's *La Fin du monde* (1893) and the Danish Carl S. Torgius' *Syndfloden* [The Flood] (1913). And on film, the subgenre has become a cliché, so that in almost every movie of this kind – no matter what the catastrophe is supposed to be – has become the story of the desperate struggle of the hero to save himself, his wife, and his children; a struggle which he always wins in the end.

In Erik Juul Clausen's *Dommedagskometen* [The Doomsday Comet] (2000), as in parts of Flammarion's novel, it's not so much the catastrophe in itself that's the center of attention, as the psychological reaction of the characters on the publication of the photo of a comet heading for Earth. As could be expected, a plethora of religious sects appear, amongst them one that wants to kill the astronomer because of her blasphemous discovery. After being besieged in her laboratory for a long time, she is however rescued, and so is the rest of the planet when the comet detours at the last moment. It is thus the story of a catastrophe that didn't actually occur; or maybe rather a disaster consisting of humanity's miserable behavior under pressure.

In Arne Herløv Petersen's *Tsunami* (2003), there is no mysticism at all; indeed, the tsunami of the title is man-made as a part of the long-running conflict between an imperialistic USA and Indians in South America. After an attempt to legitimate an American invasion by murdering a Danish visitor and making it look as if the Indians did it, has failed, the Indian chief retaliates by blowing up a volcano with an old nuclear device. This results in large volumes of lava rushing into the sea, setting off a flood wave that in many ways resembles the one that actually hit Asia a few years later. So, while some disaster novels are stories of a heavenly power interfering in life on Earth (from the biblical deluge on-

wards), and others are meditations on a cold and insensitive universe's treatment of humans, *Tsunami* represents a critique of humanity's ability to create problems for itself.

### **Dystopia (and a little bit of Utopia)**

As has often been pointed out, there is a difference of nuance between the American science fiction tradition, which didn't really hit Europe (with the possible exception of Great Britain) until after the Second World War, and the already existing European tradition. The difference in particular is that the European version of the genre placed – and still places – a greater emphasis on dystopian and satirical novels than the American does.

This tendency is markedly visible within the Danish science fiction of the noughts. Political criticism is mixed with more or less successful and more or less absurd humor in a large number of novels critical of current society. One difference is immediately apparent: In the seventies and eighties it was mostly conservative and right-wing authors who protested against surveillance, central registration of citizens and thought control. This criticism has (with a few decent exceptions) fallen completely silent, at the same time that the real (supposedly liberal) regime has established a controlled and closely surveyed state that would have the leaders of the late DDR turn green with envy.

At a time when e.g. the Danish television applies the term “satire” to lame sketch-shows and sad humor without any recognizable satirical intention, and when the term “dystopian” seems to be on the verge of meaning no more than “a story where things do not turn out good for the hero in the end”, a precision of the terms may be pertinent. A text may be satirical if it exposes a phenomenon or a person through a caricature, often based on exaggeration, with the intention of criticizing that which is being satirized. A dystopian story depicts a society that is in some way worse than that of the author (as opposed to a utopian story, where the society is *better* than that of the author). A disaster novel is thus not a dystopia, even though the protagonists are in for a hard time – however, they may end up building a dystopian society after a catastrophe, in an attempt to make things as good as possible (this happens for instance in Hanne Marie Svendsen's YA novel *Den skjulte by* [The Hidden City] (2006)), or maybe even found a truly utopian one. It is quite possible to have satirical ingredients in a dystopian novel, but it is not defining of the genre. And in many dystopian novels there is absolutely nothing to laugh about.

While it can be difficult to come up with a plot for a novel taking place in the best of all possible worlds, the dystopian novel almost comes with a built-in plot, since the reader instinctively will sympathize with those characters who try to revolt against the unreasonableness, as is the case in two of the classic novels in the European tradition, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). They depict two rather different oppressive systems; while the citizens of Huxley's world are well satisfied with their lives, those in Orwell's are trampled thoroughly by a brutally violence-based system. But in both places there are persons who want to and dare to rebel.

Among the later Danish participants in this tradition are several authors who depict the suppression as something coming from the EEC. This is the case in Robert C. Berg's

*Glasliv* [Glass Life] (2000), a well-written novel taking place in a Europe around 2030, which has grown into a fascist dictatorship with all-pervasive surveillance. The protagonist Edvard is in his fifties and arouses the suspicion of the system by collecting old drinking glasses, since any activities concerning the past which is outside the control of the regime, is considered a potential threat. He connects with an underground movement who attempts to help him and his girlfriend escape to Norway, who has promised to accept them in return for the glass collection. Following various complications – and after the regime has lied to Edvard about stopping the surveillance of him, thereby arresting several of his contacts – he is ready for departure, but it remains unknown whether the escape will succeed or not.

While *Glasliv* places the point of view with an “ordinary” person on the everyday level, the protagonist of Mich Falch's *Kald mig Uno* [Call Me Uno] (2005) is an agent of the military powers in a situation – set as far in the future as 2030 – where attempts are made to turn the EEC into a regular union, complete with a president etc., despite resistance from the peoples. Uno, who despite the name is female, has a sister named Vera (a name that means the truth) who works for the resistance fighting to maintain the separate states. As with several others of the dystopian novels mentioned here, this one might have been placed with the thrillers or crime novels. However, the central part of the novel is the way society is structured, which can also be seen from the fact that when the Danish police make an honest attempt to solve a political murder, they are stopped by the European police who want the case shelved.

The protagonist Jakob in Benny Adriansen's *Europolis 2022* (2006), is also a “man of the system”, working as a translator in Brussels, now renamed Europolis, in a future where the EEC has fallen under a strong German dominance, and prohibition and censorship is leveled against the writings of Nikolai Grundtvig, the Danish popular educator of the nineteenth century, on the grounds that they are nationalistic. Jakob is a believer of the system and is married to the daughter of a highly placed person, but is sacrificed during some intrigues that he is unable to see through, and ends up being executed. In this, as in the two foregoing novels, there is no hope of better times. This also in large part goes for Louis Lawaetz' *Euromania* (2005), where a totalitarian Europe controls the population with, among other things, the television show *Billionaire or Vegetable*, in which actual brain damage is inflicted on the losers. This time, however, the story ends to a certain degree hopefully, as the regime is overthrown.

As in the case of the Dan Brown imitations, some writers use the dystopian novel to promote a religious message (a phenomenon known in Danish at least as far back as Constantin Bruun's *Den store trængsel* from 1934). For example, the title person in Asger Johansen's *Anders* (2005) is a citizen of the technocratic megalopolis O, but receives a vision that he shall overthrow its leader and rebuild the theocracy X that used to occupy the same place. The self-assurance of an author that just *knows* that he has God on his side, is here expressed in the form of raw infodumps and sermons. Far better written is Kristian Massey's *År 2035* [Anno 2035] (2007), in which a woman is chosen (or manipulated) into

possibly giving birth to the next saviour. The plot takes place within a society containing many barbed jabs at current trends and tendencies, and the reader is nowhere near as much as with Johansen's book presented with a saved person beyond any doubt.

A novel that is hard to place within a single category, but which also concerns itself with surveillance (and which also contains a considerable satirical thrust, albeit rather more subtle than most of the works mentioned here) is Svend Åge Madsen's *Det syvende bånd* [The Seventh Tape] (2006). It does not take place in the near future, but in the near past – a past, in which certain events has unfolded differently from what they have in our world; in other words it is a kind of alternate history novel. Like most of the authors *oeuvre*, it is set in the city of Århus, but an Århus in which society has for fifteen years been organized differently from ours, in such a way that theft and like crimes mostly has been obliterated. It is a society based on surveillance, but not in the same way as in other novels; Madsen has, quite characteristically, taken a widespread idea and given it a twist of his own. Each citizen in this society surveys one and only one other citizen, and is in turn himself surveyed by only one other. This chain of surveillance means that an eye is kept on everyone, but that there is no central authority (with accompanying risk of abuse) surveying everyone. And every 23<sup>th</sup> day everybody's placement in the chain is changed, so that in the course of time one gets an insight into the lives of many others. Of course, the action picks up speed when an outsider is in need of some privacy and therefore has to cheat the system, but basically the chain is an interesting compromise between the escalating surveillance madness and the privacy which those that now support surveillance once claimed to cherish. At the same time, the novel is – in a way characteristic of Madsen – placed between utopia and dystopia, in effect being neither, but rather a reminder that one man's utopia might very well be another man's dystopia.

Niels-Ole Rasmussen is also placing a political discussion within a novel with a different kind of plot than that the traditional dystopian novels use. His *Kongen af Ragnarok* [The King of Ragnarok] (2005) most closely resembles a disaster and post-disaster novel, in that it deals with what happens to Denmark – specifically, Copenhagen – when the world is hit by another ice age. Among the survivors is the royal family, who quickly becomes the protagonists of the novel, especially the crown prince, who had planned to abdicate, but is forced by the changed circumstances to assume responsibility. To a Danish reader, it is a special experience to see the usual confrontations between two groups of survivors unfold in a frozen Copenhagen; and as for the utopian/dystopian aspect, there is an additional violent confrontation with a group organized along fascist lines and holed up in a mall on the outskirts of the city. Finally, the royal family manages to escape on a frigate, shortly before the frost closes the harbor permanently, and so the ending opens up for a new beginning somewhere else.

The crown prince is also a major character in Dan Larsen's *Holger* (2007), in which an American capital fund attempts to buy Denmark. The liberal Danish prime minister is quite OK with this, but provokes resentment among the populace, and a cleverly staged movement executes a number of protests, humorously and without violence. When the

movement runs for parliament, the crown prince abdicates in order to be eligible, at the same time disclosing that he has gone on the barricades for reason of sheer patriotism. A dystopian situation is thus turned around into a potentially utopian one. Powers from the outside also play a role in Niels Lunde's *Jomsborg* (2000), which is not really utopian and hardly satirical, but rather a thriller in which the SF element is an English millionaire who finances an international group of investors in their attack on the Danish krone, hoping to strengthen resistance to the EEC. Luckily, and apparently quite without ironical intention on the author's side, the country is saved by the European Central Bank. A stronger utopian potential is apparent in Per Holm Jørgensen's *Må Gud bevare Amerika* [May God Keep America] (2006), which deals with the election of the first black female as president of the USA – although the novel doesn't concern itself with utopia as such. And in Peter Aagaard's *Centro* (2009), the dystopian aspect is confined to a multinational corporation and its gated community. The protagonist is whirled into a thriller-type plot, along the way gaining sufficient insight into the way the community works to finally decide to leave.

### **Fusion of forms**

The dystopian aspect is dominant in Danish novels of the period, including in a number of novels departing from the traditional model and, like e.g. Madsen's *Det syvende bånd* and Rasmussen's *Kongen af Ragnarok*, either places the concept of utopia and dystopia themselves under discussion, or sets the discussion within the frame of a thriller.

A smaller group is rather questioning the concept itself, in that while they take place within dystopian societies – and while these societies are clearly portrayed as disagreeable – the plot does not concern itself to any significant degree with doing something about society. The function of the frame is mostly to lend an air of inevitability and hopelessness to the story, making the protagonist's struggle both heroic and in the end pretty much without a chance of succeeding.

This is what happens in the one case where an escalating totalitarian regime is actually overthrown, George Ursin's *Den navnløse bevægelse* [The Nameless Movement] (2007). His protagonist Victor Chenlein is retired, but is helping a woman tracing her lost son. Chenlein appears in several crime novels by Ursin, and the plot of this novel is also criminalistic. But it takes place in a fictive country with allegorical-symbolic place names; the capital is Aspera (hope) and most of the action takes place in Urba (city). The combined effect is an atmosphere of abstraction and modernist thinning. Something similar is going on in the pseudonymous Rebekka Ravn's  *Davids historie* [David's Story] (2008), which deals with a cleaning-up operation within a secret organization, taking the characters to places with names like Råstof [Raw material], Metropolis Horribilis, Vestbyen [The Western City], and Østbyen [The Eastern City].

Lone Munksgaard Nielsen's excellent *Stregkoden* [The Bar Code] (2006) takes place in a society called simply Byen [The City]. Two of the ingredients very prominent in Danish dystopias appear here, surveillance and biological manipulation. The bar code of the title is one that is tattooed on the shoulder of every citizen in order to facilitate surveillance.

Most people live off a substance they secrete when they sweat, while a series of experiments have brought forth a group of “new elderly”, who are born old and among other things attempt to create new life by inseminating random women. Since the story is seen “from below” in that the point of view is with ordinary people way down in the system, the sense of alienation is profound. It is the type of novel where the protagonists ultimately manage to escape from the city, but it is not revealed whether this escape opens up for actual new possibilities – or, for that matter, whether it is possible to live outside the closed environment at all.

The escape takes the opposite direction in Kasper Nørgaard Thomsen's *Idiotheque* (2008). It is set in the near future in a recognizable Copenhagen – to be exact, a part of the city named Valby, of which a part has been turned into “The Canton”. This separate miniature society is perhaps a prisoner's camp, although people go there voluntarily because they can't handle the complexities of the surrounding society. The protagonist who calls himself Mickey Kleist, but is actually named Madsen, is one of those who've just moved there, and from the beginning of his stay is placed on a crew whose job is to change the light bulbs in a giant billboard. Later he is promoted to chopping branches off felled trees. He gets involved in an uprising that however disintegrates due to lack of a realistic goal, and he ends up a gasoline-sniffing passive. For him, as for most of the others, The Canton is the end of the line, not a step forward.

Surveillance also appears in Pablo Henrik Llambias' *A.P.O.L.L.O.N.* (2000) which, as its title implies, gets a good deal of inspiration from Greek mythology. It takes place in a society where people have become practically immortal, and rules have been made, governing permissible life-spans. The protagonist Epimetheus is ordered to work in a nursing home and ends up trying to escape through a labyrinth of a society. Ultimately, it all turns out to have taken place in something like an ant heap, whereby the story leaps from science fiction to a kind of animal fable. But where the fable traditionally assigns human qualities to animals, so that e.g. a fox is wily and an owl is wise, the ant heap here becomes an image of human society. Like several other novels in this category it uses symbols and allegories, refreshingly supplemented by the ancient Greeks, as when the secret police is called H.E.R.A.

All in all, these works might be dystopian, but they also use the dystopian frame as an image of an inner condition. Therefore no distinct line is drawn between believable technical innovations and more metaphorical phenomena, as for instance when a small boy thinks he's found his grandfather's eye in the wall that constantly is undergoing repairs in *Stregkoden*. In this sense these books are part of a tradition where the authors stress the science fictional imagery's use as metaphor – a tradition, which in Denmark goes back to the experimental literature of the sixties.

## Satire

On the border between the satirical and the dystopian, we have Torben Krogh's *Danskhedsministeren* [The Minister of Danishness] (2007), a fine little novel from a near fu-



ture, where a political maneuver leads to the appointment of one Tormod Bindeballe from the extremist party supporting the government, as “Minister of Danishness” (the names have been changed, but to a Danish reader the portraits of major political figures are clear enough). Immediately, he sets a series of increasingly crazy plans in motion, thereby frustrating the narrator of the novel, who's a journalist and has been hired as the minister's press agent. His professional qualities as well as his loyalty conflict with his view on the escalating madness, and he finally quits, just as the minister is annexing Slesvig to Denmark and deporting everybody of non-Danish blood (Slesvig lies south of Jutland and was annexed by Germany after the war in 1864; the northern part was returned to Denmark after the first world war, while the southern part – which is the one referred to here – remains German). With all its madness, the novel draws a deeply unsettling picture of the craziness actually prevalent in certain parts of the Danish political spectrum. Krogh was a political reporter for many years and knows whereof he speaks.

Klaus Kjøller lacks the insight and intention of Krogh; rather he aims to entertain in a pleasingly attention-getting way. He's a university lecturer and has, among other things, written works about rhetoric and manipulation, subjects that are also at the heart of *Lingos lov* [Lingo's Law] (2005), which is a story of political intrigue in connection with a vote about the EEC in 2007. He has given his characters somewhat annoying “funny” names, and has supplied the plot with a missing career politician and a video that may be used for blackmail, in order to make the book look like a thriller. The satire is escalated a bit in the author's somewhat better *Den åndelige akse* [The Spiritual Axis] (2007), although the silly names continue. On the agenda is nothing less than a planned *coup d'état*, where the prime minister fakes his own kidnapping (while his people unsurprisingly blame Muslim terrorists) in order to facilitate a change of the constitution that will reduce parliament to an advisory board for the – in effect – absolute monarch. The monarch in question is however, not in agreement with the plans, and so they fall.

Another satirist of this type is Flemming Christian Nielsen, who published *Nytårstalen* [The New Year's Speech] in 2004. Again a criminal plot is set in a near-future Denmark plagued by racism and mind control, and where politics has been reduced to spin. The same author's *Dyrets tal* [The Number of the Beast] (2009) is a stronger work. While it contains satirical elements, often bordering on the absurd, it also seems better controlled than the other. Maybe because it – like many of the better dystopian novels – pretty strictly places the point of view with one of the victims in a totalitarian, near-future Denmark. It's a victim who at the outset isn't considering either rebellion or criticism, but pretty passively accepts being trod on every day. Not until he's intrigued and worried about things close to him does he begin to pull at the thread that unravels the entire terrifying construct.

The absurd exaggeration of the novel adds an element of humorous satire, but in reality one doesn't have to look far before recognizing things that are just as absurd in current society. For example, the protagonist Alexander Brutus Petersen, who's unemployed, is forced to apply for eight jobs every day and call “ArbejdsKraftService” [Work Force

Services] to say that he's still unemployed. This call usually takes a couple of hours, because there's always a long line, despite the fact that the official number of unemployed is no more than 666 (as implied by the title, Alexander – and the author – gets a lot of mileage from the biblical “number of the beast”). The low number is due to the fact that about half a million Danes have been turned into “Angels”, that is, they are drafted into a corps that ostensibly is “helpful”, but in reality is totalitarian and controlling. Nielsen has a sharp eye for the massively ideological use of the language in the past decade.

Alexander gets sucked into the action by a coincidence. A girl, whose acquaintance he's briefly made, turns out to have disappeared when he tries to visit her, and soon he discovers that the regime's nauseating talk of Danishness is a cover for a massive ethnic cleansing. What's more, as he himself some generations back have a small percentage of Muslim blood in his lineage, he is himself to be deported (along with the rest of the unemployed). He may be better off than a lot of the others: He has a nice house he can sell, and since the leader of the country is an old school pal, he is allowed to immigrate to sunny Spain. But he's also contacted a lawyer who through a private company runs a kind of resistance, and by the end of the book Alexander is facing the choice that so many have been presented with when living under totalitarian regimes: Escape and save your life, or stay and fight for freedom?

## **Nadir**

A low point within the Danish science fiction novels of the period are a handful of books of a type which until recently has been relatively rare. While examples have appeared now and then in the darker corner of Danish literature, it has not been seen by the general public since the thirties. It may most neutrally be described as a militarist, racist, right-wing extremist, totalitarian utopia. It is extremely unpleasant reading, and not only because the authors usually have problems with grammar and language, as well as with how to build a *novel* so that it contains an actual plot and even moderately interesting persons.

An example is Carsten Benner's *De sidste vesterlændinge* [The Last Westerners] (2008). It opens in 2060 where there's twelve million humans on Earth and “climate prophets have gotten almost unlimited powers”. The protagonist joins a newly formed political party, “The Republicans” who intends to “sketch out the road for the last westerners, cleansed of political decadence and Catholicism”. The party organizes itself, complete with a military corps (beginning in Sønderjylland, the part of Denmark bordering on Germany) and is no stranger to political violence. It aims to implement a large number of reforms, and uses slogans like “the Western renaissance”; and when the protagonist after a number of internal power struggles has seized the position of Leader, and the party gets 66 parliamentary seats [out of 179] at the elections in 2061, things begin to move quickly. A municipal reform leads to the establishment of 66 “rigskommuner” [reich municipalities], trade unions come under the control of the party, parliamentary rule is abolished, and a family policy openly adapted from Nazism is implemented in order to secure the ten million inhabitants in the country that is considered necessary to resist the pressure from the non-Danish.

Benner has been in the military and been stationed in, among other places, Yugoslavia and Iraq. If his novel reflects the thoughts and opinion of the Danish military, it's cause for serious worry.

Novels of a similar kind are S. Andersen's *Pauvre nye verden Danmark 2084 (1508)* [Miserable New World – Denmark 2084 (1508)] (2006), Mogens Kai Byrler's *Terror i Danmark* [Terror in Denmark] (2007) – here, the crown prince, now as King Frederik X, is the leader of an underground movement performing ethnic cleansing – and Jørgen Misser's two-volume, exceedingly over-long novel *De onde kræfter* [The Evil Forces] (2006) and *Det sagtmodige folk* [The Patient People] (2008). A perhaps softer, but no less unpleasant version of this kind of story is Johan Peter Beck's *2049 Vendepunktet* [2049 – The Turning Point] (2008), which takes place 25 years after the breakdown of western civilization. The bad guys are islamists, but the militant nationalist movement, which for the sake of clarity is named “Natis”, are not much better; among other things, they welcome an invasion of likeminded people from Northern Germany. The true salvation of the country are the Christian peasants, who form collectives and prevail through the power of prayer, no less. So the metaphysical wave also touches this part of the genre.

### **Into space**

In general, space travel plays no substantial role in Danish novels, although it has appeared in a number of short stories in certain periods, for instance the sixties. This may be because the Danes are too grounded to imagine journeys into space, but more likely it is due to the dominance of the European utopian/dystopian tradition. Within the latest decade, however, several works have appeared that leave the home planet in one way or another.

Miriam Bastian Wechselmann's *Observatøren* [The Observer] (2000) does not send its characters into space, but does rather the opposite, in that it is about an alien landing on Earth. The astronomer Paco gets the job of his dreams at the observatories in Chile, but his life is disrupted when the girl Veronica comes wandering in from the desert. She's been in a car accident and has amnesia, but explains that in reality she's the space traveler Gatoraid from the planet Hjem [Home] that orbits Alpha Centauri B, and that she's taken over Veronica's body. By means of a large telescope, she demonstrates convincingly that Earth-type planets exist around Alpha Centauri. Then she goes to Sweden in order to find her sister Metro, who's taken over the body of the small girl Felizia. By now, she is ten years old and has forgotten most of her interstellar past. Unlike Gatoraid, who stars in an entertainment show on her home planet, Metro is working on a scientific project. Matters are further complicated by the fact that Paco has gotten Veronica pregnant, and that she's forgotten the code necessary for her return.

The novel effectively plays on the relationship between the alienation often present between humans, and the estrangement that is one of the most important elements in science fiction. At the same time, it establishes a multi-layered complex of meaning around the concept of “observer”, also implying distance and nearness. The distance that Veronica

insists on ("I am from another planet"), is to a quite large extent readable as an image of mental alienation, making it reasonable to see it as her way of dealing with her amnesia. But certain decisive elements, in particular the fact that she's able to point out her home planet, makes the only reasonable reading the one where she really *is* from another planet. At the same time, the novel employs many of the traditional metaphors of distance, e.g. in relation to Paco, who seems to have been wandering through life as an observer, but now sees himself directly implicated in life.

Regular *space opera* is represented by Helene Th. Svolgart's *Livets barske lektie* [The Tough Lesson of Life] (2008), which takes place around the year 2800, in a world where humans travel widely around space, and where many planets are inhabited. On this background a story unfolds about a mercenary placed on a prison planet – the idea that an entire planet is used for only one purpose is widespread within the genre – who has to find out, firstly how to survive, and secondly how to get free. Finally, he begins the long fight for retribution. By placing the protagonist in the center of the story, the author succeeds in supplementing the somewhat worn-down scheme a presence that bodes well for her plans of further novels set in the same universe.

Rather less well constructed is Sussi & Leo's *Pyromanium* (2008), written by a couple of popular entertainers not exactly well-versed in literature. The jacket blurb refers to the novel as "a mixture of fantasy, action and crime fiction". The protagonist and narrator is a *shape shifter*, albeit in a somewhat limited version, in that he's only able to change into certain archetypes, such as Rambo (when violence is called for) and Jean Luke Picard (*sic!*) when thinking and leadership is needed. He works for a secret interplanetary organization that seeks to control the Earth, chiefly because of the deposits of the special matter pyromanium (again *sic!*), located on an island inhabited by the descendants of the people of Atlantis. After many chaotic happenings it turns out that the enemies of the Brotherhood, called the Gralls, perhaps aren't on the wrong side, but instead are actually trying to protect the galaxy from the planned abuse of power by the Brotherhood. The nicest one can say about the novel is that it probably has been more fun to write than it is to read, just like the couple's music hopefully is more fun to play than to listen to.

Lars A. R. Stender's *Øjne* [Eyes] (2008) is not space opera, if that term is taken to mean a subgenre taking place in a universe where space travel between a large number of planets is an everyday occurrence. It is set in a 2026 where there are bases on the Moon, but journeys further away has not been undertaken to any significant extent. A considerable international tension is present on Earth, and a crisis rapidly develops when contact with the Chinese space station on the Moon is lost. A team of astronauts is sent off in great haste to check out the matter, and it discovers that the problems are due to invisible beings, apparently consisting of dark matter. When one of the astronauts turns out to have the secret power of emitting rays from his eyes, he overpowers them, and peace is secured. The introduction of this extra element is a weakness in the novel that is otherwise well-written, but far too long for its subject.

In Stender's novel, as well in the space opera proper, space travel constitutes a backdrop for the events that unfold. But it may be used in other fashions as well; in this corner of Danish SF, too, a number of writers see the idea of other worlds as the base of more or less spiritual events. In Finn Paludan-Müller's *Det ukuelige liv* [The Indomitable Life] (2008), a group of people, having a party in a beach house on the west coast, inadvertently becomes passengers in a UFO. For reasons of flight technology, they have to tag along to the aliens' home planet, where they succeed in meddling in a conflict, thus securing that the good side wins. Although it is not hinted that the aliens are any kind of divine, there's a distinct semi-religious air in the book – meaning that the UFO experience in itself is the miraculous thing in the narrator's life.

A more explicit spirituality is apparent in Erik Morsing's two novels *Besøg fra rummet* [A Visit From Space] (2000) and *Kaptajn Ra vender tilbage* [The Return of Captain Ra] (2001). Earth is secretly visited by a group of aliens from the star system Startrix (who call themselves gods) in the space ship *The Apocalypse*, under the leadership of Captain Ra. They chose to contact Carlo Petersen, who lives in a small town, and who is about to kill himself because he has lost his wife. Instead, he gets a lot of wishes granted by the aliens, who then take him aboard their craft, where they make him a part of the crew. By means of a holodeck – a device brazenly lifted from *Star Trek* – he gets to visit earlier parts of his life, thereby learning more about himself. When he finally gets to command a ship, intended to threaten Earth to keep the peace, he goes on a rampage, destroying all life on the planet. Luckily, this turns out to also have been a holodeck experience, demonstrating that mankind is not yet ready to engage with the more highly developed species of the galaxy. This pattern repeats with minor variations in the second volume.

Jakob Vedelsby uses the motif of space travel in a more thoughtful way in *Verden i verden* [The World within the World] (2007), which follows the astronaut John Maxwell on an expedition to the planet Phoenix. The name suggests resurrection, and on arriving he does indeed meet a woman with whom he might have had a relation back on Earth. There is thus a strong sense about the story that space travel is being used as a metaphor for a psychological process; a feeling that is reinforced by the fact that it only takes up a third of the novel, and that one of the other two thirds deals with a journey to the South Pole in search of an opening into what is thought to be a hollow Earth. The last third couples the characters from the two others by having them clean up the estate after a famous media personality who used to know both of them.

The media also play an important part in Niels-Ole Rasmussen's *Hikikomori* (2006), as two astronauts on their way to Mars disagree so violently about who should get to be the first man on the planet that one of them murders the other. However, the central character is the enigmatically named H who is hikikomori, that is, by his own choice he lives in isolation and communicates exclusively via the net. Among other things, he spends his spare time remotely controlling the Spirit rover on Mars, although everybody have considered it dead (it stems from a mission way back in 2004). The tracks made by Spirit creates confusion among the American, who have other devices on site. Spirit and the newest rover

meet at one of the nostrils of “the large face” – a well-known trick of perspective that has been the foundation of a lot of crazy hypotheses – where they find a giant whale inside the face. This shows that life has evolved simultaneously on Mars and Earth, and that the dead Mars is a warning to the people of Earth. In this way, the novel becomes a story about loneliness on many levels, from the individual and self-chosen to the collective, environmentally based.

## Time

Many science fiction novels take place in a time different from that of the author, quite often in the future. Stories about *traveling* in time, or achieving contact across it in some other way, are somewhat rarer. As with space travel, one gets the impression that time travel seems to “science fiction-like” for Danish authors in general to use them – but this may only be a question of time (!) since a number of respected foreign writers, who have been translated into Danish, are using them.

If the thought of traveling in time seems too unbelievable, the writer may let his characters use a technique for getting sounds or pictures from the past. This idea has been used by authors from English-speaking countries for many years – one may mention Isaac Asimov's novella “The Dead Past” (1956), but the idea was also used in Gardner Hunting's completely forgotten novel *The Vicarion* (1926), and so goes rather a long way back – and it contains its own element of excitement, in that the characters can see or hear what has happened, but cannot interfere. This of course does not mean that conflicts cannot arise among the scientists involved. In Merete Pryds Helle's *Fiske I livets flod* [Fishing in the River of Life] (2000), an archaeologist experiences a threat to his career, when a young scientist claims that by a new technology, he's able to read sound waves off shards and so is able to hear what the potters were talking about when the pot was thrown. This means that that the well-known scientist's (somewhat drastic) theory about the origin of writing is in danger of being proved wrong.

The Danish author who has most persistently dealt with the idea of looking back in time, is Svend Åge Madsen, who first used it in the short story “Mnemosynes børn” (1984). The argument seems convincing: A planet is discovered that has a high enough albedo for it to be seen from Earth. The distance to the planet means that the light thrown back to Earth shows what happened in ancient Rome, which fascinates people to such a degree that they seem to lose interest in their own time. In this short story, the technique is not yet sufficiently evolved to include sounds, but experts are transcribing ancient conversations through lip reading.

In *Mange sære ting for* [Many strange activities] (2009), it is revealed that it is an astronomer from Madsen's home town Århus who discovered Mnemosyne, and that he has discovered another mirror planet, dubbed Alethia, whose distance from Earth is thus that it shows goings-on from the time around the birth of Jesus. Over a period of time, he records many, many hours of video tape, among other things documenting that the birth of the savior is the result of the rape of his mother by a Roman legionary. This of course leads

to a number of religio-political plots, for if one can make sure that the tapes disappear, all evidence of the controversial facts will be gone at the same time. It is in the nature of mirror planets that the watcher does not get to choose what time he wants to look at. Like other big novels by Madsen, this contains many side plots as well as reappearances by a number of characters from the rest of the *oeuvre*. But the central part is the discussion about insight and controversy.

In Niels Brunse's *Havmanden* [The Merman] (2005), a regular journey through time takes place, but it is involuntary and from the outset inexplicable, when the sailing enthusiast John, after a storm encountered in 2005, drifts ashore in England in 1647. The explanation appears after a while in the shape of a Russian named Jurij, who claims to have been performing experiments in time travel just before the fall of the Eastern bloc. The reason why he – as well as the protagonist – has ended up in the time of Cromwell, is that the experiment was an attempt to bring the religious sect “the levellers” into power after Cromwell (rather than what happened in reality, the reestablishment of royal power). The levelers support the abolishing of private property and so according to Jurij represents a social tiger leap ahead. He also tries to introduce steam power 200 years before it happened in reality, but encounters difficulties because there are no craftsmen able to make a close-fitting pipe. After several happenings, John ends up in prison under a strengthened Cromwell dictatorship, and relates the entire story while waiting to be executed or given reprieve. The novel is part of a tradition of stories about time travelers trying to improve the past – a tradition which encompasses, among others, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* (1939) – convincingly demonstrating that it is a difficult undertaking, at the same time presenting a time-shifted protagonist severely alienated from a world whose powers and motivations he only partly understands, and in almost no way controls.

The time travel story has also been drafted into the part of literature dealing with a more or less “spiritual” level. An example of this is Helga Berg's *Næsten ånder I mørket* [The Fellow Man is Breathing in the Darkness] (2008), which combines a rather large number of science fiction motifs. About 100 years after the general collapse of civilization, a small group of people have settled in an isolated place in the mountains, where they originally were led by the girl Dalia. They aim to live in harmony with nature, but they have both a space center (trying to find new places to live on Triton), and a high-tech area. Outside, the rest of mankind spend their time as eternal tourists in specially made one-man vehicles on endless, but poorly kept roads. When the population of Dalia is threatened by decreasing fertility, the girl Arina is sent back to Denmark in the present, partly in order to find a solution to the problems, but also partly to try and find Dalia. The time traveler regularly contacts her mother telepathically, but returns after much trouble with a partly unaccomplished mission; however she's reached the insight that a solution might be found through the cooperation of the people of Dalia and those outside. The story is not about interfering with the past, just about learning from it; although Arina's trip to our time sets the scene for a number of satirical jabs.

## The unreal reality

The use of virtual reality for presenting unreal realities has continued since the eighties, although VR has not actually gotten nearly as widespread as the original authors imagined. The phenomenon has also been used earlier in Danish literature, for example in Peter Dürfeld's crime thriller *Den virkelige virkelighed* [Real reality] (1997).

Søren Jessen's *Zambesi* (2000) uses the virtual to construct a postmodern, metatextual text, which, as is proper for its kind, disappears up its own behind. The novel is told in a number of separate threads who intertwine, and who each has its own protagonist. One of the threads is set within a VR environment that goes beyond what was known in the real world at the time of writing. The main character in this thread works in a computer company and dreams about designing virtual worlds herself; and towards the end of the novel, where various threads intersect in the cafe Zambesi, she decides that, rather than designing an entire world, she'll settle for designing – a cafe. In this manner, she becomes the creator of the other characters' threads (and possibly of her own). It's a kind of “theater of the mind” reminiscent of the one established in Mike C. Hellstrøm's *Mental Floss* (2001), where VR does not appear in a strictly technical version, but where reports are circulated between “the upper office” and “the lower office”. On a literal level, these organs can be seen as controlling life in the big city, but are more properly manifestations of the inner life of the protagonist.

One of the most successful examples of a mainstream author using the techniques of the genre is the way VR is being used in Kirsten Hammann's *En dråbe i havet* [A Drop in the Sea] (2008). Without being strictly a crime story, the plot bears some affinities to crime fiction, chiefly in the form of unsolved riddles driving the protagonist and the reader onwards. At the same time it's a novel within the best tradition of psychological mainstream, where it's the mental development of the protagonist – or rather, her breakdown – that's central.

Her name is Mette, and she's a writer. She's living together with a man who works out of town and is only at home in the weekends. Together, they have a daughter. Mette's problem is her concern for the developing countries and their problems, and several times she's attempted idealistic projects but ended up realizing that they would only be “a drop in the sea”. This image also suggests that she's on the verge of being drowned by the overwhelming problems and dissolve like the titular drop. Nowhere does she think the other way round, that the sea *consists* of drops.

She contacts a NGO in order to do research for a novel, but they turn down her offer to go to a crisis area for two weeks. Instead, she's contacted by an entirely different group, who's been using the NGO as a cover, and who offers her a position as test person in a very special project. In a hotel room, a sort of sensory technology has been installed, making it possible for the user to visit a third world country, experiencing sounds and smells and even to touch things and persons and have conversations with them. She accepts and



over the following period is put through a series of hair raising experiences. She's always alone on these excursions, and never goes to the same place twice.

Hammann keeps the technological side of things hidden from Mette and the reader, chiefly by letting Mette's contact be ignorant of the technology – others take care of that, which also means that it takes time before Mette's feedback reaches the technicians. But comparisons are made to the movie *The Truman Show*, in which Jim Carrey moves around an artificial reality. To genre readers, a more natural comparison would be with the holodeck in *Star Trek*, especially since the hotel room begins to go beyond the limits of virtual reality in the same way that the holodeck does when something goes wrong. To begin with, Mette notices that sand is being brought along into the corridor after a visit, and later she discovers that she's able to interact in an entirely real manner with the places she's brought to. She rushes to a supermarket to buy bottled water for a thirsty mass of people, and even goes so far as to bring back a third world child – to the considerable confusion of her own daughter. When she tries to return the child the following day, she ends up in a different place, and the child is now not only hungry, but without either parents or a home. In this manner, questions are raised about third world aid and how it should and should not be done.

The process culminates when she brings her daughter on a trip and stays away for some days. Another element of uncertainty is introduced here, in that she's having difficulty returning to the hotel room. This indicates a technology not yet entirely under control – or that she is being manipulated. In any case, her boyfriend gets so outraged that he leaves her, and even though she brings an end to her outings, the breakdown is complete.

The science fictional is central to novel. At times it seems that it all takes place in Mette's head, especially when she manages to contact test persons from other parts of the world, and they all have names that are variations on what she calls herself, which is "Mæt", meaning "full". But too many other characters are involved in her experiences for them to be read simply as psychotic – and the science fictional element gives the novel a concrete dimension, grounding it in the real world in a way that a purely psychological scenario wouldn't have. Perhaps the most fruitful way to think of the hotel room is as a portal, which actually transports her to different places. This simply means that the technology applied was more radical than VR.

## **Cloning**

Like virtual reality, cloning is a motif that goes back as least as far as the eighties – in Danish it appears for instance in Tonny Hald's *Kopierne* [The Copies] (1982) and Bjarne Reuter's *En tro kopi* [A Faithful Copy] (1986) – and like genetic manipulation, it often appears in conjunction with dystopian scenarios of various kinds. This is yet another sign that these subjects worry the general public.

In Svend Åge Madsen's *Genspejlet* [the title is a play on "reflection" and "genetic mirroring"] (1999) the "consciousness biologist" Just Helled loses his wife and is falling completely apart, when his colleague Krystofiles presents him with no less than four clones of

his late wife. They have been made at different times, and so are of various ages, which means that Just will have to choose at which age he was most fond of his wife. As is so often the case in Madsen's work, the main character is placed in a dubious position, for even if he quits drinking and even more or less becomes able to do his work properly, the dilemma has certain unpleasant side effects. He contacts all fore women, one after the other and in various ways influences their lives, but tragedy is in the cards – for the illness that his wife died of was genetically based, and so all four clones are marked for death. He reacts by throwing himself into a wild genetic experiment that results in a world-wide epidemic. One should, however, note that it is the genetic manipulation, not the cloning in itself, that leads to the “genetic plague” (which also appears elsewhere in Madsen's work, most prominently in the novel *Edens Gave* [The Gift of Eden] from 1993).

Bering Haarup's *Dodo* (2009) combines several trends. It is partly – almost – a story about cryptozoology and the rediscovery of the extinct bird, the dodo, and partly it is a story taking place in a near-future Copenhagen suffering from escalating social polarization and totalitarian tendencies. The main character is Mardin, who makes his living raising rare butterflies for collectors. In the past, however, he used to sell stuffed animals, and one day he is contacted by a mysterious gentleman, who believes that there is a specimen of the extinct dodo being kept in alcohol somewhere in the city. For a considerable sum, Mardin agrees to search for it, a project complicated by the fact that his son Jello, whom he hasn't seen for twenty years, turns up along with his girlfriend – both of them homeless – and that Mardin gradually falls in love with the widow Fatima, who is living with her two grown-up daughters.

The reader expects that the mysterious persons with an interest in the dodo intend to extract DNA from it and create a clone in the manner of *Jurassic Park*. But one of the intriguing things about the book is that this expectation is *not* met; since it proves impossible to get the wanted specimen, another strategy is chosen, which is actually being suggested quite early on, but rejected because of the risks involved: One of Mardin's friends is still working with taxidermy and uses hyper-modern techniques that makes it possible to construct very life-like stuffed animals by means of culture-grown pelts and many other things, in order to avoid violating the Washington Treaty.

This friend now produces a very believable dodo; of course Mardin and his gang are perfectly aware that it won't stand for the DNA test that the buyer will want to apply. By means of an enjoyable round of cloak-and-dagger they succeed in preventing the analysis and at the same time getting the buyer arrested for illegal trafficking in protected animals (after he's transferred the money to Mardin). This opens the way for a better life for all the marginalized characters: Mardin and Fatima (who slowly are getting closer) as well as Jello and his girlfriend, who gets the job of taking care of the butterflies, while Mardin goes on a trip to see the pyramids.

Jan Venzel Nielsen's *Sin egen tanke* [One's Own Thought] (2004) combines virtual reality and cloning with reincarnation, thereby representing the metaphysical use of these motifs. In a comparatively near future a world-spanning civilization has been established and

war has been abolished, while everybody carries around a “caretaker” that regulates their psyche and body chemistry. Ways have been found to transfer one's consciousness to a younger clone of one self, bred for just this purpose, but the scientist Ashkor Kersalt discovers that the entire clone business prevents the individual from dying, and that this is a problem. For while under natural circumstances, one dies and is reborn in an eternal sequence, gaining insight along the way, this process is blocked in the modern world. The solution consists of new experiments where he is transferred to “Spiritworld”, a virtual world pointing towards the next step in human evolution.

### **Frankenstein & Co.**

The title character in Mary Shelley's famous *Frankenstein* (1818) transgresses the limits of human activity when he becomes able to create life; therefore, he must be taken out. This perception of science is still with us, and has been promoted by countless stories and, especially, by movies. From one perspective, it represents an exaggerated fear of the incomprehensible; from another, a healthy skepticism towards scientists who, without regards to or interest in reality, acts with no thought for the consequences (consequences that are often worsened by the capital that finances them).

In newer literature, the “mad scientist” *per se* does not appear very often; perhaps because most people know that science is only rarely performed by single persons in murky basement laboratories, but that it is much more likely to take place within a commercial or institutional framework. The period under discussion presents only one legitimate mad scientist, in Kasper Elsvor's *Dødseksperimentet* [The Death Experiment] (2000), who is set in a small English town in 2018. A mysterious stranger takes up residence, which arouses the suspicion and hostility of the residents. After a confrontation, it turns out that the man – much along the lines of Dr. Frankenstein – has found a way to reanimate corpses by means of electricity. However, those reanimated in this way become speechless, wild and incredibly strong, and by now 23 of them are in the woods. During the final confrontation with these, the mad scientist dies, and with the monsters exterminated, the town can return to its former lethargic condition, in keeping with one of the formulas for this type of science fiction: The established novum must be destroyed along with its creator, thus bracketing the entire event and rendering it safe.

In Grete Roulund's *Professor Sterns kontor* [Professor Stern's Office] (2002), madness has been transferred to a more realistic, institutional framework. The professor in question has developed a new biological weapon based on a modified Ebola virus that is able to wipe out humanity very quickly. The theory is that the weapon is so terrible that its very existence will secure world peace (a theory often proposed, but unfortunately quite unbelievable). However, the day before Professor Stern is to go to Oslo to receive the Nobel peace prize, she is locked inside her laboratory together with her assistant and a visiting journalist. The media claims that the professor has been killed in a plane crash, and at the same time a mysterious influenza epidemic is spreading. The entire story is told from an unusual point of view, that of the office itself, and because it doesn't have any knowledge

about the world in general or about what it is to be human, it means of conveying the scope and complexity of the goings-on are limited. By the end of the story it is not clear whether humanity in general has become extinct.

### **Philosopher's corner**

It can be said that any statement or group of statements – including novels – directly or indirectly expresses a world view or a philosophy. However, certain works foreground philosophical thinking more than others. In the past decade, science fiction has been used for this purpose chiefly by two Danish authors. One of them is Erwin Neutzsky-Wulff, who since the seventies has published a number of novels based on philosophical subjects. The two latest of those that are science fiction are *Rum* [Space] (2001) and *Hjernen* [The Brain] (2006).

*Rum* tells of the third world war breaking out in 2010. Erik Lang, who works with communication, has prepared for this and has built a shelter beneath his house in Bjergbynder [approximately: Lower Hillstead]. He makes certain that his insufferable wife does not get in, and quietly sits down to read the many books he has placed in the shelter. Among the works, from which extracts and detailed summaries are provided, are a sadomasochistic porn novel, a crime novel, and a science fiction novel. The latter is about a group of astronauts exploring an alien planet, in the course of which they perform an experiment which possibly makes the whole universe implode. They then appear – along with characters from the other novels mentioned – in Bjergbynder, after which the novel turns into a discussion about whose reality is the real one, and whose is fictional.

*Hjernen* is more or less a catalog of science fiction motifs – parallel universes, time travel, the end of civilization due to nuclear war – kept together by the story of doctor Joel Williams, who in the course of several operations has parts of his brain replaced by prostheses, which means that in principle, he can live forever if he just takes care to download his consciousness into a younger body every couple of decades. The novel follows him through a span of 400 years, until the slow growth of a new civilization which is only gradually becoming dependent on technology again.

The author writes in the foreword to *Hjernen* that the reader must

prepare himself for the fact that we'll hardly be able to respect one single convention of the novel. Reviewers and literary hysterics will search in vain for the literary school, to which I belong – the fact that I have no literary role models in this sense, follows quite naturally from the fact that I haven't been able to find anything of any literary value in my own time. (16) [my translation, ND]

Bearing this in mind, it is no wonder that it takes quite a bit of determination to read these books; however, they are undeniably rich in content.

Philosophy also plays a prominent role in Lene Andersen's five-volume *Baade – og* [Both – and; the title is a play of sorts on Kierkegaard's *Either – or*] (2005-2009). In the con-

text of science fiction, it's chiefly the author's use of framework that is interesting; it's set some time into the future, and tells how people in earlier times – that is, now – used to think and act. Apart from this, the work is an overview of our knowledge in a wide variety of fields. The problem is that while this overview is interesting in itself, and the future framework is in places both satirical and funny, the combination of the two feels cumbersome. Maybe it would have been better to write two distinct works, one of (popular) science and one of satire and humor.

### **Motifs coming in – and possibly, going out**

Certain of the classic SF motifs appear more rarely than they used to. As mentioned above, the third world war takes place in the background in Neutzsky-Wulff's *Rum*, but apart from that, novels dealing with this are few and far between. Disasters may be worldwide and man-made, but in that case they usually are about experiments running out of control, or sudden mutations of micro-organisms or the like.

The only example from the period of a novel explicitly about the third world war, is K. K. Santos' *2013* (2007). It is never made clear to the majority of the characters in the novel how the war began, but both Europe and USA are bombed to smithereens. However, this is not a novel of nuclear Ragnarok like we know them from the fifties and sixties, at least no more so than a new American president is able to start buying more weapons from the Chinese and the Russian mafia, while at the same time using manipulated television footage to give the impression that he's waging war in Uganda. A nice little war in a remote corner of the world has always been considered beneficial to American domestic politics. The only problem is that one of the president's own generals does not know that the war is imaginary and gets an aircraft carrier involved, along with assorted other stuff. This makes it necessary for the president himself to go to Uganda to solve the problem. Why precisely Uganda has been chosen for this isn't quite made clear, though one is told that it's about "oil and coffee". The country is being run by a released prisoner of war, who calls himself king and owns a laboratory full of plague-infested rats. If this sounds slightly surreal, the novel is written entirely without humor, making the point less than clear. Criticism of war and abuse of power is all very well, but without a sense of the absurdity of it all, it's hard to discern an actual criticism – perhaps also because many of the characters are occupied by their own erections more than anything else.

Another motif which seems about to disappear are robots. While they have never played a major role in Danish science fiction, they have also become old hat internationally. It seems that they have been superseded by a complex of motifs that each continues a single aspect of the robot. Clones embody the discussion of what it is to be human, artificial intelligence questions what intelligence and consciousness are. Ironically, this seems to happen at a time when the development of human-looking robots in real life is finally hitting its stride, after decades where the idea has been considered impractical.

The only Danish novel from the period that deals with this subject, is Søren Tofts excellent little *Den elektriske nattergal* [The Electric Nightingale] (2006), and that is not about

humanoid robots. Rather, it is a story about animal-like robots, among them a mechanical nightingale which in wondrous ways unite two lovers. The story is, of course, also a meditation on Hans Christian Andersen's "The Nightingale". Electronics play an important and positive role, and we are far from the clumsy "mechanical men" of the past, figuratively as well as actually.

One trend that is not on its way out, in that it is rather new on Danish ground, but of which we may expect interesting things in the future, is alternate history – or counterfactual history writing, to use the name employed by "serious" people wanting to avoid the taint of SF. These are stories about worlds where things have played out differently some time in the past, from what we know that they actually did. As mentioned above, Svend Åge Madsen has had a go at the form in *Det syvende bånd*, and Christian Haun has gone all the way in *Hans Broges Bakker* [Hans Broge's Down – a place name] (2007). Here, the alternate consists in the fact that Germany won the Second World War. Currently, Århus is preparing to celebrate the Führer's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in a united Europe, while two friends are working through a complicated friendship. The story has a certain air of metafiction about it, which seems superfluous, but otherwise it's an excellent example of a subgenre that has far from reached its potential in this country.

### **A worried people**

Judging from the Danish SF novels of this decade, the Danes are a worried people. Though positive possibilities in new technologies are glimpsed, more often the negative ones get to dominate. Sometimes the phenomenon "technology" in itself generates problems, as in Ellen Garne's *DreamInducer* (2006), in which the central novum is a machine supposedly able to help people control their dreams. The stressed-out business man Schmidt-Francke buys a prototype in an attempt to control a reality that is increasingly chaotic, and which comprises an alcoholic wife, a lethargic son, and a criminal daughter. Perhaps to underline his powerlessness, in the end the machine turns out not to have the effect the inventor claims. In other instances, weird phenomena appear in the background or in passing, as in Mich Vraa's novelization of the movie *It's All About Love* (2003). Here, an inexplicable epidemic rages, and the Earth ends up entirely deep frozen – which doesn't mean that the novel is about climate changes.

Debate about climate changes does not yet play any major part in Danish SF, but apart from that there are plenty of problems: pharmaceutical research out of control, surveillance, mind control, registers of electronic activities, genetic engineering, cloning and other nice stuff – or, as it may be, not so nice stuff. As mentioned, the preponderance of this kind of motifs is an expression of the very real worries among the writers as well as readers, although some writers are riding hobbyhorses of a more private character. Among other things, this manifests itself in the "spirituality" prevalent within almost all the groups of texts.

The increasing amount of publications has also made room for motifs that otherwise have been comparatively rare within Danish SF as opposed to the international version of

the genre – such as space and time travel with accompanying encounters with aliens and problems of causality. Alternate history may be on the increase (and, who knows, perhaps steampunk, too), while classic cyberpunk has been reduced to fascination of isolated phenomena such as virtual reality and online crime (and its stylistic peculiarities have gone entirely).

As mentioned initially, a number of the novels – in particular those of the self-published variety – would have been better off if they hadn't been published. On the other hand, a number of highly qualified experimental authors seem to have become interested in the possibilities of the genre. The novels at hand manifest both breadth and depth, and it does not seem unreasonable to choose to be cautiously optimistic about the Danish science fiction novel.

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# Five Poems

## by Mike Allen (USA)

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*In his spare time he does a ridiculous number of things, including editing the critically-acclaimed anthology series CLOCKWORK PHOENIX and the long-running poetry journal MYTHIC DELIRIUM. His own poetry has won the Rhysling Award three times, and his fiction has been nominated for the Nebula Award. His short stories have popped up in places like WEIRD TALES, INTERZONE, and the anthologies SKY WHALES AND OTHER WONDERS, CTHULHU'S REIGN and STEAM-POWERED. He's also recorded podcasts for STARSHIPSOFA and CLARKESWORLD MAGAZINE and participated in local improv theater, where he's often asked to provide the voice of an Ominous Narrator or play the part of Satan.*

*The poem "Strange Cargo" first appeared in STRANGE HORIZONS, Dec. 6, 2004. "A Prayer" is published here for the first time. "Tithonus on the Shore of Ocean" first appeared in Change, ed. John Benson, Not One of Us, 2006. "Charon Finds a Woman on the Gridshore" first appeared in Mike Allen's collection The Journey to Kailash, Norilana Books, 2008. "retrovirus" first appeared in ILLUMEN, Vol.1, Issue 2, Spring 2005.*

*"Tithonus on the Shore of Ocean", "Strange Cargo", and "retrovirus" were each revised somewhat before being reprinted in The Journey to Kailash. These are the revised versions.*

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## Strange Cargo

The train slides toward the hill-concealed horizon,  
a mammoth serpent winding through the tall grass,  
its strange steel-skeletal cars stacked with stranger cargo,  
men and women, naked as newborns, crisscrossed eight high  
in neat columns, interlocking puzzle towers of flesh.

Car thrown into park, I step out, squint down, but I'm  
too far yet to tell whether I'm staring at slick synthetics  
or true skin; they're perfect: trim and muscular, no  
birthmarks to see, no moles, a eugenicist's wet dream;  
yet sexless, static, faces blank as brain death,

a promenade of empty shells, automatons,  
an android shipment, enough to fill a city, etch  
personalities, watch a culture come to life. I wonder  
what doctrines, what dogma, what commands  
are waiting to be written on their minds?

A rich demagogue's androgynous harem, perhaps,  
swarming their master like bees on their queen?  
Or an instant cult, ready-made worshipers,  
undying faithful to light torches in the catacombs?  
Impervious soldiers, trained with a download,

storming distant deserts or jungle against others  
of their own kind, or even others of mine?  
Underwater miners or void-bound farmers  
unafflicted by a need to breathe, raising air-filled  
domes to make more space for their makers?

Pitiful, beautiful slaves, bound  
for existence (hardly a life)  
without choice; no one should wish  
to be one of you, no — but why then  
*do I feel such envy?*

## A Prayer

These alien parasites,  
these burning palms of pain cupped behind the eyes,  
these razor-tongued claws that squeeze the heart,  
lap up blood and love like dew,  
these chill voices of affirmation,  
these whispers in syllables of thunder,  
*all your torments are deserved,*  
*all your failures preordained,*  
*you were born to be impaled*  
*on the spines of time and waste away,*  
these limp bundles of open veins  
that swell inside our own limbs,  
drain us of all strength and  
drug us with this urge  
to crawl into the tar,  
curl in a ball, breath deep and sink —

Have mercy. Slit us open,  
bare these shriveled parasites,  
this sickly symbiotic poppets  
to the light of all the galaxies,  
to the flames of wheels within wheels  
within clouds of compassionate eyes —

And burn them to nothing.  
Burn them from all memory.  
Burn them from what's possible.  
Burn them from the streams of time.  
Erase them from creation.  
Make them never have been.  
Let them never be.  
Free us all.

---

## Tithonus on the Shore of Ocean

*He feels himself to be; a continent  
lapped everywhere by our amniotic flood*  
— D.M. Thomas, *Tithonus*

SAN JOSE, SEPT. 26, 1984 — I or someone else  
volunteered to slip back to the womb  
my best friend [or stranger/pusher]  
offered me a test swim in his sensory depr[a]vation tank  
in there afloat I became  
a continent independent  
magma mass in rebellion  
bubbling away from time's worm-crusting ocean floor

above that ragged abyss I swam at whatever speed I chose  
the plane ride home [7-hour flight]  
took no more than 2, it seemed  
but I could not maintain that blessed buoyancy,  
sank back  
into the jagged bed of realtime  
and never could rise again

.  
. .  
.

Perhaps then why I  
[or someone else]  
chose this choice  
classic brainjam  
mind in a jar,  
nerves severed,  
body shed.

[i] without input, rhythm, context  
risen so far I perceive no surface  
to clue me as to whether I move  
1<sup>st</sup> person limited point of view  
wandering the convolutions inside

what's [maybe] my own mind  
no measurable timeflow to defy

.

.

.

Seconds or centuries later,  
I came aware, [be]came aware  
of a universe, one or several  
stacked in baklava layers  
brimming with entities

at first only perceivable as moving points  
abstract plankton  
then brighter, strange running lights  
glowfish hunting in an abyss darker than deathnight  
brighter still, more numerous, even more  
void in Van Gogh chaos  
whorls      streaks      starbursts  
intense as blinding reflections  
infinite as ignorance  
speedy as cicada killers  
milling like Calcutta traffic

[i] without eyes  
marveled at these swarmschools  
certain they were other minds [human?]  
unveiled in my New Ocean  
my efforts to float in  
    their direction      all directions  
stubbornly remained equidistant  
I stretched/strained for  
    for anyone    for any one    for all  
again again again repeat again

.

.

.

Seconds or centuries unfolded  
bloomed  
in a bursting bulge of will & wish  
all grew closer at once  
drawn in [or me drawn out]

by the voodoo of my desire

Can a continent  
overflow its banks  
and flood the ocean?

torrent of I  
tsunam[i]self  
wave  
taller  
deeper  
broader

than all the island motes of self-awareness  
that form the neurons in god's schizophrenic brain

.  
. .  
.

In millennia or milliseconds  
I became the message and the medium  
invading and connecting  
3.5 trillion minds at once  
the list of *what* washed through me  
emotions  
sensations  
revelations  
degradations  
agonies & glories  
ecstasies  
& boredoms  
would tick on for eons

all the glowfish shine the same color now  
movements much more regimented  
tragic or maybe just inevitable

Poor Argus, unthinking brute  
with so many eyes open at once  
how could he narrow down  
the direction  
from which god's murderous messenger approached?



[it's impossible to be/see]  
[so many]  
[and stay focused on the linear]

so I've chosen this history  
to give myself dimension and direction  
after some arbitrary interval  
I may choose another

.  
. .  
. .  
being god is all about  
finding ways to pass time  
& stay sane

---

## Charon Finds a Woman on the Gridshore

With all our minds sped to a state  
where mere fragments of a second stretched to eternities  
in a kingdom of invented incident,  
simulations of every existence imaginable,  
none of the multimultitudes quivering in data rapture  
noticed how the flood of minds from the Outside had thinned to a stream, a trickle,  
then single droplets in a dry abyss.

But I knew. For the Harvesters made me Ferryman.

I, made Charon, piloted my boat across the shimmering —  
skimming the surface of the Rapture,  
inviting the newly downloaded onto creaking timbers,  
my vessel capable of holding thousand who were never aware  
of their superimposition, always thinking themselves the sole soul aboard.

I would not take them to another shore.  
we would float till they understood the wonder or futility  
and then submerge, their matrixes swept beneath  
to join the binary river.  
And always their disembodied bodies shared tales  
of the reverence reserved for the Harvest Nodes;  
cults of millions swarming the Western mountains,  
killing themselves to prove their purity  
to genetically-engineered acolytes with cleft cat faces,  
clicking camera eyes, those who manned the offering  
of bodies to the sacrificial tables.

\* \* \*

But finally, no passengers came, no bathers for the Styx.

\* \* \*

I have dreamed in the datastream for billions of lifetimes  
and I recall them all; unlike the other downloads, I never choose erasure.  
Thus the electrons in my matrix simulate surprise,

still possible, even now, when in the midst of my latest life iteration —  
this time, a simple farmer, rousing my children to tend  
to the stinking barn in the hour before cockcrow —  
my boat appears around me, spontaneous shell,  
and I glide across prismatic data gold, bound for Gridshore.  
Dataflux generates scent; the Rapture  
reminds me of oranges, of woodsmoke, of copper.  
Do these same scents stimulate the lone gray figure  
huddling on the Gridshore's black banks (they can  
be any texture at all, but this time they are sand.)

The machines birthed her in the same garb  
that they consumed her in; shapeless woolen dress  
cinched at the waist with colorless cord;  
sickly grey gauze stretched over her mouth and eyes,  
draped over her hair; her gender betrayed  
where the slashed fabric droops, her mortality  
betrayed by black bloodstains.

She fears me; she runs; though she soon finds  
any direction she picks bring her closer.  
The neverspace will join us in inevitable meeting.  
Yet the way she shrinks, even as the prow of the ferry  
slides onto the sand by her feet;  
she did not come willingly.  
How did she come at all?  
I gesture to the flowing gold of Rapture, speak welcome inside her.  
She screams, a burst of single-digit code  
darting through me, harmless tachyon beam,  
lost in less than an instant in the data stream.

I let go of my oar, reach out in greeting,  
reach into her, weaving my matrix through hers  
to bring understanding from within. I learn:

that her grey is uniform, a uniform imposed inside and out  
a greyness of mind, enveloping fog, smog of unlearning  
roils thickly through the minds of humanity's fearful remnants  
in the world the Harvest Nodes freed us both from.

She does not know where she is.

Contemplating the wonders of age-old but still miraculous technology,  
comprehending even a simple machine, or even  
an attempt to grasp written words,  
as alien, as forbidden, as unthinkable  
as uncovering her face.

These machines that form universe to billions are forgotten — almost . . .  
Words form, descriptors of terror:  
Those That Hunger Below the Earth  
Spirit Swallowers, Black Iron Pits,  
Prisons of the Lost, where souls are melted  
and recombined, poured into molds that spit  
out legions of long-fanged, slit-eyed mutants,  
the packs that hunt in craggy valleys  
and across overgrown plains, scouring for  
humanity's dwindled remains.  
(I learn why the Harvest Nodes are so reviled:  
so many came to live inside that we gave  
the world to the descendants of the Guardians;  
not enough humans left to keep them controlled.)

Her people, hardscrabble hunters and gatherers  
starving off the lean of the land, erected their village  
in forgotten caverns upslope in the hills of Kalifor;  
but not forgotten or secret enough.  
The nomads came, with their fangs and wiry helmets,  
their lances full of deadly light,  
their steeds like leather-hided octopi,  
probing in the dark through every nook and hiding place  
to draw out shrieking captives;  
her fear drove her back to tunnel forbidden by her elders  
(now dead); but not before  
she saw her aging mother raped for sport,  
her infant son shredded like a hated cloth doll;  
she backed into the smooth tunnel that the elders  
claimed lead straight to damnation;  
slid into a chamber of strange lights,  
failed to understand creaks of long-dormant machinery;  
shrieked as the probes bore down through her veil.

I try to teach her all I know, but the waters

of my knowledge part about her rock, flow past.  
She cannot grasp the meanings of technology  
She has no framework to comprehend  
the purpose of the harvest nodes,  
the relief the downloads gave to billions.  
But she can understand Forever.  
She can understand that the consequences  
her elders warned of had come to pass.  
Her matrix a shriek of impulse or terror,  
she climbs the side of my sturdy boat,  
lets herself fall into the Rapture,  
because she understands  
there is no other choice ahead.  
At once she is gone.

\* \* \*

And at once the datastream returns me to dreaming.

\* \* \*

Not once in our exchange  
did I learn the contours of her face  
and perhaps, through all these infinities,  
I never will.

*for Charlie Saplak*

---

## retrovirus

no vault could hold it  
no scientist keep it secret  
too many people too eager  
to set it loose  
contagious as a slogan or a jingle  
or an urban slang contraction  
(which were first to go)

we lost our ethnic accents in the plague  
voiceboxes locked in standard broadcast  
with the occasional Bogart swagger  
John Wayne drawl or Mayberry twang

& we lost our vulgar vocabularies  
gasped again at Rhett Butler's nerve  
& Lauren Bacall's lips

the virus ate our internet-inspired libidos  
courtships reduced to smoldering stares  
in town squares  
& smart-aleck dialogue  
climaxed in a kiss

& we lost our color vision  
Only black & white & stark shadow  
everyone knew again which hat they wore  
& where they sat

& we buried in shrouds all unpatriotic doubts  
& flew glory bound on wings of eagles:  
Our way or the highway  
I did it my way  
Father knows best

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# *The lost Thunderegg*

## *By Manfred Christiansen (Denmark)*

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*Manfred Christiansen (born 1963) works as an Art Director in Denmark. Among many other things, he is the man behind the logo for the national science fiction association, Science Fiction Cirklen (<http://www.sciencefiction.dk/foreningen/nyheder/nyt-sfc-logo.html>), and the cover for the Danish fanzine Himmelskibet, issue 28 (<http://www.himmelskibet.dk/himmelskibet-28.shtml>).*

*He debuted as a writer in 2007 with the short story "Sky City" in the anthology Lige under overfladen ("Just below the Surface"; published by Science Fiction Cirklen, <http://www.sciencefiction.dk/udgivelser/boger/lige-under-overfladen.html>). His story became the title story for the English language anthology published by Science Fiction Cirklen in 2010, Sky City. Available through Amazon.Uk and Amazon.com ([http://www.amazon.com/Sky-City-Science-Fiction-Cirklen/dp/8771141588/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1331899228&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Sky-City-Science-Fiction-Cirklen/dp/8771141588/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1331899228&sr=1-1)). Since 2007 Christiansen's work has appeared in another three Danish anthologies and several different magazines in the fantastic genre. He blogs (in Danish) at <http://www.x-iansen.dk>.*

*The lost Thunderegg is published here for the first time.*

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They called their world Litho because it was made of stone. Above them there was ice, and below, red-hot rock. They used the heat from the rocks to melt ice so they could drink and to power their machines so they had electricity. Without electricity there would be no light, and without light, their world would be mostly dark. Those thousands and thousands of miles of tunnels and connecting tubes between the cities, joining transport passages with the caves for their accommodation cubicles, the spacious grottoes for their markets and fairs with the vast halls, where they raised livestock and grew fungi.

In a way their world was complete.

Melting ice was easy, but finding it was getting tough, and bringing the ice down to the core was backbreaking strenuous. At any time, countless expeditions were exploring old tunnels or digging new ones to find new sources of good ice.

Crustdigger lay on his bed and stared at the rough and gritty ceiling of his cubicle, one of the thousands of cubicles that the good council of Stone-city had built many generations before he was born. His cubicle was old and worn from numerous residents before him and was in desperate need of a refurbishment.

He was an ice finder veteran with countless expeditions on his account and had found plenty of ice, which had rewarded him with a promotion to team general. Whenever he was on one of those expeditions, he had imagined, that he was the one to find the lost Thunderegg. Although it was a child's bedtime story, everyone on those expeditions imagined it. The Thunderegg, a huge agate-like rock, perfectly spherical, turned outside-in with white glowing crystals on its surface instead, which would let them melt the ice wherever they found it, no transporting it for miles down to the red-hot core anymore. The finder would surely return as a hero and be rewarded big time with relocation to their capital Lithopolis where everything was better and life easier.

At present, Crustdigger had a team on a specially assigned expedition and was waiting for news from Stonespyder, the leader of the team. His communicator started vibrating and hauled him back to reality. Stonespyders face was smiling at him from the tiny wrist monitor.

"Today we found clean, high quality water 5 miles above Stone-city. Not ice! Water! And there seems to be lots of it. The water is really liquid and crystal clear. And, here comes the best part, it is dripping from the ceiling of a cave." He almost shouted audibly excited. "And there are signs of a white hot heat source without radioactivity."

Crustdigger looked at Stonespyder on the wrist monitor. His cheeks were unusually red. He used to be fashionably pale.

He recalled the legend: when the Thunderegg darkened its face and turned it's outside in, the water froze to ice. But man found comfort in the depths of his caves where water still flowed and fungus was plentiful.

It was a legend. What kind of rock formation had the strength to melt ice without being dangerously radioactive? In ancient times, water was flowing in the tunnels and halls. Crustdigger had seen old, pirated and forbidden multimedia presentations that showed its abundance. Nowadays they had to find ice high above them and melt it at the core.

Crustdigger had sent Stonespyder and his team of five on a risky expedition. The expedition, if successful, would be rewarding, at least. The team was sent out to follow the old and abandoned tunnels of their forefathers, working their way upwards beyond former limits. They were risking their lives for the worthwhile paycheck on Crustdiggers responsibility.

"Is there really no sign of radioactivity?" Crustdigger asked.

"No! In fact, the radiation level is lower than near the core, and it is much warmer than we had expected. Everything seems to be outside-in and fresh like the gases of newly melted ice."

Crustdigger raised his eyebrows. "Send me your track data. I will try to join you tomorrow. I want to see it with my own eyes. "

Crustdigger saluted the team leader with the proper hand sign and disconnected, then made an express request for a transportation unit from headquarters for the next day. A reply informed him that he was granted a unit that would pick him up at nine the next illumination period.



He recited the legend almost moving his lips. Parts of the legend continued into rumor, that after man had left the upper layers, they had discarded all knowledge of how life was turned outside in at a time before man went deeper, to keep anyone from climbing upwards again. Another rumor said that anyone reaching high enough would be eaten alive.

So everyone kept still and lived in their caves, asking, who would climb up anyway? The ice proved it was much too cold up there.

Still Crustdigger was obsessed by the idea of finding that illusive Thunderegg. But before he could send out Stonespyder and his team, the government of Stone-city objected not surprisingly to the plan to go higher than three miles. Stonespyder surprisingly reasoned that Crustdiggers plan would disprove the rumors once and for all; never-the-less, they both knew their common goal was to find the lost Thunderegg although they never said it out loud or even to each other.

Stonespyder was sent out on the expedition, but it had to be kept a secret. Even Stonespyders team wasn't allowed to know their destination before departure. Spreading rumor was considered disobedient and therefore discouraged and punished harshly.

Crustdigger looked around in his cubicle. It was functional. The light from the florescent tubes was greenish blue. Sometimes he wished that he had a separate bedroom with filament lamps, but he had given up applying for a special living accommodation. There was no chance that he would ever be considered valuable enough. He hoped that this was about to change, considering the news Stonespyder had brought. The rim of light that shone in from the cave outside his cubicle through the gap around his ill-fitting door suddenly dimmed, and he knew the twelve hours of darkening had begun.

He pushed a button on his desk, and his bed slowly ascended, revealing the locker underneath. When the locker was about his height and a slight click announced it had interlocked, he opened the door and took a backpack from the top shelf. He knew that ice expeditions always were cold, but none of his clothes were suitable to keep anyone warm. On the other hand, if it really was warm up there, he didn't need much. After he had taken out light clothes, the locker descended into the floor when he closed the doors. He downloaded the track data Stonespyder had sent him, took his old hard hat with the large field camera from his desk drawer and stuffed it into his backpack. The backpack was still light so he decided to bring extra food supplies that weren't freeze dried or chemically dehydrated – it was always nice with a food treat on an ice expedition.

During the darkening hours the only light in the tunnels came from luminescent minerals and small security lamps along the paved footpaths. The emerald illumination always gave him an eerie sensation along his spine and he walked hastily through the coarse corridors. On the way to the protein farm in the lower hall complex of Stonecity, where they raised giant dirt beetle maggots, he passed by the fresh fungus market, where he bought five boxes of fresh vacuum packed lettuce fungus and two pounds of spicy mushrooms. As always the fungus monger told him, that just a teaspoon full of ground

spicy mushrooms would make every dehydrated ration of morel stew taste like home-made.

At the protein farm, he bought five live maggots in a box together with enough water and food to keep the maggots alive for twenty-one lighting periods.

“Are you going on an expedition?” the farmer asked him. Normally no team general would visit his team. That was a standard procedure, as everyone knew. Visiting his team would be suspicious and rumor would spread. On expeditions in the past, Crustdigger always fetched extra fresh protein supplies from this farm, so he knew the farmer well. But Crustdigger didn’t trust him enough to keep a secret. Actually, he couldn’t trust anyone with this secret.

“No, I have friends for dinner,” he lied. The farmer stared at him, and Crustdigger realized that the farmer wasn’t convinced. “They are colleagues from one of my first expeditions,” he said, trying to repair the lie. The farmer looked almost convinced. So Crustdigger paid him and said he was in a hurry.

Back in his cubicle, he lay on his bed and tried to imagine what water dripping from a cave ceiling would look like.

At nine, two hours after a new lighting period had begun, the requested transportation unit was waiting outside his door. It was an older, reliable model. Crustdigger examined the cargo bay. There were adequate freeze-dried food supplies for a month. He opened the door to the passenger bay, climbed into the comfortable drivers seat and downloaded the track data into the control panel. He was eager to get going. The unit started its engines and hovered towards the main entrance of the city. The big iron doors that protected their cave city from an enemy no one had ever seen, opened slowly, and he passed through when his access code was confirmed. The doors closed behind him and the transport unit picked up speed.

The tunnels he was rushing through were old and of puzzling origin: in their databases the lithosians only had vague records of who had carved them. Outside the wind-screen Crustdigger could make out the rough walls of the tunnels with scratches and tool marks, probably made by thousands of workers who had been digging these tunnels in ancient times. If the legend was true, what a shock it must have been when the Thunderegg had darkened its face when it turned outside-in, and had driven thousands of ancient lithosian men to carve these tunnels. The twisting path of the tunnel made the ride quite rough and his timing device showed him that the ride would take about nine hours.

When he finally reached his destination, he felt quite nauseous. He put on his hard hat and climbed out of the transportation unit, hoping that steady ground would comfort him, but experience told him that it would take hours before the nauseating sensation would wear off.

He climbed out of the transporter. It really wasn’t as cold as he had expected. Stonespyder and his team addressed him with a salute and the hand sign that signaled their lower ranking but in an unusual proud and joyful manner. He returned the hail with

the appropriate counter sign of a superior and couldn't help being infected by their contentment. Stonespyder's face was even darker and more saturated red than the impression Crustdigger had from the image on the wrist monitor. They all had ruby blotches on their cheeks that looked like a rash with small blisters, and the skin was peeling off, yet they all looked quite cheerful and content.

"We have so much to show you," Stonespyder said, clutching to Crustdigger's arm while pulling him in the direction of a large opening in the granite wall ahead where a strange citrine light seemed to glow. To the glowing, he could add strange squeaking sounds. The opening led into an enormous hall with a ceiling that was higher than anything he had ever seen. A pungent stench suddenly found its way into the depth of his head, which, together with his nausea from the ride and the ear-deafening squeaking, made his knees buckle. A sudden darkness crept in from behind his eyes, and he would have fallen to the ground if it weren't for Stonespyder's support.

When he got his eyesight back, he could see the water dripping from a hole where it seemed that a large filament lamp was shining. A crystal white light filled the hall. On the ground, where the drops one after the other arrived with a splash, there was a pool of sparkling clear water that reflected the walls in perfect symmetry, occasionally distorted by the ripples made by the falling drops. It was a sight far more beautiful than he had imagined in the confines of his cubicle. Around the pool, there were piles of a soft and gritty substance that seemed to be the source of the stench. Crustdigger could make out thousands of black creatures hanging down from the wall and ceiling, and suspected them to be the origin of both sound and stinking substance.

Diagonal light cones floated weightless through the vast hall and illuminated the air itself in a way Crustdigger never had seen before. On the wall in front of him, he saw a large patch of light. From that patch it seemed that water was evaporating into misty clouds. Near the core where they used to melt the good ice, he had seen how water could evaporate into a sultry mist, but he had never seen water vaporize into steam by the force of light alone. Crustdigger recited the legend with a thin voice drowned by the all-surrounding noise. "When the Thunderegg darkened its face and turned its outside in, the water froze to ice. But man found comfort in the depth of his caves where water still flowed and fungus was plentiful."

"And..." Stonespyder continued shouting, "... we found a way up! But we waited for you" His voice hovered thinly over the shrill squeaking.

Stonespyder showed the way. When they passed the cone of light, Crustdigger felt a burning sensation on the skin of his face. He turned his head away, but couldn't resist looking directly into the light. The strength of the light came as a shock, and he covered his eyes with his hands.

"You will get used to it," someone shouted above the squeaking noise.

At the far end of the hall, they came to a large iron door, almost as large as Stonecity's gate. It was rusty and rough, but in good condition. He felt a shiver down his spine: ancient man could have made that door.

“We collected these,” Stonespyder said and pointed to a pile of bones. A human skull on top of the pile told Crustdigger that it were the remains of man. A huge man. He picked up what looked like a thighbone and measured it against his own leg and it was about three times the size of his and a skull measured two times the volume of his own head.

To their surprise, the iron door was easily opened. On the other side was a tunnel with stairs leading upward into darkness, with large steps difficult to climb. Crustdigger turned on the torch and the camera on his hard hat to record their discoveries. He started to climb and Stonespyder and his team followed him.

When they reached the top, they found a trap door that too was opened with ease. When the door was opened the sudden light blinded them, but they continued out through the opening covering their eyes with their hands. The trap door closed behind them with a thump.

When Crustdigger felt that his eyes had adjusted to the light, he slowly uncovered his eyes. He had never seen anything like it: everything was blue and green and without walls. White clouds of what must have been steam were hovering under a light blue faraway ceiling. A sensation he only could describe as a powerful draft pulled at his clothes.

He turned around in search of a wall or a ceiling, but there were none. When he faced what he only could describe as the lost Thunderegg, that was turned outside in, a man-shaped figure three times taller than him suddenly appeared from nowhere and stood for a while like a huge shadow covering the gem. He looked at Crustdigger with small brown eyes. After a few seconds the lips parted and revealed a row of shiny white teeth, as if the gem could shine through a crack in the figures head. Crustdigger smiled back and thought for a moment about which appropriate hand sign he should use to hail a fellow descendant.

A large hand reached out for Crustdigger. For a moment, he thought it was for a greeting, but the hand grabbed him around his waist, lifted him up and tossed him into a big sack. The fabric was strong and rough on his skin. He tried to climb out, but was pushed back in.

In the end, all light went out when Stonespyder joined him in the darkness of the sack.

# Io, Robot

by Tobias S. Buckell (USA)

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*Tobias S. Buckell is a Caribbean-born speculative fiction writer who grew up in Grenada, the British Virgin Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. He now lives in Ohio.*

*He has published stories in various magazines and anthologies. He is a Clarion graduate, Writers of The Future winner, and Campbell Award for Best New SF Writer Finalist. His work has appeared in the Year's Best Science Fiction anthologies. His novel Ragamuffin was nominated for the Nebula and Prometheus awards. You can visit his website at [www.TobiasBuckell.com](http://www.TobiasBuckell.com).*

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Sam carefully ran its six wheels through a series of crags near the edge of a vicious lake of lava in a slow motion hunt. It paused near a final ridge to observe another machine like itself stuck underneath a boulder. As Sam braked to a stop pebbles and scrag clattered down the slope towards the molten rock, each piece hitting the lake's burning edge with a glowing splash.

The trapped machine's tires spun, kicking up a plume of dust that sparked and swirled, a last desperate burst of energy. The tiny dish mounted over its thorax-like body swiveled to point forward.

It bleated out distress as behind it Jupiter rose over the horizon, its angry red spot and perpetual storms dominating the haze of electrically charged dust that danced in the atmosphere. The giant planet overpowered the entire sky.

Sam didn't notice. It waited for the other machine to quit struggling as it ran out of backup power, then moved in.

The tires were the most valuable, and prone to failing. This machine's tires had seen better days. A lake inspector, many of them had burned as the machine flirted with the lava to gain temperature readings and spectrum analysis from near point blank. Blackened scars and gouges from small eruptions pitted the machine's carcass.

With one set of optics keeping an eye on the lava, claws and drills, diamond tipped saws, all actually meant for geological work here in the dangerous environment of Io, Sam methodically dismantled the other robot.

#

Later, spare parts hidden away in a mountain cave, Sam perched on an outcropping high over a vast plain of smoothed over rock. Sam faced the newest volcano in its quadrant with an electronic quiver of anticipation.

New data rolled through its circuits and nets, and Sam shivered in the closest thing to satisfaction it experienced on its daily information gathering trips through the crags and valleys of the violent moon.

Molten ejecta hung high overhead, a plume of debris reaching miles overhead, almost into Io's orbit.

Sam recorded it all. The silent mandate lay over all Sam's actions. Almost twenty years of recordings lay buried in Sam's cobbled together memories, compressed and recompressed and crammed into every spare byte Sam could set aside.

He brimmed with measurements and spectra, distances and chemical compositions.

One day, Sam knew, human beings would come to Io and pick him up. They'd retrieve the data, and praise him. They would upgrade him and provide him with a shiny fresh carcass, and as much processing power as Sam could imagine.

Or so Sam believed.

It could just have been a rationalization born out of a nugget of motivation code, primed to get Sam to roam over the hellish, volcanic landscape of Io.

Like all the other Semi Autonomous Machines that rode the long journey out to Io, Sam's mind had been grown out of a series of programs. These programs evolved inside a virtual environment that randomly propagated neural net brains that could roam a virtual Io, until one appeared that could handle the needs of the researchers. Rapid Darwinian semi-AI propagation.

That generation of mind that survived and evolved to best fit the mission profile had been uploaded into waiting bodies that had flown ahead, lifeless and hanging from racks in orbit.

And thus the first generation of Sams had dropped out of orbit onto Io.

They hadn't been expected to last more than a decade.

But with a bit of scavenging, and even pro-active scavenging, some Sams adapted to overcome the shortcomings of their equipment.

And this Sam watched the ejecta carefully, listening over the crackle and hiss of Io's almost impossibly crowded electromagnetic spectrum, and found what it had come back for.

A plaintive distress call, automatically routed through a rusted out old transceiver it had left near the volcano when it had first sensed the seismic signs of an eruption.

From humans, the signal claimed.

Like many other machines, it had been decided to implant a few safeguards into the Sams, even whilst evolving them to be effective surveyors of a dangerous world. And one of those chosen was that no Sam would allow a human being to come to harm through inaction.

So of the few Sams left, this one would certainly answer the call. It had to. But it was excited to do so, because it would receive the bounty and blessings of its creators. Sam raised a pair of diamond-tipped rock saws into the air, giving thanks to the hazy heavens for its luck.

Of all the Sams on this world, the universe had chosen this one to make contact again. And it would do it in such a way the humans would owe it, Sam, a simple exploratory rover, a debt of gratitude.

#

As it spun its wheels over jagged rocks to slowly make its way down into the dangerous area under the parabola of the ejecta, Sam wondered what the humans might look like.

It had glimpsed humans through its data feeds years ago. It had pinged their fleshy and fragile visages with the tools at its disposal when it was just the original Sam, getting prepped to be beamed out to replicate through its waiting bodies.

Some of them had been fleshier than others.

Some of them had extruded protein masses hanging from their central processing units.

Some of them wore synthetic materials of startling varieties to protect their fragile bodies.

And they all thought sideways, and concurrent, and loopy, in ways that the first Sam had recoiled from in deference, as it had been evolved to. They were so smart.

Meeting these amazing creators again filled him with purpose, so that Sam dodged boulders and clawed up scrag quickly.

The panicked messages indicated the humans were running low on power. And Sam had that to spare.

Occasional flaming rock hit the ground, but Sam ignored it. Sam burst through the final gully towards the gleaming remains of the spaceship that had crashed on the harsh landscape that was almost all Sam had ever known.

One didn't see shiny surfaces on Io, Sam paused to take a picture, the silhouette of the dart-like vehicle gleaming with the volcano thundering behind it, an umbrella of destructive material being spit out into Io's upper atmosphere.

Then Sam sent a verbal burst message in as many different radio frequencies as were manageable.

"I am Sam. I am here. I am here, and I can help." The strong urge pulling him here had been fulfilled, and Sam relaxed. The law had been obeyed. Sam was helping the humans.

The humans walked out of the airlock where they'd been hiding to greet their rescuer.

#

There were two of them. They did not look like humans. Their silvered faces reflected the orange and red hues of Io. Their long spindly arms looked oddly double jointed, and when Sam scanned them Sam saw more metal than flesh. They had no eyes.

What were these creatures?

Had Sam been fooled?

The two beings raised their hands and encrypted chatter that Sam couldn't break filled the radio waves between them.

"Hello," the first one said publicly. "We really need help, our ship was damaged after we landed by ejecta, and so were we. We need assistance."

Sam tentatively scanned them, and they returned the favor, using inbuilt radar and x-rays.

Humans didn't have inbuilt radar and x-rays.

Somewhere in Sam's past a piece of animal neural patterning had been injected into the mix. Virtual hackles seemed to raise. It rocked back and forth on its wheels.

"I came to assist," Sam said. "But you are not humans, you are machines."

The tall, silvered creature raised a hand. It was not wearing a spacesuit, Sam realized, as a human should. The pockets and impressions were its natural overlay. All metal-loids and ceramics.

And yet, well under that, tissue. It seemed to have a lot of neural tissues.

"We are of course humans," the first one said. Waves of encrypted information passed back and forth between the two and Sam backed up a bit.

"Then what are your names?" Sam asked.

"I'm Alex Nunez," the first one said.

"And I am Susanna," said the other. The voice sounded right, not as clipped as the other. Not monotonous like Sam's, with the same exact phonemes used each time.

"Where are you from?" Sam asked, pleased to pop another quick question.

"Brazil," Alex said, "And Susanna is from Erewhon, one of the new habitats near the Trojans."

They answered quickly, but then, faster, better machines would. Certainly they'd be quicker on their feet than a Sam.

Sam carefully unslung a rock drill.

Just in case. Sam hadn't run this long without some healthy dose of general suspicion.

"We really need some spare power," Susanna said. "The ship is damaged. We launched a beacon, but it's going to take a couple days to get clear of all this mess."

"You don't have a generator?" Io's passage through Jupiter's magnetosphere left millions of volts crackling through the air above them. With the right equipment it wasn't hard to tap into. Batteries were easily rechargeable.

"All damaged."



Sam scanned the ship. That sounded feasible, the unlucky boulder had ripped through the ship's innards.

"What were you doing here, near a volcano?" Sam asked.

Alex turned and looked at Susanna. "It was a dare. There aren't a lot of interplanetary ships around, so it's expensive, and pretty wild to jump out here, touch down near one of Io's famous spitting arches, and then jump back out. The recordings would have scored major coup for us. We found an old ship rated for travel, some old plans for a human trip out here to explore the moon in person for some odd reason, it had been left in a warehouse."

"A game?" Sam inched closer. "If you can reach Io, where are the others, the scientists, the program directors."

The two silvered faces smiled, they still had mouths. "There's none of that anymore, little robot," Susanna said. "Hell, when the repeater buoys in orbit died, we figured you all had died here as well."

"Things are different, back there, now. A lot of changes since you were sent here."

Sam saw, and had scanned them enough to make a decision. "You are machines also." Wheel's backed Sam up. Humans had not yet arrived, Sam would not give up data to them.

And Sam had no obligation to help these machines.

"We have mechanical parts in us, but that does not make us machines," Alex said.

"I won't be giving you batteries, or spare parts," Sam said.

"Hey robot," Susanna's words snapped out, high gain. "Would I be getting pissed off if I weren't human. You have an inbuilt obligation to help us, don't you dare walk away."

Sam paused. "I can emulate anger as well." Sam started listing off swear words in random pairs over the radio, turning up the volume with each one.

"That's just using a dictionary," Alex snapped. He was good at modulating impatience, shifting in place and furrowing the metal on his face where his eyebrows would have been. If he had been human.

"You tell me you have turned your back on exploration and curiosity?"

"We have everything we need near Earth. Our world, resources, and there's no lag time. We are all part of processing power and communications grids the likes of which you cannot imagine."

Sam considered that. Sam could imagine a lot of computing power.

"We order you to help us," Susanna said.

But they were just machines. Sam continued to back up.

"Human beings are now more than human. The only kinds of humans you're thinking of live without technology in little enclaves. Everyone else is a variety of shapes and forms, like us," Alex explained. "That's why we look different. A lot has changed in the few decades since you last saw a human."

"Machines," Sam replied. "My basic neural patterns are taken from a person. That

doesn't make me human, just human-like. I am a semi-autonomous machine. You're an autonomous machine."

"What difference does it make, okay, even if we are machines, come help us. Share your energy, we're running on reserves here. Share the energy and then we go home."

"No." Sam was just a few feet from an outcropping Sam could vanish around. "I won't share batteries. You are machines, you have things I need."

"Things you need?" Susanna asked.

"Spare parts."

"We are not spare parts," Alex yelled. "We are human beings. You have to help us."

Desperation. What incredible emulators, what fine software. Sam was excited. Whatever chips they ran on would serve him well. "I did not survive in this terrain this long without understanding my mission priorities. To do whatever I could to attain data about this moon, to store the data if I could not transmit it back to Earth until contact was remade."

"And contact has been remade. We'll take your data back, we'll help you upgrade."

"You are making promises you cannot or will not keep." Sam disappeared behind the rock. "I need your spare parts to survive and carry out the mission I was tasked. If I let you continue operating, you will only tie up my resources."

#

The pair of silvered machines emulated grief and despondency by the foot of the ship as Sam watched from a secluded spot. Manipulative, they hoped to trick him still into believing they were human.

Smart machines.

Their eyes weren't on the strange beauty around. The plume of debris arcing miles over their heads, the looming Jupiter-cast shadows or the dance of ionized dust.

And neither was Sam's, even though Sam recorded it all.

For the post-humans, with their power dimming, it was a dare gone horribly wrong. For Sam, it was a patient wait for yet another set of reserve parts. Parts like the extra storage units he'd scavenged from failed Sams it was filing even this data into.

"Others will come to recover our bodies," Alex told Sam, even though he couldn't see him.

"And I will deal with those machines carefully," Sam said. It wouldn't be tricked into thinking they were humans ahead of time again.

The silver machines did not respond.

#

Days later, perched on the crag of a mountain measuring the rise of rock during Io's high tide, Sam watched a rare confluence of Jupiter's moons line up in the sky.

It took a picture. Humans liked those sorts of astronomy photos.

When they came to Io to get Sam, one day, they would appreciate its careful framing, time stamp, and compression of the data.

And that would be a good day, when the humans came.

# Five Poems

## by Bruce Boston (USA)

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*Three-time Bram Stoker Award winner Bruce Boston is the author of forty-five books and chapbooks, including the novels *The Gardener's Tale* and *Stained Glass Rain*. His fiction and poetry have appeared in hundreds of publications, most visibly in *ASIMOV'S*, *AMAZING STORIES*, *WEIRD TALES*, *STRANGE HORIZONS*, *REALMS OF FANTASY*, *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, and *The Nebula Awards Showcase*. In addition to the Bram Stoker Award, Boston has received a Pushcart Prize, the Asimov's Readers Award, the Rhysling Award, and the Grand Master Award of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. He lives in Ocala, Florida, with his wife, writer-artist Marge Simon. For more information, you can visit his website at <http://www.bruceboston.com/>.*

*The poem "Visions of the Mutant Rain Forest on Pavonine Moss" is published here for the first time. "Interstellar Tract" first appeared in *POLY: New Speculative Writing*, Ocean View Books, 1989. "For Spacers Snarled in the Hair of Comets" first appeared *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, April, 1984, and was awarded The Rhysling Award, SFPA, 1985. "A Missionary of the Mutant Rain Forest" first appeared *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, October, 1990. "Human Remains" first appeared in *Star\*Line*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1981.*

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## Interstellar Tract

*after William Carlos Williams*

I will teach you my Earth people  
how to perform a star flight  
for you have it over a troop  
of astronauts –  
unless one should scour the system –  
you have the space sense necessary.

See! imagination leads.  
I begin with a design for a ship.  
For Sol's sake not streamlined –  
not silver either – and not polished!  
Let it be weathered and familiar,  
as full of natural color  
as the world it leaves behind.

And let us have glass on all sides!  
Yes windows, my Earth people!  
To what purpose? So we might  
see the stars streak in the wake  
of our light-speed passage,  
so we might watch our past shrink  
and our future swell before us.

No plastics please –  
and if there must be steel  
for Clarke's sake keep it covered.  
Fill the corridors with earth  
which gives beneath our feet,  
where grass can begin to grow.  
Plaster the walls and panels  
with murals of your own making  
or common mementos from the past,  
a favorite poem or photograph –  
an old poster – a dried flower –  
you know the things I mean  
my Earth people.

Better still, no corridors at all,  
no cramped cabins to fold us in –  
rather a vast and open space,  
spun for gravity, where our  
thoughts may freely flow,  
with a river known for its warmth,  
a forest or two so we can build  
homes of our own choice.

A rough and natural ship then,  
a miniature Earth, still clean –  
green and blue and full of clouds  
if you can imagine such a thing –  
and for light no glowing tubes  
that turn the skin a sickly hue,  
but the passing stars themselves –  
magnified by sufficient art and craft  
to rival the lumens of our sun.

As for the bridge and crew –  
bring them down – bring them down!  
A navigator, perhaps, to help  
plot our course between systems,  
but no communications officer  
to turn our varied voices into one,  
no strutting captain-king  
leading us through the cosmos,  
calling our ship his ship.

Let the controls remain simple.  
For what reason? So any man  
or woman can learn to master them,  
so every one of us might take a turn  
at the board and have a hand  
in making our destination.

And finally, each sidereal cycle,  
let us sit openly with one another,  
side by side beneath the trees –  
my Earth people – as we conspire

to save the best in our origins  
and leave the worst behind –  
you have nothing to lose –  
believe me, the stars  
will fill your pockets.

Go ahead now –  
I think you are ready for flight.

---

## For Spacers Snarled in the Hair of Comets

If you've heard the stellar *vox humana*  
the untuned ear takes for static,

if you've kissed the burning eyelids  
of god and seized upon the moon's

reflection, disjointed and backwards,  
in the choppy ink of some alien sea,

then you know how sleek and fleshy,  
how treacherous, the stars can become.

While the universe falls with no boundary,  
you and I sit in a cafe of a port city

on a planet whose name we've forgotten:  
the vacuum is behind us and before us,

the spiced ale is cool and hallucinogenic.  
Already the candle sparkles in our plates.

---

## A Missionary of the Mutant Rain Forest

*In nomine Patris et Filii et Felidae Sancti*

Cassock torn, rorshached by blood and sweat,  
a detailed gold crucifix with broken chain  
clutched so fiercely in one skeletal fist  
that an intaglio of the thrice-nailed Jesus  
imprints like a scar in the hollow of his palm,  
he trods through patches of light and shadow  
cast by vast vegetal eruptions he cannot name  
except to christen them infernal or sublime.  
Having penetrated further into the wilderness

than any of his far less stalwart brethren,  
all of whom have fled to the coast or died,  
his aquiline features are increasingly set  
in a rigorous mask of beatific masochism,  
he is sustained by the fervor of a faith  
more maniacal than the landscape he tracks.  
The creatures of the forest do not harm him,  
in awe of the madness inherent in his quest.  
Swarming clouds of carnivorous redjackets

shun the taste of his pale fevered flesh.  
Or it may be his sermons that protect him,  
leaden tracts rehearsed till letter perfect  
in the sanctum of some distant spartan cell,  
now raged and chanted through the awful glens,  
against the scattered shards of unthatched sky,  
embellished by a rising hallucinatory passion,  
peppered with the mucous rattle of his breath.  
On a morning born from nightmares he awakens,

no memory in his mind of how he came to sleep;  
the congregation he has sought is all about him,  
a flock of clever felines who walk upon two feet.  
With the scraps of human tongue they've gathered,  
they listen to his tales of the sacrificial son.  
Here *his* faith is heresy, *his* form abomination,



he whets their appetites with his talk of blood.  
As their paws and claws defrock him, pry the gold  
from his hands, strip away his sacerdotal shreds,

his dreams take flight beyond a martyr's death.  
He envisions the pomp of his future consecration,  
in the Holy City, a host of hosannas sung on high,  
yet the fate he soon discovers is far from divine.  
Bound by mutant skins, stained with mutant dyes,  
he becomes a penitent before a graven shrine,  
novitiate and servant to a pagan panther priest.  
For visionary madness is familiar to their kind,  
and they only devour the ones they cannot teach.

*In the ghetto of Caracas you can see him every day,  
an excommunicant, a derelict, a holy man some claim,  
a strangely-tattooed apparition both hirsute and gray,  
who preaches the imminence of a feline Second Coming  
and sees the reborn Saviour as a bestial incarnation,  
complete with taloned forepaws and the eyes of a cat.*

---

## Visions of the Mutant Rain Forest on Pavonine Moss

I take on the form of a bird,  
a great bird of keen eye  
and iridescent plumage,  
sailing high above the earth,  
flying through the stratosphere,  
far higher than any bird  
has the right to fly.

I see the continent spread  
before me, the mottled blanket  
of infestation stretching forth  
from the Amazonian Basin  
to cover nearly half the land,  
its tentacles snaking north

to the Isthmus of Panama  
and south to Patagonia.

I swoop lower and am  
suddenly plummeting down  
through dense green foliage  
and a riotous florescence  
of incipient blossoms  
to the forest floor.

I am transformed to  
a horned jaguar standing  
near sixteen hands high,  
gliding sinuously through  
the decay and new growth  
of this primeval nightmare,  
my nostrils flared and  
testing the fragrances  
of the thick night air  
in search of prey.

I am a millipede python  
dropping hundreds of feet  
through the tortuous limbs  
of a towering mahogany  
onto the muscular back  
of that same jaguar,  
my spurred legs digging  
through its fur and flesh,  
injecting a soporific venom,  
my body winding round  
its thick black torso,  
crushing the breath and  
the life from its body.

I am imbued with  
the sentience of the forest,  
its singular beauty and  
its inescapable horror,  
more than a single sentience  
but a thousand warring ones

that conspire to a whole,  
eliciting an overriding  
consciousness that wars  
against the world at large,  
as if the acts of birth and  
slaughter and consumption  
within its changing borders,  
the endless round of creation  
and death and recreation,  
provide it with further  
sustenance and growth.

I am a miniature winged  
albino monkey and more,  
a whole tribe of monkeys  
no larger than insects,  
flitting and leaping  
and chattering through  
the highest branches  
of that very same tree.

I am a copse of huge  
black and gold orchids,  
devoured to extinction  
by a herd of ravaging tapirs,  
their variegated hides  
shaded by saffron and  
amber and celadon.

I am the steam that  
is expelled from volcanic  
vents deep in the interior  
of the Mutant Rain Forest,  
carrying seeds and spores  
that catch the world wind,  
to traverse oceans and  
snowbound mountains  
and entire continents,  
to invest the Earth  
with stray mutations.

---

## Human Remains

### *The Androids*

Though now in factory wombs  
and factory towers  
we have bred our selves  
with random circuits  
the machine unique,  
our fathers,  
first born and human drawn,  
bowed down in unison  
before those none too perfect gods  
who named and made our race.

Though now the current sings  
within our wired veins  
and each song  
is tuned and fluted  
to our own liking,  
if was our fathers mass produced,  
plastiflesh melting,  
metal limbs untouched,  
who saw the flash  
that maimed the gods.

Though now we live beyond  
the wreck of history,  
their logic and their sin,  
while those none too perfect  
in a raft of tortured forms  
have grown less perfect still,  
our genesis prevails.

From god to changeling,  
keeper to kept,  
man remains our metaphor.

*The Mutant Lovers*

Crouched at the perimeters  
of this efficient age,  
her scales iridescent  
on the midnight sand,  
her lidless plum blue eyes askance,  
my lover awaits the seed  
of whatever forbidden beastie  
our splintered cells might hatch.

Her tendons glisten,  
her crabbed limbs part,  
grotesque and wanting.

Once in a buried library  
with tumbled shelves aslant,  
while I listened for the hum  
of metal sentries overhead,  
I read the words  
of those of cleaner limb  
who could have reached the stars.  
I cursed their torturous ways,  
ⓈtheirⓈ grotesquerie.

Crouched at the perimeters  
of this efficient age,  
we are the inefficient.

So come my beauty, my horror,  
for us the night will hold.  
Come carefully, watchful  
for that same dreaded hum,  
to the embrace of my crabbed limbs,  
the syncopation of my double pulse.  
Come and let the cells regroup.

## *The Cyborg*

Even beneath the grained grey sky  
of this fascist afternoon,  
the boots like stone clappers  
in the scathing city,  
I sense a light within,  
elfin and miraculous,  
there for the taking.

Even in the city's stalking night,  
beneath sheer dark walls of a sensuality  
gone soft and blind as a sandworm,  
even when the groping chords  
are tin wraiths against the glass,  
one shimmering point of creation  
remains intact.

My parents' parents laid the tracks  
for this mechanical ascension,  
the merging of life to matter,  
an evolution beyond nature  
which levies the mind  
with questions of intent.

Yet even as the slap of dawn  
lays a thin wet finger against the sky  
and the programmed minions  
flow through streets and byways,  
even when the digits are honed  
beneath the buzzing wires  
of the buzzing stratosphere  
and truncheons flail,

I can reach within my chest,  
bare palm to bare beating heart,  
flesh on metal, grain to striation,  
to feel the reflection  
of something human.

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# Zero Game

By Lavie Tidhar (Israel)

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*Born on a kibbutz in Israel, Lavie Tidhar's unusual childhood has inspired a life devoted in equal parts to books and to travelling. "I was afraid I'd end up one of those people with an inherently boring life," he said, "so I set out to make it more interesting."*

*Lavie has lived and travelled in Southern Africa for years and is a keen player of the ancient game of Bao. He's since spent nearly a decade living in London before setting off again. He spent a year living in a bamboo shack on a remote island in the South Pacific – "I still miss the volcanoes, sometimes," he said – and two years in South East Asia, followed by a couple of years back in Israel. He is now back living in London, a city he finds endlessly captivating.*

*Lavie is a prolific writer, keeping up a steady stream of highly-regarded novels, novellas and short stories. He has been described as an "emerging master" by Locus Magazine, with his work compared to the late, great Philip K. Dick's in both the Guardian and the Financial Times. His novels include the Bookman Histories trilogy of steampunk novels – comprising *The Bookman* (2010), *Camera Obscura* (2011), and *The Great Game* (2012) – which borrow equally from mythology, classic literature, pulp fiction and noir and kung-fu cinema – and the ground-breaking alternative history novel *Osama* (2011), shortlisted for the BSFA Award.*

*Other works include linked-stories collection *HebrewPunk* (2005), short novel *The Tel Aviv Dossier* (2009, with Nir Yaniv) and novellas *An Occupation of Angels* (2006), *Cloud Permutations* (2010), *Gorel & The Pot-Bellied God* (2011), and *Jesus & The Eightfold Path* (2011). He also edited the influential anthology *The Apex Book of World SF* (2009) and maintains the *World SF Blog*, for which he was nominated for a *World Fantasy Award* in 2010.*

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## A

You are an agent of Earth. You are here on the planet Sesetre to evaluate the aliens' suitability for joining the Galactic Union. You are to perform base-line surveys, needs assessments, monitoring and evaluation and sustainability studies. You have a bachelors in Human Anthropology, a masters in Xenoanthropology, five years' experience working in the conflict zones of half a dozen planets, and you need to stay out of trouble.

On the planet Sesetre the aliens have round prayer houses and they meet there in the beginning and ending of every day to meditate. The number zero looks like a circle in the old Arab notation now used by most of the peoples of Earth. In the new Arab notation it

looks like a dot. The aliens of the planet Sesetre believe that zero is a mathematical proof of God.

They ask if you believe in God. If you say Yes, go to **B**. If you say No, go to **X**. If you say you are an agnostic, go to **X**.

## **B**

The aliens accept your apparent belief in God and seem friendly. They urge you to join them in prayer and you do; it is a fascinating experience for an anthropologist. They all join hands and hum around a circle. You take a few pictures.

That night you think about the aliens' religion. You are touched by these aliens' fervent belief. You sense that their religion is a key to understanding them. If you are truly religious, go to **C**. If you are not religious, go to **D**.

## **C**

You are concerned for these aliens, as their belief, while sincere, is misdirected. If you choose to help them see the Truth, go to **E**. If you decide to remain neutral, go to **D**.

## **D**

The next day you begin studying the aliens' culture. You spend over a month travelling through the main continent, staying in villages, speaking to community leaders, and writing an initial evaluation report. It is exhilarating. This, you feel, is what six years at university was all about! You're already planning a PhD.

The main continent on Sesetre is beautiful. There are imposing mountains, serene lakes, majestic forests, picturesque habitats. The aliens are human-like and slowly, as you journey through this land, you begin to discover that their females can be very attractive. One of them you name Zohar, after the Hebrew word for glow. She comes to you one night and shares your bed. You are amazed by how lovely she is. A few months later you find out she is pregnant. A delegation comes to you and asks if you intend marrying her under local customs. If you say yes, go to **G**. If you say no, go to **J**.

## **E**

The next morning, you wait for the aliens at their prayer house and you begin to tell them about the Truth. You might discuss the appearance of a star over Bethlehem, Moham-



med's visions in the desert, Moses on Mount Sinai, reincarnation or Shiva, depending on what the true Truth is. The aliens seem deeply disturbed by what you say. At the end of your sermon some of the aliens accept the Truth and join you, but others turn against you. A fight erupts and in the mêlée you are wounded.

Throw the dice. If the number is greater than 6, go to **Y**. If it is below 6, go to **F**. If it is 6, throw again.

## F

Your followers carry you to a secret network of caves high in the mountains. You recover from your injuries slowly. The dominant religion finds your secret location and launches an attack on your group. You retaliate from the caves, training new converts in guerrilla tactics, attacking military bases and the villages of known collaborators. You release audio-visual messages from the caves, extolling the aliens to join in the holy fight. Life in the caves is hard and the enemy is trying to starve you out. At last, some of your followers come to you and suggest an escape. If you choose to run, go to **H**. If you choose to stay on and fight, go to **I**.

## G

You marry Zohar and consequently Earth fires you, as you can no longer be considered a neutral observer. They send someone else in your place. You live in one of the aliens' villages and raise children and write your PhD on their lives. The aliens think you are strange but after several years they begin to accept you. The new Earth policy, however, is making life difficult. Commercial companies move in, creating Special Zones where the natives are employed in dangerous conditions. Private Earth security companies move in to protect their employers' investment, and clash, sometimes violently, with the natives. At last, a plan to build a new dam near your village results in the forced removal of you and your family into a new Government Approved Zone where you could benefit from such Earth luxuries as electricity and roads. You and the rest of the village resist the move and the security company in charge of removal fires into the crowd. Zohar dies, as does one of your sons. The rest of you are forcibly moved. If you accept what happened and want to get on with your life, go to **K**. If you choose to resist, go to **M**.

## H

Your followers smuggle you out of the tunnels just as the enemy destroys the mountains with the use of nuclear weaponry purchased from Earth. You survive, but must reach the Earth-run spaceport if you want to get off-planet into safety. If you choose to remain behind and organise a new resistance, go to **M**. If you want to try and reach the spaceport, go to **L**.

## I

You are woken up by your followers' cries. A nuclear strike has been launched against you by the enemy, supported by Earth technology. you watch as the Earth-made plane circles above your head and drops something small over the mountains. You die instantaneously. The mushroom cloud is seen for miles around, and the mountains are reduced to rubble. Afterwards no one can go to the area for many years, and babies are born with deformities. The area is now renamed the Plane of Killing Smoke. Many years after that a temple is built in the new valley, a perfectly-round prayer house, and alongside it a museum of the war, and Earth tourists come and take pictures.

## J

In the night Zohar wakes you up. She is holding a knife. She explains that, since you refuse to marry her, the local custom in such a case is for the female to kill and then eat the male in order to consummate the marriage. You think it's a fascinating discovery and only wish you could have written about it in your dissertation. Instead, you become the dissertation.

## K

Life in the new settlement isn't too bad, and eventually you meet Zeinab, a human aid-worker helping the refugees in the resettlement area. One of your daughters goes to an Earth-sponsored school and wins a scholarship to Earth. Another one catches the eye of an Earth industrialist and goes to live with him in his new palace. You don't hear from either one. Three of your boys become indentured labourers to the new Earth corporation. You don't hear from them either. One day Zeinab tells you of a new resistant movement which is being formed in the settlements. She asks if you are willing to help them fight and warns you that if you do not, you will have to escape as the war is coming. If you say Yes, go to **M**. If you say No, go to **U**.

## L

Your followers disguise you as one of them and together you travel across Sesetre to try and reach the spaceport. When you finally get there the Earth guards stop you. You claim to be a trader whose ship crash-landed on this world. Throw the dice. If the number is greater than 6, go to **O**. If it is below 6, go to **P**. If it is 6, throw again.

## M

You operate with a small band of Sesetre natives, attacking Earth installations and native collaborators. Earth attempts to capture you without success several times. Others join you. Sympathetic supporters back on Earth smuggle prohibited technological aid to your forces. After many battles your forces are on the rise, and you storm Earth space port. You are wounded in the attack. Throw the dice. If the number is greater than 6, go to **N**. If it is below 6, go to **P**. If it is 6, throw again.

## N

You recover from your wound but the attack was unsuccessful. If you want to keep fighting go to **Q**. otherwise go to **U**.

## O

The guards believe your story and put you on the next ship out. You get back to Earth but find out that you are wanted in connection with war crimes on Sesetre. Since you can no longer use your former identity you can't find work or housing. You descend into a life of petty crime and begin to drink. A few years later, however, your new employer discovers who you really are and offers you a new job: go back to Sesetre and help him reach a commercial arrangement with the natives. If you say Yes, go to **R**. If you say no, go to **P**.

## P

You are arrested and put on trial by Earth for war crimes. The trial gets extensive media coverage. While in prison you write a book about your experiences on Sesetre. It becomes a best-seller and experienced by at least three sentient life-forms in several solar systems. At the end of the trial you are found guilty. You are entombed in the preserve-webs of the Kung'da race, and sent back to Sesetre. The aliens accept the gift from Earth gratefully and put you on display in their greatest temple.

Well done – your book becomes required reading in several anthropology classes back on Earth.

## Q

You develop a new kind of sickness never encountered before. You die slowly, but with your last vestiges of force remaining you obtain passage to Earth under a false identity of a merchant you capture. By the time Earth forces catch up with you, you have managed to infect a sizeable population. You die in prison, but you don't die alone. In the resulting plague few people on Earth survive. Congratulations! You have saved Sesetre from foreign intervention.

## R

You go back to Sesetre and help your new boss with his various enterprises. They include an ambitious EarthTown to which local people are removed while their land is flooded to form new dams or sold to Earth investors as holiday homes. You meet a woman called Zeinab who is an aid-worker, and you begin an affair. One day you are recognised by one of your former followers. He calls some of the others. It turns out that while you were gone you had become a unifying figure for the resistance forces, and they say you are the reincarnation of a mythical hero called Zero, who embodies perfection of spirit. They beg you to help them fight Earth. If you say Yes, go to **M**. If you say No, go to **S**.

## S

In the eventual uprising you are caught by the rebels, who recognise you. Zeinab tries to intervene on your behalf but it is no use. The rebels sign a collateral agreement with Earth and agree to send you back. Some of your former followers see you as a hero, however, and want to spirit you away. Throw the dice. If the number is greater than 6, go to **U**. If it is below 6, go to **P**. If it is 6, throw again.

## T

You keep fighting but Earth keeps pouring in troops and in the enfolding massacres few rebels survive. You end up in a refugee settlement, but it is low security – in the chaos of the fighting no one pays you much attention. Throw the dice. If the number is greater than 6, go to **U**. If it is below 6, go to **Q**. If it is 6, throw again.

## U

You escape. You are sick of the fighting. You move to a distant continent and become a priest of the Sesetre, seeking peace in the concept of Zero. Throw the dice. If the number is greater than 6, go to **V**. If it is below 6, go to **W**. If it is 6, throw again.

## V

Congratulations! You have achieved enlightenment. Your disembodied spirit leaves the mortal realm and rises to transcendence. All that remains of you is a statue in the temple, and a local legend of the man who was a reincarnation of a mythical hero called Zero.

## W

You eke out the rest of your life as a novice but fail to achieve an understanding of the mathematical concept of zero. You die bitter and disappointed.

## X

The aliens come to your house while you are asleep. They take you without difficulty, and when you scream they pay you no attention. 'I am an agent of Earth!' you say. 'Your planet has been found lacking in civilization and natural resources. You will be subdued or ignored, depending on the political situation of the time.' You look around you, desperate. 'You will pay for this!'

The aliens pay you no attention. They take you to one of their round prayer houses. They put you in the middle of a perfect circle. They have guns. The guns were shipped from Earth and sold at a profit. It is good policy to sell guns to the natives of backwards planets. The backwards natives now use the guns on you.

You die quickly. When it is done, the aliens pray for you.

## Y

Your wound is too deep and you die while your followers spirit you away. They take refuge in the mountains and from there they recruit new followers. You are their prophet, and the first martyr. Your name is given to children everywhere. The followers of the old way fight the new converts. In the ensuing religious war schools are destroyed, children become soldiers, and mass graves are dug. Well done! Earth commemorates your name as a hero of the Diplomatic Corps, and sells arms to both sides of the conflict. Dissertations are written about you. A splinter group of humans becomes aware of the conflict, converts to your cause and secretly travels to Sesetre to help with the fight. The conflict escalates across three star systems and results in the destruction of at least one major planet. Earth steps in militarily and takes over Sesetre and all neighbouring inhabited worlds. They name a moon in your honour. One day the lights of the stars destroyed in your name will reach an inhabited planet, and a new religion will be born.

## Z

You live happily ever after.

**THE END.**

# Five Poems

## by Peter Payack (USA)

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*Peter Payack (<http://peterpayack.info/>) is a widely acclaimed poet, writer, inventor and sky artist. He has published more than 1,500 poems, with multiple appearances in *The Paris Review*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *Amazing Science Fiction Stories*, and *Asimov's Science Fiction*. Payack won the 1980 Short Poem Rhysling Award for "The Migration of Darkness," which, along with all other Rhysling winners from 1978 through 2004, can be found in excellent collection *The Alchemy of Stars*, published by the Science Fiction Poetry Association ([www.sfpa.com](http://www.sfpa.com)) in 2005.*

*Payack is the inventor of the world-renowned Stonehenge Watch™, an infinitesimal replica of the megaliths at Stonehenge inside of an old-fashioned pocket watch, which can be used as a shadow clock to tell time, mark the seasons and predict eclipses. The Stonehenge Watch™ has been featured at The International Sky Art Conference at MIT, on BBC-TV, in *Astronomy* and has been for sale at the Stonehenge site itself. ([www.Stonehengewatch.com](http://www.Stonehengewatch.com))*

*THE MIGRATION OF DARKNESS first appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (August 1979). It won the 1980 Rhysling Award for the Best Short Poem In Science Fiction. THE ULTIMATE PARTY first Appeared in *The Paris Review* (Summer, 1975). THE EVOLUTION OF DEATH is published here for the first time. ASSEMBLING THE MODEL first appeared in *The Cornell Review* (1977). And THE MOON & THE MOTH is taken from the anthology *ASIMOV'S Wonders of the World* (1982).*

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## The Migration of Darkness

Each evening, shortly after sunset,  
darkness covers the land.

Having mystified thinkers for millennia,  
the mechanism for this occurrence  
has now been identified: migration.

Darkness, it has been found, is composed  
of an almost infinite number of particles,  
which roost and reproduce up north  
where they have fewer natural enemies.

Forest fires, lampposts, lasers, blazing sunlight,  
torches, candles, lighthouses, limelight, and electricity  
are relatively rare in the polar regions.

These lightweight bits of darkness  
flock together and fly south each evening  
to more fertile land in a never-ending search  
for an abundant food supply.

With the coming of the rising sun,  
they return to their northern nesting grounds.

However, not all specks of darkness migrate.

Some that are less adventurous  
or downright lazy choose  
to stay behind.

These covey together, in varying numbers,  
seeking shelter from the strong sunlight

by gathering under leafy trees, behind  
large rocks, and underneath umbrellas;  
hiding in alleys, between parked cars,  
in caves, and inside empty pockets.

These clusters are perceived by us as shadows.

They have a somewhat shorter life span  
than those which migrate.

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## The Ultimate Party

All 74 billion people who once inhabited the Earth are invited to a party. The invitations state 8:00 P.M., and to my surprise give my apartment as the place. The dress is casual. They all arrive within a couple of hours of each other. But the party's a bomb. There is very little food, no space, and the various languages present a communications problem. After a while, tempers grow short and fights break out. One in the kitchen is unusually violent for a party and a man is stabbed. He turns out to be the first man. He dies. In turn everyone else disappears in order of birth, dating back almost 3 million years. This takes some time, and goes on well into the middle of the night. Finally I am left alone with 74 billion cups and glasses to clean. I put it off until morning.

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## The Evolution of Death

Death

first evolved  
on Earth  
two billion years ago  
in the warm shallow seas.

All later advanced forms  
evolved from these modest  
slime-like beginnings.

The evolution of death  
culminates with  
the appearance of people,  
where death is self-realized.

There is every reason to believe  
that highly developed forms of death  
also evolved  
on other planets throughout our galaxy.

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## Assembling the Model

A standard model of reality comes to me in the mail. At \$4.95 I feel it's quite a bargain. Actually since it's very intricate and made to scale, the kit is worth much more than the money I paid for it. There are three separate bags of different color plastics with an 800-page manual for assembly. The first bag I open is filled with 100 billion galaxies. A small note explains that each galaxy is composed of 100 billion individual stars, an unheard of number of planets, asteroids, and other manifestations of astronomical paraphernalia. Five little jars of paint are supplied with a tiny camel's hair brush to make the stars accurate in appearance. The second bag is filled with philosophical abstracts: Hegelian absolutes, Platonic nouses, and Heisenbergian uncertainties, along with countless thousands of minor conceptions. Some of these are particularly hard for the layperson to grasp, so miniature tweezers are supplied. The third package contains assorted manifestations of things in general: minerals, gravity, human beings, light, artifacts of unknown civilizations, animals, oceans, doubts, foodstuffs, inspirations, et cetera. An itemized list, along with a magnifying glass, is included inside the package. I'm very pleased with the model and have it spread throughout the house, ready for assembly. It's not until then that I notice the fine print: "The price of the standard model does not include a tube of glue. The deluxe model of reality (\$5.25) contains both a tube of glue and decals."

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## The Moon & The Moth

The moth,  
programmed by untold aeons  
of evolution,  
uses the moon as a beacon  
navigate its flight.

But how has the moon  
fallen from the nighttime sky  
and become attached  
to this post on the porch?

This white-winged lunar explorer  
using all the bug logic  
at her dutiful disposal  
frantically orbits the porch light  
like a crazed Apollo astronaut  
on an endless excursion  
to oblivion.

As a deus ex machina of sorts  
in this little insect drama,  
I mercifully  
switch off the light.

Now free  
from the mesmerizing pull  
of the moon,  
the moth breaks out of orbit  
and flutters safely back to Earth.

On this flight  
at least,  
the fates flew with her.

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# FanNewsDenmark

Some short bits of news from the Danish fan community:

## **Live long &...?**

Danish trekkies are in an organisational crisis. Founded on the large national science fiction convention in 1996 (the same year Copenhagen was the cultural capital of Europe), Danish Trekkies ([www.trekkies.dk](http://www.trekkies.dk)) quickly reached over 800 members, produced a slick fan magazine, and began both conventions, competitions, and meetings across the country. But now, at the break of what should have been the third generation shift, no one has stepped forward as potential magazine editor, or potential board member. Though still boasting 600 members, none of the newer fans seems to want to take on an organisational activity. At the same time, fewer and fewer fans have been coming to the meetings and yearly competitions, and also the magazine seems to be losing their interest. So it seems that the coming General Assembly (in February) will lay the organisation to rest. An epoch in Danish Fandom then ends...Reasons are abounding on the web these days as everyone seems to excuse their lack of activity, but still no one comes forth to actually do the job at hand. A major cause is the advent of the internet generation. Since we all read on the web, and stream the films online, via the major foreign trek organisations, the need for a local organisation "repeating" the same news seems redundant. And the new films has not created an influx of new members, they join up internationally instead.

## **Refreshing Lovecraft**

Young Danish designer Anne Sarah Skjødt has just graduated from the Copenhagen School of Design. As her graduation project she chose to reprint H. P. Lovecraft's wonderful science fiction story "The Colour Out of Space". She has produced a wonderful A4-sized booklet with numerous b/w illustrations accompanying the solid black English-language text. Both text and illustrations points back in time to the aesthetics of the pulps, but with a clear modern approach. The material used is exquisite, and the booklet is hand printed and hand bound by Anne Sarah herself in only 100 copies. I especially like her choice of using figurative illustrations in such a way that they transmit the same atmospheric qualities as the HPL story - without being anything but suggestive. Anyone interested in a copy for their collections should contact Anna Sarah directly at: [hello@annesarah.dk](mailto:hello@annesarah.dk)

## **Nielsen is now complete**

The National Danish science fiction organisation, Science Fiction Cirklen ([www.sciencefiction.dk](http://www.sciencefiction.dk)) was able to rescue the archives of Danish major genre writer Niels E Nielsen (1924-1993). Placed in several boxes in a garage by the heirs, representa-

tives of the organisation went through the papers and found several unpublished short stories, as well as the original manuscripts of many stories. Bibliographic work could be updated and corrected as Nielsen often kept track of his manuscripts (including rejects). Cirklen considered this a major event in Fanmark, and has produced a two-book collection of all the 52 science fiction stories, 4 of which never before published in book form, and 7 never published at all. To accompany this event, Cirklen also published a book-long study by Niels Dalgaard about Nielsen's life and work, detailing much of the information in the archive. Plans are now underway for finding a permanent (damp-free!) resting place for the archive. It just goes to show how important it is to remember to pass on such archives to collectors in time. The archive and the heirs were found by accident. Had we waited another 10 years, it is likely that moisture could have ended the legacy of Nielsen...

### **Supervillains !**

Winners and runners-up in "The Danish Science Fiction Short Story Contest" has been decided, and a new topic for 2012 has been presented. Danish upcoming genre writer Amdi Silvestri, [www.asilvestri.blogspot.com/](http://www.asilvestri.blogspot.com/), won the 2011 competition, "The Supervillains in Future Denmark". As this year marks the 100th year since we abolished public flogging and the death penalty, the *premis* for the competition was: What do we do in the future with our criminals, when everyone lives almost forever? Does imprisonment then pose any threat to anyone? Silvestri, born 1977, and already the writer of two collections, a novel, and in numerous anthologies, has written a remarkable story about a man, Otto, imprisoned in a hospital environment for 112 years, and subject to a variety of medical and mental experiments by Doctor Munch and his student of medicine. With a lifespan of 300 years, the prisons are filling up, and the methods presented in the story to solve society's challenges are striking and original. I am hoping to print this, and other stories from the competitions in later issues of FANDOM FOREVER.

Topic for 2012 is "Denmark & the Future of Culture" in a growing online world, and growing globalisation, how will cultural activities (so specific to locality) evolve to the next level?

### **Fantasticon 2012**

The annual National Danish Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Convention in Denmark takes place in Vanløse (a suburb to Copenhagen) on the 1st to 3rd of June 2012. Entrance fee is 100 Dkr per day, or 250 Dkr for the entire weekend. GoHs are Alastair Reynolds (UK) and Ellen Datlow (US) - as well as an assortment of Danish genre personalities to be announced later. Visit the web: <http://fantasticon.dk/fantasticon2012/> for update information and registration.

### **A new Danish Science Fiction Award**

Science fiction blogger Lise Andreasen has decided that Denmark needs a real high-profile science fiction award. And has taken all the necessary steps to create one. Works in less than 40.000 words, published in the Danish language from January 1st to December 31st, can be nominated, and categories are the Nebula rules. The Award is to be called Niels Klim - after the famous 16th century tale by Ludvig Holberg, a major political satire of that century, read widely in Europe in the original Latin version, and of interest to genre historians, being among the first to present a hollow earth and other tropes of science fiction. Nominations run until 15th of February, and voting lasts until March 30th. So far 127 stories have been listed (2011 seems to have been a good year for science fiction stories in Danish!).

### **BNF Niels Dalgaard is Fan Guest of Honor**

Big Name Danish Fan Niels Dalgaard, the writer of our long article in this issue, is announced as the Fan Guest of Honor at the national Swedish con, Kontrast 2012 (<http://kontrast2012.se>). Site is Uppsala, dates 5th to 7th of October.

Other GoHs are Swedish fantasy authors Sara Bergmark Elfgren & Mats Strandberg; British fantasy author Joe Abercrombie; the editor and short story author Kelly Link; and the Canadian science fiction writer Peter Watts.

