

Foreword & Acknowledgements

This story, although rather short, took a long time to be born. I had been dreaming of writing it for more than three years, groping into other works of science fiction for an original idea integrating (more or less) the context at the time period when it would be taking place. The not-too-distant future seemed to be just right, at a critical moment before the advent of intra-galactic travel. I would like to dedicate this work (and other instalments that may follow) to the past, present and future members of the *Champlain Regional Repeater Association* for whom I chose to write this tale. May it live long and prosper, as the saying goes!

My thanks to my wife, Diane, for her support and technical assistance in proofreading the early French version and commenting its translation into English. I am also indebted to many hams who showed some interest and/or commented on this venture, particularly VE3XEM who accepted to test read this pilot. I initially intended to read this text on the air, as a weekly feature of our nets, but due to some technical problems such as programming and poor signal into the repeater (from my location); it seemed simpler to post it on CRRRA's Web site. This way, you will have the choice to read it at any time of your liking.

Please, do not hesitate to send your feedback and comments at the email address below:

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Enjoy!

Jean Desbiens

The Notice

In those days, even though mankind had finally agreed to create a World Government, one could not say that it had much power. President Tsien was nothing but a puppet of the wealthy oligarchs who were the true do-nothing kings of the countless humans for whom short term survival was almost the only preoccupation. His role was limited to holding formal protocol sessions or to sponsor various initiatives aimed at convincing the masses that the planetary problems would finally be solved.

The settlement of Mars had begun many years before and the Moon had various permanent bases, but the only inhabitants of the planet were robots of all kinds working incessantly to build the underground complex for the military and scientists who were to be the first wave of permanent colonists. Indeed, domed shelters and gardens had to be built to grow plants, start chemical and mining operations, and serve as the only infrastructure necessary to sustain life and human activity.

Most of the Earth's population was still dreaming about would-be saviours heralded by some prophets, or by believers in the Ancient astronaut theory. There were many rumours about strange appearances and/or advanced technologies, reflecting the scale of despair. Humanity was not yet feeding on *Soylent Green* as predicted in a science fiction story of the late twentieth century, but many insects and their various by-products were widely used for food, though livestock and some plants existed as luxury staple.

The cost of surface housing was so high, due to climate change and extreme weather, that most of the poorer people had become underground dwellers and were rarely visiting the so-called "upper side". There were many disappearances and the missing were often not heard of for days, months or years, which was used as a basis for many wildly sprouting conspiracy theories all made more or less believable by the various stories reported by those who came back.

Pollution was everywhere and the "sixth continent" (garbage lands) had started to emerge in various spots of the world oceans, partly promoted by powerless local administrations who had found no better solutions than shipping the larger plastics and other refuse to a number of strategic locations where the prevailing winds were dumping sand blown away in high altitude by desert storms. Eventually, these mounds had formed small islands that were slowly colonized by hardy plants, insects and tough bacteria able to assimilate plastic. These had become a no man's land for human dwelling due to the presence of venomous species and miasmas.

One day, a strange astronomical phenomenon began to occur in the shape of whitish aurora borealis. Scientists, well-instructed in this by the World Administration, quickly said that these were only harmless, low-energy level radiations carried by the solar wind. However, a secret report to the Administration rather stated that they were due to the presence of *antigravitons* that could not be attributed to any known phenomena.

Tsien was furious. "What kind of nonsense is this, Professor *Van den Brook*?" You are only giving me dubious explanations involving fancy subatomic particles whose existence has not even been ascertained... If your team and you cannot do any better, I might very well consider assigning you to the Submerged Countries or the New Islands where there are many concrete problems to solve. Life is very interesting there, I'm told. Not much time for leisure, no contact with the rest of civilisation, top secret place, meant to preserve our privacy when we're holding emergency sessions there, away from the public eye.

— Hem! may be, Mister President, indeed, but I must remind you that the existence of gravity waves has already been established and where there is a wave, a particle and the matching antiparticle may be expected. Many such predictions were made in Einstein's relativity theories and those of his successors. Moreover, I must stress again the apparent unnatural aspect of these auroras. In other words, there is a possibility that they are artificially caused by a technology beyond ours.

Let us also bear in mind that our space defense fleet originally voted by former President *Trump* of the *United States of America* is a rather primitive technology borrowed from our uh *guests*. It enables us to side-step into another dimension, but we can still only use it at relatively low speeds within the confines of the Sun's gravity pull because of the narrow window of time offered to us, astronomically. True artificial gravity and antigravity are also needed if we have to deal with anything from other star systems, not to mention high-energy devices to power weapons and space drives. That's why the CERN has been working for so long at generating artificial black holes which could, theoretically, supply us with unlimited power.

"Okay professor let's forget this for now, but I insist for clearer answers and appropriate action plans. We don't want our good citizenry to get too edgy. I must now leave you to your work. Yet another virtual session of the Earth Council... These talks never end."

"Certainly, Sir. Good evening!" [*Tsien* rises from his chair and slowly exits the lab].

There goes one that will never be a good decision maker, thought the professor, shaking his head after *Tsien* had left...

An upsurge of magnetic phenomena associated with the appearance of tiny evanescent black shapes showing up here and there and everywhere on all continents caused *Tsien's* not too subtle threats to Professor *Van den Brook* and his colleagues to be swiftly forgotten. Strangely, these appearances were difficult to characterize or observe. Witnesses said that they seemed to rapidly move to another location as soon as one could focus on them and many people had the feeling of being observed when they caught these ghostly bugs from the corner of the eye. However, no one was stung or even touched by them, so that they were swiftly labelled as optical illusions caused by prolonged exposure to light sources having a too intense blue component.

However, in his report to *Tsien*, Professor *Van den Brook* stated that some of his colleagues rather feared that they might be a kind of surveillance or spying device shifting in and out of our dimension, hence the magnetic disturbance.

— "Is this notion somehow connected to the theory you alluded to earlier about those auroræ borealis?" said *Tsien*.

— "It would appear to be a coincidence, at any rate, replied the professor, but I would need more evidence before I can say so."

— "Oh really? You, scientific types, seem a bit too hesitant to affirm anything, as far as I am concerned. May be an incentive would help you, (...) but what the devil is that?"

Tsien's attention had been drawn by a feeling of motion at the ceiling of the room, which was located at the 5th underground level of the administrative complex housing the labs. Professor *Van den Brook*, surprised, had a quick look over his own shoulder and caught sight of a black blob seemingly sprouting from nowhere which quickly turned into a swarm of little dots that zoomed in front of them, coalescing again into the tridimensional picture of a colourfully-uniformed android.

Tsien paled, then mastering himself again he broke out with his usual angry tone of voice: "Who are you and how did you get past our security systems?" Leaning on his desk, as if he were weak, he stroked surreptitiously a hidden switch activating the silent alarm and security cameras.

The professor, keeping his cool, simply said: "It is only a hologram; however, I would be curious to learn how it is controlled..."

Both men remained silent for an instant, after which the hologram, looking at them, said in a slightly jeering tone:

"This is recorded? Fine! (...) Of course, I am a hologram. We've been observing you for quite a long time and know what to expect. I am the Bailiff of the Watchers and my task is to formally notify you of the following:"

"[Ahem!] After a thorough examination of your case, the Council of the Watchers has determined that you are bad tenants of this planet and has decided to serve you with a Notice of Eviction. You have one hundred (100) of your years, as of now, to move your population elsewhere, after which enforcement actions will be taken."

"Judging by my own observations, I deem very unlikely that my superiors will have to expel you at all, since you seem quite advanced in the process of self destruction, but this is a shame for the other species that live here and also for the wonderful ecosystem that had been entrusted to you upon seeding..."

End of transmission!" [The hologram disappears in a twinkling]

Taken aback, the two protagonists are left speechless for a moment but then, freezing Professor *Van den Brook* with an icy look, *Tsien* suddenly bursts forth:

"This can only be an elaborate bad joke! What kind of fools do they think we are? Professor, this incident never happened! I will personally ensure right now that all recordings of this event are destroyed. I advise you strongly not to mention it to anyone whatsoever. I am putting you in charge to detect and quench any rumor..."

[The President turns swiftly towards the exit and hurriedly leaves the premises, his face showing suddenly a preoccupied mien]

After his departure, Professor *Van den Brook* grumbles: "It was to be expected..." then leaves the lab in turn, slamming the door behind himself.