

Ivan Efremov's The Bull's Hour: A Translation of Selected Parts

Translated by: Ryan Earthy, Yulia Ekelchik, Monika Fedyczkowska, Beth Hawes, Grigory Kruglov,
Aly Marren, Morgan Pulsifer, Julie Ruch, Sarah Shoquist & Diana Smardon

Introduction by: Yulia Ekelchik, Beth Haews, Aly Marren & Julie Ruch

Edited by: Same Chapman-Schmidt & Aly Marren



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Introduction

Summary

The section translated from Chapter III of Efremov's *The Bull's Hour* begins with a group of space travellers on a spaceship called the *Dark Flame*, hovering above the planet known as Tormance, or Yan-Yakh. The crew members are watching video programming that is being transmitted from the planet, describing the people of Tormance and their history. In general, the crew is appalled by what they witness; not only because of what they see of the planet's past but also because of how the Tormancians live now. The crew members learn that certain citizens of Tormance are only given 25 years of life. At this point in time, they must sacrifice their lives in a cult-like ritual that takes place at what is known as the *Temple of Gentle Death*. However, the citizens of the planet Tormance are divided into two groups: the Kzhi and the Dzhi. The group that an individual is assigned to is based on their profession, and this determines the allowed length of their lifespan. Certain jobs, such as politicians or models, are viewed as more important than lowly worker occupations, and so the people in these more valuable positions are rewarded with longer lives. To the crew members, this was a waste of life. The crew members also watched films about the planet's past and the subsequent conquests over its territories. Years before, the planet was wild and free, unsettled with large expanses of uninhabited land where animals roamed. Now, however, the crew members note that almost the whole planet was either cultivated, urbanized, or inhospitable, where nothing could grow or live.

Native Tormancians were also very different from the crew members. They appeared not to show much respect for each other and were fascinated by catastrophic events, taking pleasure in the misfortunes of others. They did not care for science or human advancement, but rather, they focused their attention and energy on sporting events or artists called "stars." While members of

the *Dark Flame* crew are watching this programming, the Tormancian government detects the spaceship and an alert is sent out. The crew decides to interrupt the planet-wide transmission with one of its own, requesting that they be allowed to land on the planet in hopes of establishing contact with this strange world; contact would give the Earthlings a possibility of introducing the Tormancians to the Earthling's way of life, to them a better life. At the end of this part, the crew members are awaiting a reply from Tormance.

In the next section from Chapter V, Fai Rodis, a crewmember of *Dark Flame*, meets with an engineer named Tael on Tormance, and ends up discussing the class structure, lack of resources and fabrication of history that occurs on his planet. She sees the "Center of Wisdom" below the palace gardens, and is unimpressed by the poverty and misbehaviour of the town folk and palace servants. She then proceeds to the projector room, to show the high officials of the planet and their families SDF films depicting the beauty and purity of Earth. The Tormancians do not believe that it is real, and the films also cause Choyo Chagas, the ruler of the planet, to become very angry. He leads Fai Rodis to his chamber, where he talks about his values and she largely disapproves of his thoughts and feelings. After he accidentally lets it slip that they have common ancestors, that they are in fact both decedents from ancient Erath, Chagas takes Rodis down to a secret chamber which holds all the true ancient information: information about Earth's past unknown to the inhabitants of Earth now. At the end of this part, Rodis attempts to seduce Chagas to prove to him that he is swinish in his ways of lust, a reflection on the level of superiority Earth has reached.

In the final section translated from Chapter VI, Fai Rodis and Choyo Chagas begin watching the old films from Earth, which were organized into the big historical events of the past. Unlike the ancient histories known to Fai Rodis, these reconstructions transformed the tales of valiant heroes defending good causes in glorified battles into tales of murder and destruction by terrible measures.

The film seems to outline every single instance of brutality in human history, which comes close to overloading Rodis's senses.

The two finish watching the films, Choyo Chagas falling asleep due to boredom. Rodis, however, is fascinated and disgusted by the films; Earth does not have such complete records of past events, most of the films having been destroyed. Chagas, enthralled by this beautiful, foreign woman, suggests that Rodis stays in the vault and watches more. Rodis is very excited at this idea, even though she will have no food and a limited supply of water for days. Chagas leaves and Rodis starts to watch more of the films. The first film she watches, "Man against Nature," focused on showing the destruction man has on the Earth. The second film, "Nature against Man," tells of how nature attacked man and caused humanity to descend into immense suffering, terror and grief. She watched footage of hospitals and people, and the diseases and mental problems ancient humans faced. The film showed massive cities laid to waste, and vast seas of water polluted from mankind's overuse of chemicals and misunderstanding of nature. People became sicker and more cruel as time passed and the discord between man and nature increased. New diseases attacked humanity from the outside, and mental disorders and cancer attacked humanity from the inside. It was probably situations like this that prompted the people to leave Earth and forbid their children from ever returning. They were lucky enough to find an uninhabited, life-supporting planet, Tormance, and settled there, abandoning the Earth to its fate.

Fai Rodis begins to reflect on what she has watched, fascinated by how much suffering the people who stayed on Earth had gone through to fight its way out of the Inferno, and how strong the human spirit is to not give up under such circumstances. Choyo Chagas returns, interrupting her thoughts, and suggests they rest in the Green Room together, at which point Rodis refuses admitting she must return to her crew. Making more advances, Chagas seems reluctant to let Rodis

go when suddenly the engineer Tael enters announcing that the Earthlings are looking for Fai Rodis. She quickly leaves but runs into Choyo Chagas' wife, Yantra Yakhah, who accuses Rodis of being too sexual explicit in her attire and manners, in particular towards her husband. Fai Rodis explains that that was not her intention and she is only behaving as she would behave on her own planet. She dismisses Yantra Yakhah accusations as trivial which angers Yakhah greatly. Yakhah then storms away.

Interpretation

From the translated parts selected from *The Bull's Hour*, it is not difficult to see the similarities between Tormance and Earth today. In Chapter III, the crew members make the violent settlement of Tormance by means of war seem perverse, just as Earth itself was settled, with people of Earth fighting people of Earth, just as Tormancians fought each other. Another similarity between Earth and Tormance was their tendency towards the destruction of nature. Nowadays, Earth has become urbanized and there exists few places in the World untouched by mankind. Films documenting the past of Tormance also tell of an unspoiled planet of the past, now taken over by big cities. Earth's obsession with catastrophe is also similar to Tormance. Devastation on our world is continually broadcasted on the news as the general population obsesses over it, making it the topic of conversation for days. This is similar to Tormance, where people would gather around transmissions to watch broadcasts of calamity and destruction. Tormance and Earth today also focus a lot of their energy into what contemporary society understands as "popular culture," such as sports and films. Millions regard people of these professions as semi-gods, similar to how Tormancians treat their athletes and movie stars. Although the similarities of Tormance and the Earth of today are unmistakable, it is not hard to believe that Earth could be much different in

1968 at the time Efremov wrote his novel. He may have used this parallelism to allow people to see how they were living, to see how Earth might appear from an outsider's perspective. Efremov may have wanted people to understand the pitfalls of society and the need for social change. To Efremov it seemed that the Communist ideals embodied in the crew members of the spaceship was representative of the future, and that the rest of the world, under Capitalist rule, as represented by Tormance, needed to undergo change.

In Chapter VI, it is revealed that Tormance inhabitants are descendents of Earth and a greater understanding of Earth's past is given. Once again, the parallelism between Earth now, or even Earth during Efremov's time, and the old Earth presented to Fai Rodis in Tormance's archives is uncanny. The film "Nature against Man," where the film accuses Nature of Man's downfall, presents an Earth similar to the Earth of today: overuse of chemicals, cancer, pollution, and a general suffering of humanity, a downward spiral of despair and destruction. Through Efremov's book, he presents two paths that can be taken at humanity's greatest hour: the Tormance way or the Earth way. The people who left Earth and settled on Tormance demonstrate the path of fear, cowardice, and simply a repetition of the past. The people who stayed on Earth and grew from the metaphorical ashes of their destroyed cities and lives demonstrate the path of courage and perseverance towards a better life. Again, Efremov wishes to show that the Earthlings way of life is the more ideal and soul enriching course of humanity rather than the very Capitalist Tormancian way.

Efremov idealizes communism through the crewmembers of *Dark Flame* and shows the downfall of a capitalist rule, but also appears to show the ugly side of socialism by incorporating these issues into Tormance's history and society. It appears as if he admits that there are some ideals in Soviet society that are not part of his own thoughts of a perfect, true communist humanity.

There are a number of ways in which the circumstances on the planet Tormance relate to the reality of living in Soviet times. The broken promises of the communist regime, like promising to make things much better than the past, but ultimately reproducing it, similar to the promise on Tormance of a better life to come. There is also the clearly hierarchical structure, similar to Soviet society, in the book. It claims to be communal but still requires a strict ruler as well as higher-ranking party officials being granted special privileges that ordinary people were not. During Soviet times, the few were sacrificed for the many, Soviet leaders were willing to risk people in order to pursue the communist ideal. This is similar to the Kzhi and Dzhi laid out by Efremov on Tormance, where the sacrifice of people in their youth was an honour and helped all of society. Censorship and tampering with history was extremely common under Soviet rule, as it also appears to be on Tormance. The history of the planet is even kept a secret, only high officials knowing the real truth, ruling according to their own interpretations and feelings towards the past.

What is also interesting is the attitude of the crew members aboard the *Dark Flame* towards the people of Tormance, particularly in Chapter III. From their background of a “perfect” society, it is understandable that the crew members would view the planet as less than desirable. However, the way they converse about the Tormancian’s past and their beliefs demonstrates the crew’s lack of understanding and acceptance. At times it seems as if they are mocking them in very judgmental manner. Questioning the Tormancian’s custom of early death, they ridicule their complex naming system and continually underestimate their technological advancements, making snide remarks whenever the Tormancian’s show any sign of intelligence. In this section, the crew members do not possess an understanding nature and view themselves as superior, ironically as is learned later in the book, the Earthlings and the Tormancians are descendents of the same people. In any

situation, a person cannot help another when they feel superior to them; this can cause the other party to feel inferior and thus, defensive; equality allows for understanding on both sides.

Conclusion

While translating Efremov's work, some difficulties arose. In Russian, Efremov seems to use a choppy and disjointed literary style. The main concern was how to preserve this style of writing while still putting it into comprehensible English. At times during the translation, decisions had to be made whether to forego minute meanings to accomplish a similar style, or rearrange sections to conserve meaning and themes rather than structure.

Ultimately, the translation of *The Bull's Hour* has been a highly enjoyable and academically stimulating experience. With all the parallels drawn between Tormancian and Soviet society, the novel is truly a testament to Soviet science fiction, and science fiction in general. Efremov is able to create his perfect Communist humanity through the characters aboard the ship *Dark Flame*, contrasting it with the society on Tormance, a combination of Capitalism, Soviet Socialism, and Chinese Communism. By putting this comparison in the exotic setting of the planet Tormance, deep in outer space, Efremov was able to satirically comment on the state of things in his own country and on the state of present Earth. The book is a testament to the capabilities of the human spirit and the possibility of a world in perfect harmony with each other and with nature. However, it is also a warning, that from the same background, despair and destruction can grow instead; one must choose their path wisely, even if the right choice may seem like the more difficult path.

The Bull's Hour

From Chapter III: Above Tormance



“... So far I don't like the way the planet Yan-Yakh is presented in its television programs.”

As if justifying the word of Chedi, from the deepness of the video screen began a musical melody that was occasionally interrupted by a blowing and howling dissonance. In front of the crew members appeared a square on a hill that was covered in what appeared to be brown glass. A glass path led in a direction across the square to some stairs made of the same material. A ledge, adorned with tall vases and massive pillars made of a pale grey stone, led along the few steps that reached the glass building glimmering in the red sunlight. Soft pediment supported low columns with peculiar metallic engravings that were bright yellow in colour. A slight puff of smoke rose from two black chalices in front of the entrance. A crowd of young people were moving along the path, waving their short sticks and banging on what appeared to be snare drums. Over their shoulders, some were carrying red and gold boxes playing the same music that was recognized by the crew as belonging to the green-blue spectrum. Up to this point, the only music the earthlings

had heard from Tormance was of a red-yellow tonality and melody. The camera focused on those walking and picked out two couples, looking back on those moving with expressions of alarm and boldness. All four of them were dressed in identical bright yellow robes, coloured with the curves of black snakes with open jaws. Each man gave his hand to his partner. Continuing their sideways advance towards the stairs, they suddenly started to sing, almost in a loud keen. The catchy tune was picked up by all that were present. Chedi Daan, Fai Rodis and Tivisa Kenako, who had mastered the Tormancian language best, turned on a special recording filter and began listening attentively to the rapid, slurred speech of the Tormancians.

“They’re celebrating early death, calling it the primary responsibility for a person in society,” cried Tivisa Kenako. Fai Rodis was silent, leaning towards the screen as she always did when greatly moved by what she saw. Chedi Daan put her hands to her face, quickly repeating the translated tune, the melody of which was first liked by the crew members:

“The highest wisdom is to go to death full of strength and health, escaping the sorrows of old age and the inevitable suffering of continued existence...Like leaving into a warm night after a gathering of friends...Like leaving into a fresh morning after an evening with a loved one, quietly closing the door to the blooming garden of life. Mighty men – support and protection – leave shutting the gate. The final blow spreads in the dark dungeons of time, equally hiding what is coming and gone.”

Chedi interrupted the translation, and glancing at Fai Rodis with surprise, added, “They’re singing that the duty of death comes on the 101st year of their life. Or after 25 years based on their second calendar of the white star, which does not differ from our own. These four are being escorted to the Temple of Gentle Death!”

“How could there exist such a society?” indignantly exclaimed Olla Dez, “The higher the social structure and scientific advancement, the later a person matures.”

“Because we biologists, from the beginning of ancient times, above all, set the goal of prolonging life, or rather, youth,” said Nei Holly, her gaze never veering away from the procession on Tormance.

“Our people, because of the complexity of life’s high volumes of information, are considered children until we perform our herculean act. Twenty years of adolescence passes by and maturity only comes after 40 years. Then we have 70 years, or even a century, of maturity, full of energy and mighty work towards a life of knowledge. As opposed to 10 to 20 years in antiquity. Before, a person was considered old at 40. I would be an old woman!” said Fai Rodis.

“And person died, without knowing anything of the diversity and beauty of the world!” replied Vir Norin, “But in the ancient times, when 90% of people were illiterate, this was not surprising. Long life was burdensome and simply not needed. Those who died in their youth were called God’s Favourites. But on Tormance, there is a fairly technologically progressive civilization. How can they chop down trees that are not given time to bear fruit? It’s madness and death!”

“Vir, you forget that we are not looking at a Communist, or even a Socialist society, but rather a caste system. In my opinion, this monstrous custom of early death has a direct relationship with the overpopulation and depletion of the planet’s resources” Rodis objected.

“I’m thinking,” said Chedi, “early death is not for everyone!”

“Yes, whoever has technological progress needs to live longer, not to mention the ruling elite. Those who die early can’t give the public anything but their lives and simple physical labour, and they are not capable of a higher education. In any case, on Tormance there are two castes:

educated and non-educated, over which there are rulers. Somewhere in between there are people of arts: entertaining, decorating and justifying the structure of this system.”

“They also don’t die at 25 years!” cried Olla Dez.

“Naturally, but perhaps, for artists, where youth and beauty are required, the life limit is only longer by a little bit,” replied Fai Rodis.

The TVF of the spaceship blasted sharply with wildly rhythmic music, a sort of successive marching tune consistent with the rhythm of the marching people. The squealing sound of unknown instruments interrupted the barely perceptible thread of jumpy and fussy tunes. A film began.

On the expanses of a tall steppe, carts were being clumsily drawn by horned quadrupeds that looked like terrestrial ruminants, not quite antelope, not quite bull. Riding on long legged, deer-like animals were tanned, almost black, individuals swinging axes or some type of mechanism similar to ancient firearms from Earth. The riders fearlessly fought off swarms of creeping, short-legged predators; a group of terrible serpents with high squished heads on their sides. Sometimes the carts were attacked by the same riders, firing at full gallop. In the shootout sometimes the cart riders, the attackers, or everyone together died. The crew members quickly realized that they were watching a film about the Tormancian settlement on the planet. It remains unclear who were the attacking bandits. They were not natives of the planet, because they were no different from the settlers.

The crew of the Dark Flame had viewed many films, plays, and paintings on the topic of the past conquest of the new planet. Fierce fighting, racing, and murders were shown in cycle, followed by a surprisingly shallow and primitive display of spiritual life. Everywhere there were jubilant young men, endowed with qualities particularly valuable in this imaginary world of entertaining

illusion. They had pugnacity, strength, quick response, and the ability to shoot from primitive weapons in the form of a tube, from which the force of the expansion of gases ejected a heavy piece of metal. Related topics were repeated in different variations but quickly tired the earthlings. Yet they continued to watch because the films contained original documentary footage of the ancient Tormancian times, although they were interspersed with the silliest kinds of stories. In those old segments there existed a glimpse of a virgin and rich planet life still untouched by human intervention. It was the same as prehistoric Earth, but with less powerful animal and plant life. It was a similar pattern to what was formerly known in Earth's history as the settlement of America by the white race. There were pioneers on the periphery, free spirited, unrestrained and non-law abiding, as well as guardians of faith and public order in populated areas. The capital city of the planet was by no accident called the City of Concentration of Wisdom. The name originated in the pioneering days of the exploration and development of Tormance.



Initially the Tormance steppes dominated over the forest. The nature of the planet did not allow for giant animals like Earth's elephants, rhinoceros or giraffes. The largest of the land animals, which are now all but extinct, were horned creatures, similar in size to an average Earth bull. Colossal herds of bull and antelope-like creatures used to flood the vast steppes. Shallow seas

warmed by the red sun teemed with fish, remarkably similar to those of Earth, which swam in the seaweed thicket.

Enormous trees, inconceivable to Earth's dimensions, grew on the raised areas of equatorial coastline, thus confirming the absence of strong winds on the planet. Extensive swamps existed closer to the poles, covered with thickets of homogeneous trees. They looked like Earth's taksodi trees, only with brownish, small and narrow, flattened leaves.

Films shot in the past served as evidence that all of this was once on Tormance. Now, however, the crew observed that everywhere there were either cultivated fields or endless areas of low shrubs heated by the sun and deprived of any other vegetation. Even the weak winds of Tormance were able to lift and swirl the thick dust above the bushes. The dry steppes looked more pleasant, but even there the grass appeared low and sparse, reminiscent of the semi-deserts once widespread in the trade wind rings around Earth. Perhaps the movies about the planet's past satisfied the Tormancian's natural longing for their home planet's nature. An overwhelming majority of the population lived in big cities, where reckless horse riding and shooting in the steppes or hunting expeditions in the dense woods under the bright stars and clear sky were impossible to experience, forever in the past.

It was difficult to comprehend spectacles of another kind, in which beautiful women performed a strip tease, holding repulsive poses while being embraced by men. At the same time, the earthlings never saw complete nudity during these shows, something that was very common on their own planet. Something was always hidden, disguised, alluding to certain forbidden qualities in order to arouse the weak imagination or give excitement to gender relationships. This specific eroticism was combined with compulsory clothing that was unusual to earthlings. Nobody

dared to appear in public places or to be at home in the presence of other people without being fully clothed.

Most of the time women wore loose fitting short shirts with wide, long sleeves and low standing collars, accompanied with a soft, usually black belt at mid-waist, with wide pants or sometimes a long ankle-length skirt. The man's outfit was almost the same except for they had shorter shirts. Only the youth appeared in what looked like shorts that were so common on Earth. In community gatherings or celebrations, people wore clothes from colourful and patterned material and short cloaks with magnificent embroidery. The clothes seemed to the earthlings to be comfortable and simple to make, as well as appropriate for the warm climate of the planet and various work environments. Beautiful combinations of red and yellow shades seemed to be most liked by women, which went very well with the tanned tone of their skin and black hair. The men preferred grey-purple and purple colours with contrasting trim on the collar and sleeves. On the left side of their chests, over the heart, some Tormancians wore an elongated, horizontal rhombus with some kind of symbols inside. Chedi noted that those who had a shining eye symbol inside of the rhombus were shown special respect. But in general, respect for each other seemed to be lacking.

The crew was amazed by the chaotic crowds in the street that pushed, shoved and wouldn't help a stumbled person. Moreover, a small accident like falling in the street evoked laughter from bystanders. As soon as somebody would break a fragile object or drop what they were carrying, people around them would start to smile, rejoicing in their misfortune. Sometimes the telecaster showed some kind of great catastrophes involving carts or planes, and crowds would immediately gather. People surrounded the victims and silently stood watching with greedy curiosity, as men dressed in yellow, evidently the doctor and rescuers, helped the wounded. The crowd grew as new

spectators ran from all directions with the same bestial curiosity on their faces. What surprised the earthlings most was that people were not running to help but simply to watch.

When the transmission went out directly to the stadium, factory, communication station, streets of the city and even to the dwellings, a monotonous, dull roar invariably accompanied the announcer's speech or the music, at first accepted by the crew for an imperfect transmission. However, it turned out that on Tormance, they did not care about the elimination of noise. Carts roared and chattered their engines and the sky shook from the noise of airplanes. Tormancians talked, whistled and loudly cried, not shy at all of the people around them. Thousands of small radios poured in a general roar of disorderly music, a blend of songs or simply loud and unpleasantly modulated speech. How could the inhabitants stand the repulsive unceasing noise, which only weakened deep into the night? This remained a mystery for the doctor and the biologist of Dark Flame.

Gradually understanding the lives of the Tormancians, the earthlings found strange peculiarities in the transmission of the planet-wide news. Their programs differed so much in content from the general programs of Earth that they deserved special attention by the crew. Insignificant attention was given to science achievements, art, historical findings, and discoveries, on Tormance, which occupied the prime time of Earth transmissions, never mind the completely ignored news of the Great Circle. There were no planet-wide discussions of any change in social structure, large building projects, or organization of large-scale research. Unlike on Earth, nobody put forth any questions to the Council or the greatest minds of society.

Very little attention was given to showing or discussing theatre productions, which attempted to grasp arising, drifts and changes in social consciousness and personal values. Films about the bloody past, conquest (or rather, extermination) of nature and mass sporting events

occupied most of the airtime. The crew members thought it was strange how sports competitions could gather such huge numbers of observers not participating in the competition, for some reason becoming incredibly excited while observing the athletes compete. Only afterwards earthlings understood the root of why they did this. In sporting competitions, the people who took part were carefully selected, devoting all of their time to mindless training in their own sports specialty. All others did not have a place in the competition. The physically weak and spineless Tormancians, like the little children, adored their outstanding athletes. This looked ridiculous and even disgusting. Artists held similar positions. From the millions of people, a few were chosen. They were provided with better living conditions and the right to participate in any productions, movies or concerts. Their names served as bait for a lot of viewers, who competed for a spot in the theatre to see these artists, called "stars." Similarly to athletes, the crowds naively revered them. The position reached by "stars" took away his or her ability to do anything else. On Earth, anybody who achieved, on their own, a high level of skill in arts could be an artist. That was not the case on Tormance. This kind of narrow professionalism on Tormance impoverished the people and narrowed their mental outlook. It is possible that it only seemed this way to the crew members as a result of the selection of events and information of material that they were viewing. Only direct contact with the people of the planet could solve this problem.

On TV and radio, a lot of attention was paid to a small group of people; what they said, where they went, their meetings and decisions. The name of Choyo Chagas was mentioned most often, whose opinions on various aspects of public life, mostly economics, caused excessive admiration and were upheld as the highest level of governmental wisdom. Perhaps the crew members, being far away from Choyo Chagas who understood the problems in all of their breadth and deepness, whose statements were in some way very important to the inhabitants of Tormance,

didn't understand his astute genius? How could aliens, floating at the height of six thousands kilometres, make any judgements about it? Fai Rodis and Grif Rift reminded their comrades, who were harsh and hot-tempered in their judgements, of this fact.

Oddly enough, despite the constant flow of messages announcing speeches and trips of Choyo Chagas along with three of his closest associates, who together comprised the Counsel of Four, which was the high command of the planet Yan-Yakh, none of the crew members had a chance to personally see them. Most often mentioned, these people were present everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Only once during a transmission from the city of Concentration of Wisdom, the crowd, which filled the streets and city squares, greeted, with an excited roar, five slowly moving cars, which crawled through the masses, not unlike the armoured vehicles of the Old Earth. Nothing could be seen through the darkly tinted windows. Tormancians, however, were yelling and waving their arms in an expression of the mass psychosis that overcame them.

The crew now understood that these four, with Choyo Chagas in the lead, are the true rulers that reined over everything and everyone. As it is common among ancient civilizations, Tormancians mostly bore similarly sounding names, which forced them to have three names each. Some bore double names. It appeared that the highest social casts of the planet were comprised of the people who bore double names. Tormancian names were somewhat similar to the names of people from Earth, but had a complicated syllabic dissonance. Choyo Chagas, Gentlo Shi, Kando Leelut and Zentrino Umroy - these were the names of the four rulers. The abbreviation of names of everyone was allowed, except for Choyo Chagas, whose name sounded like a magical spell of the ancients when followed by the annoying, monotonous, and always in the same order, Gen Shi, Ka Loof and Zet Ug. Jokingly, Olla Dez announced that all the earth men with their system of double and infinitely varying names must also belong to the Tormance' highest cast.

“Would you want to? Wouldn’t you be embarrassed?” asked Chedi Daan. “This would give me an opportunity to meet the true masters of life and death of all the people. Even in the second cycle school I enjoyed historical fantasies. I was most captivated by books about powerful kings, conquerors, about titans and pirates. Regardless of the country of origin, all of Earth’s books are filled with these.”

“That’s frivolous, Olla!” said Chedi, “Humanity’s most horrible sufferings were caused by these people, who are almost always cruel and uneducated. One is closely related to another. In a badly organized society one must either develop a strong and robust psyche, which is used in self defense, or rely on external support, like God, which happens much more frequently. If there is no God, then belief in superhuman, all-powerful kings or leaders arises, which must be worshiped like pagan Gods. Those who played roles of these leaders, mostly ignorant politicians, could only give humanity fascism and nothing more.”

“But some of these were men of wisdom, heroes,” Olla Dez was not fazed, “I would want to meet these people.” She put her hands behind her head and leaned back onto the couch, squinting her eyes in a dream-like fashion. Fai Rodis intently looked at the communications engineer.

“Chedi is correct on one thing,” she said, “In the actions of these people, besides conditionality, there was also a lack of understanding of the consequences of their actions. This caused irresponsibility, which led to tragic results. I understand what Olla Dez is saying.”

“What!?” exclaimed Chedi, Vir and Tivisa all at once.

“Any person on Earth is so careful in their actions that they are inferior to the ancient leaders. These people show no sign of power, even though they act like a gigantic elephant carefully walking before a deer that is running scared.”

“A scared leader?” laughingly responded Olla, “You’re contradicting yourself.”

“The two form dialectic singularity,” concluded Fai Rodis.

Discussions of this nature repeated themselves multiple times, but suddenly an end came to the calm study of the planet. Gan Atal, who was on night duty monitoring radio transmissions, alarmed Rodis, Grif and Chedi, and woke them up. All four gathered near the dark screen, which was showing a singular, bright oscillating indicator line. The translation machine was turned off, as the crewmembers understood the words pronounced in the overtone:

“A message from the main observatory of Hvost was confirmed by tracking stations. There is an unrecognized flying object revolving around our planet, likely a space ship. It has a circular orbit, angle to the equatorial plane - 45, elevation - 200, speed..”

“So they can calculate orbits,” growled Grif Rift.

“According to our preliminary data, the size of this cosmic body is significantly smaller than those of the space ships that visited us in the Century of Wise Rejection. Second report of the tracking stations will follow at eight o’clock in the morning.”

“And, we’re detected,” remarked Grif Rift to Fai Rodis, with a shade of sadness, “What are we going to do?” Rodis didn’t have time to respond as the large screen flared up, showing a familiar anchorman.

“Urgent message! Everyone must listen! Listen, City of Concentration of Wisdom!” the Tormancian spoke abruptly, sharply, almost barking in the middle of his phrases. He spoke about the space ship and concluded:

“At nine o’clock in the morning an announcement will be made by Choyo Chagas’ friend, Zet Ug himself. Everyone must listen, City of Concentration of Wisdom!”

“What should we do?” repeated Grif Rift, lowering the sound of the second announcement.

“We need to talk to Tormance! After Zet Ug’s announcement we’ll interrupt the transmission, and I will appear on all the screens with an appeal to land. Olla Dez had prepared for such occasion.” Fai Rodis’ cheeks flushed red, revealing slight nervousness.

By nine o’clock, the whole crew gathered around the communication screens. This was the moment of crucial importance. For this exact moment they were sent here by Earth, having gone through an unbelievable journey. Everything now depends on how the relationship pans out between the unfortunately uninvited guests and the Tormancians, or more specifically, their rulers; for the decision of this small group of people, and probably just Choyo Chagas, will decide the “will of the people” of Tormance, and the fate of the earthlings’ expedition.

The clock above the stereo screen was set to the time of Tormance’s main city. After retiring to her cabin, Fai Rodis appeared approximately quarter of an hour prior to Zet Ug’s announcement. It seemed like she prepared in advance a dress of the favourite Tormancian colour, red with a shade of golden-orange. The dress was made out of fluffy material, which gave its colour a deeper tone. Darkened by this dress, familiar features of Fai Rodis now seemed tougher and piercing, almost menacing. Her fluid movements now resembled glares of the red Tormancian sun. She cut her hair even shorter, fully exposing her proud neck. Thoroughly combed, with curls of dark hair on her cheeks and without any jewelry, Fai Rodis sat down in the chair in front of the screen. She didn’t say a word to any of her crew mates. The muffled, familiar hum of the OES instruments didn’t disturb the alert silence of the ship.

A hollow metallic gong, as if produced by a large battle shield, signified the beginning of the announcement by one of the rulers of the planet. The screen remained empty for some time, after which a person of small height appeared, dressed in a red gown embroidered with peculiar golden snakes. His skin seemed brighter than most of the people of Tormance. Unhealthy puffiness

softened sharp wrinkles around his wide, thin-lipped mouth. Small, clever eyes sparkled with determination, but at the same time, moved restlessly, as if the Tormancian was afraid to lose sight of something.

Olla Dez suppressed her confusion and disappointment, eyeing Fai Rodis, who remained dispassionate, as if the sight of this person was not a surprise to her. Zetrino Umrog ran his hand over his tall forehead, furrowed with wide wrinkles.

“People of Yan-Yakh! The great Choyo Chagas instructed me to warn you of danger. An alien from the darkness and coldness of space appeared in our sky. A controlled ship belonging to the enemy forces. We are announcing a state of emergency for the whole planet in order to repel the enemy. Let’s follow the example set by our ancestors, their wisdom during the rule of Ino Kau and courage of the people who drove away unwanted aliens during the Century of Wise Rejection. Long live Choyo Chagas!”

“Enough, perhaps? The lord expressed himself clearly?” whispered Olla Dez behind the control panel. Fai Rodis nodded, and Olla turned the blue toggle ball to the max, turning the pre-configured TVF device to full power. The image of Zet Ug started to shake, broke into colourful lines and disappeared. For a fraction of a second, Fai Rodis was able to see the expression of fear on the face of the ruler. She stood up and moved into the circle of primary focus. She stared into the diamond of the main light, seeing herself on the screen with her peripheral vision, just like in a mirror.

In front of the shocked Tormancians, instead of the garbled image of Zet Ug, appeared a beautiful, smiling woman with a powerful and gentle voice. “People and rulers of Yan-Yakh! We came from Earth, a planet that raised and fed your ancestors. By chance we were separated, and you were moved into the before unreachable deepness of space. We are now capable of crossing it,

and came to you, our blood relatives, in order to unite our efforts for the better life. We were never anyone's enemies and are full of kind feelings towards you. Nothing divides us, and complete understanding of one another is possible. We are asking for the permission to land on your planet in order to meet you, tell you about life on Earth and share with you everything that we know that is good and useful. Our ship's crew consists of just thirteen people, who are just like you. The crew is just a handful of people compared to the multitudes living on Yan-Yakh. If you accept us as guests on your planet, we will not pose any kind of threat. We studied your language in order to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings."

The screen shook with grey static, becoming flat and empty. From its depth appeared, with interruptions, a howling sound through which a scream, by the now familiar anchorman, could be heard:

"Transmission...Stopping the transmission..."

Fai Rodis and Grif Rift looked at each other and, stepping back, Fai Rodis sat down in her chair. Olla Dez moved her hand towards the blue toggle ball, but Rodis gestured her to stop. Bending towards the transmitter, she spoke in a loud voice, ignoring the howling and whistling interference:

"Space ship 'Tender Flame' is calling Council of Four! Calling Council of Four! We're repeating our request - permission to land! We're asking to bring this to the attention of Choyo Chagas, chairman of the Council of Four. We're listening for a reply on your navigational frequency. We're waiting for an answer!"

Olla Dez turned off the TVF. The green light of the elliptical antenna came on. After a howling and barking noise, there was dead silence in the round hall. Rodis herself broke it:

"I can't consider this beginning a success," she said, visibly concerned.

"I'd say that an attempt to familiarize Tormance with us failed," smiled Grif Rift slightly.

"Those are some rulers!" cried out Chedi, "They're afraid!"

"They're afraid of the same thing of which those raised by capitalism were afraid of. They're afraid of competition. They're filled with jealousy of forced inequality," sadly replied Fai Rodis.

"They're afraid of us taking away their power?" asked Chedi.

"Of course!"

"But that's ridiculous. Why would we want power in an alien world?"

"This is obvious to us, to the whole Earth, to the Great Ring, but probably not a lot of people understand this on Tormance."

"Then why should we even ask for permission to land? Evidently, we're not going to understand one another," said Chedi, shrugging her shoulders.

"For those who are capable of understanding, perhaps we, too, should understand them, even those odd rulers," firmly said Rodis.

"And you're going to insist?"

"I will try!"



From Chapter V. In the Gardens of Tsoam

“I am Hontelo Tolo Frael,” he said clearly, with the three-word name indicating the lowest status.

“I am Fai Rodis.”

“Fai Rodis, I was sent into your command. My name is complicated, especially for guests from other planets. You can call me simply Tael,” the engineer smiled shyly and kindly.

Rodis understood that this is the first genuinely good person that she has met on planet Yan-Yakh. “Do you have any prefixes to your names demonstrating respect, celebrating intellect, skill and heroism, as we do on Earth?”

“No, nothing like that. They simply call everyone Kzhi – short-living one, simple inhabitant. Educated people, technicians, men of the arts, who are not susceptible to premature death, are called Dzhi – the long-living. The rulers are addressed as 'The Great', 'All-Capable', or 'Emperor'.”

Fai Rodis considered what she had heard, as the engineer nervously drew designs on the rug with the sole of his shoe - firm and noisy - unlike the silent footwear of the “snake-wearers.”

“Maybe you would like to go out to the garden?” almost timidly he asked. “There we can...”

“Let's go...Tael,” said Rodis, giving the engineer a smile. He grew pale, turned around and started walking ahead. Through the window-door they descended down into the garden, into the narrow alleys that were designed as if they were on Earth.

Fai Rodis looked around and tried to remember where she had seen something similar. Was it in one of South America's third-cycle schools?

Leafless disc-shaped flowers, bright-yellow on the sides and deep purple in the middle, rocking on their thin and bare stems over the bright-blue grass, did not resemble Earth not the least bit. The yellow cone-shaped trees also looked foreign. The subtle spicy smell of the bright-blue flowers that hung in bunches from bushes around the oval-shaped clearing permeated through the biofilters.

Fai Rodis took a step towards a wide bench, intending to sit down, but the engineer energetically pointed in the other direction, where on a small conical hill there stood a pavilion resembling a crown with blunt teeth.

“These are the flowers of thoughtless rest,” he explained, “It is enough to sit there for a few minutes in order to sink into numbness without fear and concern. The rulers like to sit here, and servants help them leave after a designated time, otherwise one can spend an infinitely long time here!”

The Tormanisan and the visitor from Earth went up into the pavilion with a view onto the Gardens of Tsoam. Far below, beyond the blue walls of the gardens, at the foot of the plateau, an immense city stretched out. Its glass streets shone like the currents of a flowing river. But there wasn't enough water even for the Gardens of Tsoam.

Beneath the ground, in hidden pipes, rushed streams and in some places they poured into modest pools. From the towering gates discordant music, conjoined with the sound of voices, laughter, and cries, could be heard all the way at the gazebo.

“Is there something happening over there?” asked Rodis

“It is nothing. Those are just the guards and the garden-servants.”

“Then why are they so unrestrained? Do the rulers living here not demand silence?”

“I don't know. The city is much noisier. They cannot hear it from the palace, and the comfort of others does not matter to them. The servants of the rulers are afraid of nobody, as long as they are in good standing with their masters.”

“Then they discipline them very poorly!”

“Why bother! And what do you mean by this word?”

“Above all, the ability to restrain yourself, to not disturb others. In this is the only way to make communal life good for all without exception.”

“And you have achieved this on Earth?”

“That, and much more. The highest level of enlightenment and self-discipline is when you first think of others and only then of yourself.”

“It is not possible!”

“It has been achieved thousands of years ago.”

“Does that mean that it was not always so with you?”

“Certainly not. Man has overcome countless obstacles. But the most difficult and important task was overcoming oneself not for just by a few people, but by all the masses. And then it became easy. To understand people and to help them brought a feeling of self-worth for which neither a special talent nor an exceptional intellect are required, therefore this path is followed by

the largest number of people. They could feel themselves becoming more sensitive, skilled and open-minded, which gave them an advantage over even the most intelligent yet narrow-minded intellectuals.”

The engineer did not answer, listening to the distant roar of the radio and human chatter.

“Now, tell me about the ways of information-storage on the planet Yan-Yakh. And help me obtain them.”

“What interests you most of all?”

“The history of the settlement of the planet from the moment your people arrived here and until now. Particularly interesting for me are the periods of maximum population and the subsequent sharp fall of the population of Yan-Yakh. Obviously, please include economic indicators and changes in the dominant ideology.”

“Everything that concerns our existence here is prohibited. In the same way as is all information about the periods of the Great Disaster and Wise Denial.”

“I don't understand.”

“The rulers of Yan-Yakh do not let anyone study the so-called forbidden periods of history.

“Unbelievable! I believe that there must be a misunderstanding. Now, in the meanwhile, familiarize me at least with the history which is permitted, but only with economic indicators and corresponding computed statistical data from the computing machines.”

“Those computing machines are not shown to anybody and have never been shown to anybody before. For each period, they are processed by special people in a secret order. Only approved information is made public.”

“Does this information have any scientific value?”

“Almost none. The rulers tried to present every period the way they wanted it to be seen.”

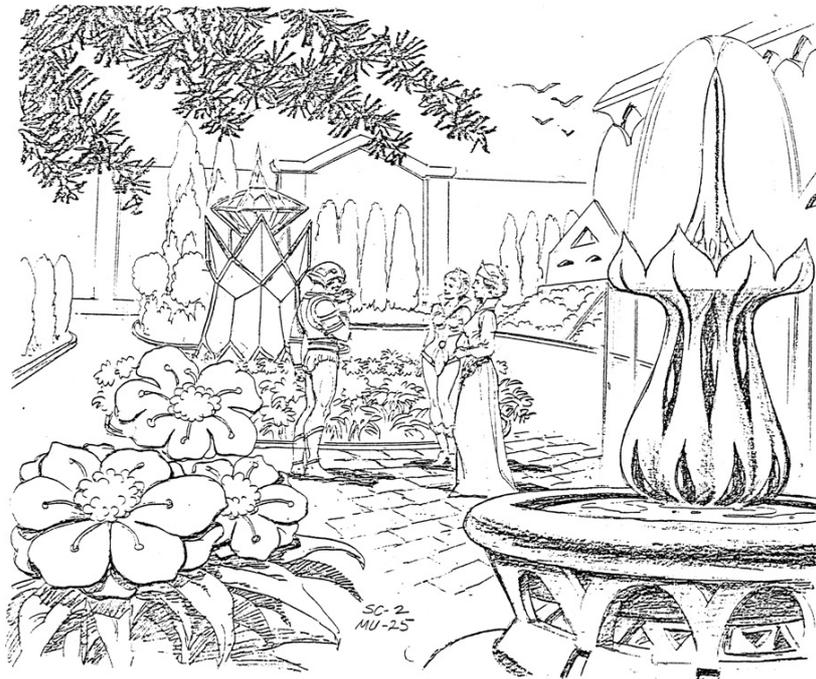
“Is it possible to obtain true facts?”

“Only indirectly, in handwritten memoirs in literary works that have escaped censorship or destruction.”

Fai Rodis stood up. The engineer Tolo Frael also rose, with downcast eyes, humiliated by his slavery as a researcher. Rodis put her hand on his shoulder.

“Here is what we will do, she said softly. First, gather a general outline of the permitted history. Then, try to get all that which was concealed from previous censors and corrections, or rather distortion and direct misinformation. Do not worry, there were similar periods on Earth. And what happened later you will soon see.”

The engineer silently walked her to the palace.



From Chapter VI. The Price of Paradise

Fai Rodis recounted her memories in the chambers of Choyo Chagas. This test shook her confidence in the earlier scheduled plan. It all started with a demonstration of Earth's stereofilms.

Two SDF's established a channel on which Dark Flame began broadcasting vital, vibrant images, known on Earth as the old stereoscopic. For the residents of Yan-Yakh, they seemed miraculous, transmitting the true life of a distant planet. The members of the Council of Four, their wives, several high officials, and Engineer Tael watched with bated breath as scenes of nature and human life on Earth unfolded before them.

To the great surprise of the Tormancians, there was nothing mysterious or unknown in all the areas of life of this great home of humanity. There were giant machines, automatic factories and laboratories in underground or underwater facilities. Here, machines worked tirelessly in unchanging physical conditions, piling supplies into disc-shaped underground storehouses from which scattered transportation lines ran, hidden beneath the surface. Above ground, under a light blue sky, there was a vast open space for human housing. Tormancians were free to live in enormous parks, wide steppes, clean lakes and rivers, unblemished white mountain snow, and ice caps in the center of Antarctica.

After a long economic struggle, the city finally yielded to stellar spiral systems of settlements, between which were scattered centers of research and information, museums, and art houses, connected to one harmonious grid that covered the temperate subtropic areas of the planet most suitable for habitat. In another layout, the school gardens differed by cycle.

They were located along the meridian, providing the growing youth of the communist world with a variety of living conditions. To the residents of Yan-Yakh, the earthlings themselves at first seemed too serious and focused. They were reserved, disliked jokes, and had a full-on aversion to silliness. In the eyes of the talkative, impatient, mentally untrained Tormancians, constant toil and restrained expression of emotion seemed boring, and devoid of genuine human content. Only later did the residents of Yan-Yakh realize that these people were full of carefree joy

generated not by frivolity and ignorance, but by the awareness of their own force and the dedicated care of all humanity. The simplicity and sincerity of earthlings was based on the deepest conscious responsibility for every action, and on the fine harmony of individuality, the effort of thousands of generations, given in accordance with society and nature.

Here there were no seekers of blind happiness, and therefore there were no disillusioned men, those who had lost faith in all humanity. There were no mentally weak individuals who, overcome with a keen sense of their own inadequacy, were poisoned by envy and sadistic anger. The strong, correct faces of the people did not reflect confusion. There was no anxiety about their own fate or their loved ones, or isolation of a man from his comrades. To the Tormancians, it looked like there was not one defeated, bored person to be seen, no one who withdrew from their thoughts and feelings to relax after finishing hard work. But temporary stillness and inner peace were ready to be instantly replaced by the powerful action of mind and body.

The living visions of Earth's beauty awakened a sharp, unprecedented longing for a small handful of earthlings, cut off from their homeland by the inconceivable abyss of space. The Tormancians tried to resist the insurmountable attraction to the world they saw, to convince themselves that, in fact, what they had been shown was staged. However, the gigantic reach of the planetary scale of the spectacle testified to the authenticity of the stereofilm. And, yielding to the evidence, the residents of Yan-Yakh were captive to almost the same wounding sorrow as the inhabitants of the earth, but the cause of their grief was different. The vision of this fantastic life was shown to them on top of the hill, in the fortress of threatening lords, in a convent of fear and mutual hatred. If they were brought to the wide open gates of the garden, nothing would be hidden from their greedy eyes and at the same time, it would all be unavailable. And below them was the

Center of Wisdom, the crowded city packed with millions of men. Its name sounded ironic for a planet so dusty and poor .

“Maybe that's enough for the first time?” asked Fai Rodis, noticing fatigue on the faces of her audience. Choyo Chagas glanced from side to side. His wife Yantra had her hand pressed firmly to her chest. Engineer Tael raised his head and tried to quietly brush away the tears that had rolled down into his thick beard, the same tears Choyo Chagas saw on the face of Zet Ugg. A sudden flash of inexplicable anger caused him to raise his voice:

“Yes, enough! Enough for good!”

Perplexedly glancing at the lord, Fai Rodis turned off the transmission with the spaceship. The SDF's were put out, removed and their emitters were placed under their caps. The audience began to leave and Fai Rodis approached Choyo Chagas who signalled at her to stay. When they were the only two left in the empty chamber, Choyo Chagas took Rodis by the elbow, frowned slightly, and let go of her arm.

Rodis laughed.

“I'm used to your face without the shield up and forgot that to everyone else it is made of metal. Sometimes I think that the earthlings are simply robots with the heads of living people,” joked the ruler, showing his guest into a familiar room with green draperies and a crystal ball.

“Could it be that we really are robots?” asked Rodis, with a slightly flirtatious and feminine smile. Choyo Chagas had to summon all the strength of his will so as not to succumb to his powerful attraction to the earth woman. He turned away, opened a black wardrobe, and took out something resembling an ancient smoking pipe. Settling into a chair opposite Rodis, he lit it.

Through sharply scented smoke, the ruler of the planet observed Fai Rodis, and his narrowed eyes were covered by a veil of oblivion. He was silent for so long that Rodis spoke first:

“What did you mean when you shouted ‘Enough for good’? Did you really not like the Earth?”

“The films are technically great. We have never seen anything like it!”

“So you think it is all a trick of technology? Our planet, I mean.”

“I’m not one to judge fables. How can I separate lies from truth, not knowing anything about your planet other than these pictures?”

Fai Rodis stood up, leaning slightly on the edge of the ornate table, and looked carefully at Choyo Chagas.

“Now you’re lying,” she said evenly, avoiding the rising and falling tones used in Tormancian, “Help me to understand you. You are a man of outstanding intelligence, why do you avoid speaking directly, truthfully expressing your beliefs and goals? What are you afraid of?”

Choyo Chagas slowly rose, cold and proud.

Fai Rodis didn’t tremble as he stood before her, stretching his neck forward and leaning on the table with his fists clenched. Their silent duel lasted until the ruler gave in, wiping his forehead with a thin yellow handkerchief.

“We could destroy you,” he snarled with an evil and inappropriate smile, “but instead I have to report to you!”



“Is this sacrifice really an inconvenience to you?” Rodis said with an undisguised sneer, “Are you afraid that there will be a second spaceship, and both ships will crush your cities, palaces, factories? I know that you and your underlings will quietly accept the death of millions of residents of Yan-Yakh, the destruction of thousands of years of labour, the disappearance of great works of human genius, as long as you stay alive! Is this not so?” Rodis suddenly exclaimed

“Yes,” confessed Choyo Chagas, shuddering, “And is this such a pity? Insignificant little people with shallow feelings? Old trash, outdated art, lying in useless piles in dusty vaults? The imaginative wreckers that are the ‘ji’?”

“But they are people!” cried Rodis

“No, and no again!”

“Well, do you help them become people? I cannot understand you! The most wonderful thing in life is to help people, especially when you have this kind of power, strength and capabilities! Can there be a greater joy than this? Didn't you even consider it? You poor man.”

“No, you are the unhappy one!” cried the leader, “The old saying is true, that for women there is only the present and the future, no past. How can you be a historian if you don't understand that the sea of empty souls has spilled all around the planet drinking, over-gorging and trampling all of its corners!”

Fai Rodis already calmed down.

“Are you aware that the human brain possesses the marvellous capacity to fix the imperfections of the outside world, and not only the visual ones but also those in thought form? They appear because of the imperfection of the laws of nature in an imperfectly organized society. The brain fights with distortion, shifting it to the side of all things beautiful, calm and good. I speak, naturally, of normal people, and not psychopaths with an inferiority complex. Aren't you familiar with the illusion that human faces are all beautiful from a distance, and someone else's life, if seen from the side, appears exciting and important? Consequently, every person has the predisposition to dream of beauty which has formed over thousands of generations. Our subconscious leads us more firmly towards the side of good than we know. How can you speak of humans as if they are the trash of history?”

“I am beginning to like your honesty,” said Choyo Chagas with a sidelong smile, “Do continue!”

“I know that now you don't doubt the harmlessness of our intentions. Many times have your people tried to detect even a little bit of hostility from any of us, even after a trial starship attack which you commanded! Don't you do anything here without the orders from the Counsel of Four?!”

“Yes,” confirmed the lord, giving in to the woman’s strange magnetic power once more.

“If so, then the matter is in the imagined threat which we, allegedly, pose. I understand that you intend to forbid the showing of Earth to the people of Yan-Yakh. But you have to act accordingly to some sort of motives dictated by your view of the world and system of beliefs. We, the earthlings, didn’t notice you having any deep concern for the improvement of your society and people in your primitive propaganda. Preserving the existing structure is advantageous only to a handful of rulers. In Earth’s history, this has destroyed hundreds of countries and millions of men. You have just recently survived the catastrophe of over-population...”

Fai Rodis interrupted her own speech, regarding the distorted features of the lord of Tormance’s face with surprise. Choyo Chagas lost his temper for the first time.

“Enough! I don’t want this! No more about Earth! I hate it! I hate the cursed Earth, the planet of my ancestors’ boundless suffering!”

“Your ancestors?” Fai Rodis exclaimed, as her throat tightened – her suspicions have been confirmed.

“Yes, yes, mine as well as yours! It is a secret which has been guarded for many centuries, and its disclosure is punishable by death!”

“Why?”

“So that dreams of the past, of a different world, wouldn’t appear and debilitate the pillars of our stable way of life. Man should not know about the past or seek power in it. This gives him convictions and ideas which are incompatible with submission to power. History must be destroyed at its’ root, and start at the moment when the tree of humanity put its roots in at Yan-Yakh.”

Choyo Chagas stood for a minute, deeply in thought, then sat down and pointed Rodis towards her chair. He smoked, staring intensely at the crystal ball, as his guest from Earth sat motionless as a statue, in the deepest silence of the lord's chambers. Choyo Chagas glanced at her figure, looking so neutral and detached, and, having decided, stood up. From a secret hiding place he brought out a set of tools reminiscent of ancient keys. With one of them, short and thick, he opened an inconspicuous door made of thick metal, turned something in it, and carefully locked it again.

"Come," he said simply, pushing the green curtain in front of the narrow-as-a-slit door.

Fai Rodis followed him without hesitation. Choyo Chagas walked down the long passage which was barely lit by the dim light of the eternal gas lamps with his head lowered and without turning to look backwards. He turned around only when they reached the door of the elevator, letting Rodis into the cockpit. There was a screeching indicative of a mechanism seldom used, and the cabin started rapidly descending downwards. Fai Rodis had to catch her breath, as she expected it to rise rather than fall. They descended to a considerable depth and went out into the hallway, which was lined on one side with iron rails and supports. Choyo Chagas looked back as he led his companion into the small dark wagon and sat down to the controls. He lit the track searchlight and, with a roar reminiscent of the old machines of the Earth, rushed into the impenetrable darkness. Rodis smiled at the visibly perturbed lord and began to sing softly, giving in to the hypnotizing flashing of the vertical, multicolored glowing signs. She noticed that Choyo Chagas is listening attentively and often looking back at her through the fast-paced glares of the luminous route indicators.

"What's the song?" he asked abruptly, accelerating the already-racing wagon's speed even more.

"To dive swiftly and inexorably into a deep and stagnant pond and to find, to save from the haze of the nethermost ... " Rodis began translating to the Yan-Yakh language.

"Is that really just it?" Choyo Chagas exclaimed.

"What did you expect?"

"Something war-like. It's a very lively and rhythmic melody," said the lord as he braked abruptly in front of a square of purple luminous route indicators.

They stepped into the darkness of the vault. Only the dim lines from the indicators shone on the floor, as if floating in the darkness.

Choyo Chagas carefully took Rodis by the hand. When he approached a square column, he found a small door, opened it and listened in.

"We have to make sure that the switch in my room worked," the lord explained to the silent Rodis, "if not, at the first attempt to open the safe one will be killed on the spot."

With a second key from his bundle he opened a different door, grabbed on to the handle which resembled an arrow in shape and pulled in at himself, putting in visible effort. A silver rod moved forward, and at that moment the doors, which were heavy as gates, opened up with a squeal to reveal a large, brightly-lit room. As soon as they entered, the lord found a button and the doors slammed shut.

Rodis looked around as Choyo Chagas bent over a wide stone table and moved things around on it while flipping switches that reminded her of the levers of old electronic machines, so often seen by Rodis in historical films and museums. The room itself brought to mind a museum. The glass shelves and cabinets ascended high up to the ceiling, and the rows of tightly shut drawers were covered in faded hieroglyphics. The steps of the movable ladders were grey with dust, and in some places bore the footsteps of those who climbed to the uppermost shelves.

Choyo Chagas straightened his back, solemn and pale. To the guest from Earth he resembled an ancient priest, the keeper of sacred knowledge, which he indeed was.

“Do you know where we have come?” the lord asked hoarsely.

“I figured it out. This is where you keep the things that you...your ancestors brought on the starship from Earth,” Fai Rodis was tense with emotion. Oh what it felt like for a historian of the ERM to find herself in the repository of knowledge about perhaps the darkest period of great upheavals of the era before the AWR – the Age of the World Reunion!

Rodis touched the bulky console with reverence. It was evidently taken off an ancient starship - one of the first ships that desperately leapt into the great unknown and discovered the immensely complex depths of the Universe.

Choyo Chagas nodded encouragingly at the troubled-looking Fai Rodis and pointed her attention to a row of hard metal and plastic chairs in the centre of the room.

“I realize that everything here is interesting for you. But do not forget that we are continuing with our conversation. You will watch movies that the ancestors brought to remember the planet from which they fled. They fled with the faint hope of salvation, yet found a virgin planet and a new life that eventually turned the same as the old one. When doubt and uncertainty about which path to take overcomes my tired nerves, I come here to saturate myself with hatred and gather strength from it.”

“Hatred for what, towards whom?”

“Towards Earth and all its’ humankind!” said Choyo Chagas with conviction, “Just watch the episode that I have chosen. I will not even have to explain to you my motives behind banning your stereofilms.”

“After having seen the history of your paradise,” said the lord with acrid bitterness, “who wouldn’t doubt the truth behind the sights you have shown? How could it happen that a planet so robbed and tortured miraculously turned into a wonderful garden, and its people so angry and untrusting have become tender friends? What kind of weapons, what kinds of iron shackles of fear keep the people of Earth so disciplined? You know how to seduce. I have myself experienced your powers. Remember the legend of Circe, the sorceress who turned men into pigs? Sometimes it seems to me that you are Circe...”

“Circe is a wonderful myth from ancient times, which has emerged from the times of the matriarchal goddesses. The sexual magic of the goddess depends on the level of erotic direction – either down to swinishness or upwards to the goddess. It has almost always been misinterpreted. Beauty and the lust for women cause swinishness only in the minds of those who have not risen above animals in their sexual feelings. Women in the old days rarely understood how to effectively fight the men’s’ sexual savagery. Those who knew how to deal with it were considered Circes. An encounter with Circe was a test for any man to find out if he is a man in Eros. Sexual magic works only on the lowest level of Beauty and Eros perception. Do you want to try?” Rodis offered, as she instantly transformed. The regal gaze of her wide-open eyes was directed at the lord, as her straight figure bent into a sexually suggestive pose.

A dark power twisted Choyo Chagas’ will, and a mighty spring inside him started to uncoil, limiting his breathing, clenching his jaws and filling his muscles with immense longing.

“No!” he shouted furiously.

Rodis lowered her gaze and the lord sat down heavily on the edge of the table, pressing the switches.



From Part VI. Price of Paradise (continued)

The lights went out just as the underground wall disappeared and was replaced by an image of extraordinary depth, even compared to the ordinarily excellent TVP. Rodis forgot everything and was transported to the distant past of her birth planet.

In the beginning, only some films were projected, as chosen by Choyo Chagas in accordance to the historical order of the events. No cinematographic documents existed for the most distant times. They had had to reconstruct the most important events. However, these reconstructions inevitably destroyed the most marvelous tales of the world regarding the good czars, the wise queens, the fearless knights without reproach, the defenders of the weak, and the oppressed. The legends of the valiant defenders of the faith and the courageous generals were transformed into a series of bloody murders, of fanatical cruelty, and the destruction of beautiful cities, countries, and fertile islands.

This history of the earth, which our ancestors wrote and learned, was taught in such a way as to hide the real cost of wars, and the changes of rulers and of civilization. But the reconstructions, filmed later in the EMD, have established proof that the efforts of the people to create beauty, to build the Earth, work peacefully and understand nature were invariably pointless and ended in calamity and destruction. Sometimes, ferocious cannibals ate a more civilized tribe in front of their caves, which were organized and decorated with care. In the background of burning cities, the Assyrian warriors killed children and the elderly and raped women in front of a crowd of men brutally garroted and attached to the chariots by straps that passed through their lower jaws. There was an uninterrupted series of pillaged villages, trampled fields, and crowds of emaciated men chased like beasts. It was clear: man had less worth than an animal. Moreover, the people were submitted to sadistic tortures. In China, they were cut slowly in two in public places, impaled on the routes of the Orient. They were put on crosses in the Mediterranean and hung on iron hooks like freshly skinned cows.

The technique of mass destruction was "perfected" continuously. Decapitations, fires, crosses and stakes could not destroy the people amassed in the warring cities. They were gathered in groups in fields, and trampled by horses. With spears and sabers, the crazed crowds were chased into the mountains then thrown into the ravines below. The walls and the towers were built up with live people, becoming layers of bodies alternating with layers of clay. Amongst all this phantasmagoria of massive destruction in which the absolute obedience of masses of humans formed the most striking point, Fai Rodis, hypnotized by the power of the conquerors, remembered the image of the fall of Rome. Proud Roman women sought refuge in the Forum. Defenseless - devoid of the usual support of fathers, husbands, brothers, killed in battle - girls, young women, women, and old women, hopelessly numb with despair, looked at the approaching

crowd of Huns or the Germans, intoxicated by their victory, with bloodied axes and swords. This unforgettable sequence of events, created by a talented artist, became for Rodis the personification of one of the degrees of Hell.

As if responding to Rodis' compassion, the film changed now, listing the crimes of the Romans that functioned as a justification for revenge. Among all the defeated people of the distant and recent past, the degradation of the Romans had no parallel, except in Germany's era of fascism. The Romans considered themselves superior to the "barbarians" but they themselves were the worst savages in dealing with other people.

Indulging in the most basic of instincts, the rulers of Rome made their citizens into an ignorant sadistic mob, insatiable in their demand for "bread and circuses." Treating cruelty and the total absence of compassion to human suffering as entertainment, combined with the total absence of any respect for foreigners or those with unorthodox views, broke down values and dignity.

Even in the pre-Christian era, the Romans began this practice in circuses, especially built for this purpose, to present Greek theater, the spectacle of bloody battles with people, wild animals or each other. This custom, growing to monstrous proportions, lasted more five hundred years before the edict of Constantine forbade the killing of people for sport.

The emperor and consuls became immune to the violence, increasing the number of murders and diversifying the methods used.

Pompey celebrated his victory by staging "venatsiyu", or "the hunt" in the circus. In five days of festivities, six hundred lions and fourteen hundred people died.

Emperor Titus, the builder of the huge circus in Rome - the Coliseum - killed seven thousand people and five thousand animals.

Christians sewn into animal skins were tied to stakes and were devoured alive with the cheering and howling of fifty thousand people – the so-called free citizens of a great city.

The Emperor Trajan killed twenty-four thousand people and eleven thousand animals. Elephants, hippopotami, lions, leopards, bears, hyenas, crocodiles, tigers, wild boars – all perished in the amusement of the rabid crowds. Thousands of naked women, very young girls, and children were torn to pieces in the arenas by predators, and trampled by elephants, rhinoceroses, and wild bulls.

Emperor Probus planted a forest in the arena of the Coliseum and gave “hunt” to a hundred lions, leopards, and two hundred to three hundred bears. People – “hunters” had to kill predators with short spears. The next day, three thousand wild boars, deer and ostriches were killed.

The Emperor Gordian organized a celebration with thousands of bears, and on Millennium Day in Rome, two thousand gladiators were killed in the arena. Such occurrences, of course, were not the same in Rome, as in all the other big cities.

No less humanity and spiritual degradation was exhibited by Romans in their conquests. Instead of respecting the courage and heroic resistance of their enemies, they instigated vile massacres against unarmed civilians, driving the defeated out with their families, children and the elderly into the mines and quarries, where they slowly died in inhumane conditions, without water for washing, shelter and bedding. Christians and Jews in particular were subjected to cruel treatment.

When the Roman legions suppressed an uprising in Judea, its entire population was driven to the African quarries. Males were castrated, blinded in one eye with red-hot iron and put in chains, and with a brand on their foreheads they were forced to break the famous Numidian marble for the magnificent Roman buildings. If you imagine the colossal amount of marble used

in the forums, palaces, temples, aqueducts and even roads, this ocean of human suffering cannot call out and in the soul of every human today is disgust and hatred towards the irreparable past.

And that was a majestic civilization that left the proud inscription "Gloria Romanorum" (Glory to the Romans), which the nations of Europe for many centuries considered an unattainable model.

Retribution, like always, came late and came down, like usual, on the innocent. But many more of the later states also competed in brutality. The French kings, having at times proud nicknames, like the Sun King, dealt with non-Catholics with unbelievable absurdity – and also with Frenchmen.

A few hundred men bound together in chains were driven onto the galleys of the Mediterranean Sea; where in horrible conditions, absolutely naked, chained to the benches, they toiled at the oars for life, not knowing what they had done wrong. Each galley needed 300-400 rowers, and in the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas at that time there were thousands of these vessels, on which Christian slaves were racked with pain.

The most bloodthirsty sultan of Morocco, Mulai Ishmail, locked in his harem eighty thousand captives. These acts didn't lag behind the other lords, the African kings and queens. To commemorate the death of the queen of the black Ashanti people, three thousand five hundred slaves were killed by having their arms and legs cut off, while some were buried alive. These acts of cruelty pale in comparison to the ancient burials of kings, like the Pharaoh Jera, in whose tomb 587 people were killed, or the Scythian chiefs in Kuban and the Black Sea, with the massive slaughtering of people and horses on the burial mounds, with the pouring of blood from the worthless corpses.

The gem of the ancient culture is Ellada, which was a goat pasture at the beginning of the Dark Ages; the ruins of even more ancient civilizations include the maritime people of Crete; the worn hooves of the Golden Horde culture in Ancient Rus'; the colossal massacres of the natives of South Africa who were invaded from the North by conquering tribes – these are all, already familiar, and didn't arouse new associations. But Rodis had never seen these fragments of documentary filming, which had been put into dramatized films about the last periods of ERM. Huge massacres took on an even more monstrous character, corresponding to an increase in the world's population and powerful technology. Huge concentration camps were factories of death, where hunger, grueling labour, gas chambers, special apparatus', spewing whole showers of bullets, people were already exterminated in the hundreds of thousands and millions. Mountains of human ashes, piles of corpses and bones are not what the ancient destroyers of mankind had dreamed of. Atomic bombings destroyed huge cities in a few seconds.

Around the scorched crater, where hundreds of thousands of people, trees and buildings perished instantly, and located around the ruined buildings the blinded, burned victims crawled. From the wreckage drifted the never-ending cries of children, the calls of their parents and prayers for water. And again came scenes of massive repression, alternating with battles, where thousands of aircraft, armoured artillery on land or ships with planes taking off in the continuous squall of wailing iron and thundering light. Tens of thousands of poorly equipped soldiers stubbornly climbed straight through the continuous screen of the fire from high-velocity weapons, for now the mountain of corpses doesn't collapse the fortifications, depriving the enemy of the ability to fire, or else their soldiers would have gone mad. The bombing of cities; where the brave people of the past photographed the crumbling and burning buildings. Doomed to die kamikaze pilots raced through the screen of shells and crashed on the decks of the gigantic

ships, throwing up flaming tornados, sending people, tools, and pieces of machinery into the air. Submarines suddenly appeared from the depths of the sea, in order to bring down the enemy with rockets carrying thermonuclear warheads...

"Wake up, earthling," Fai Rodis heard Choyo Chagas say. She gave a start, and he shut off the projector.

"You didn't know of all this?" asked Choyo Chagas mockingly.

"We don't have such complete films about the past that have been preserved," answered Fai Rodis while coming around, "After the departure of your spaceship there was still a great battle. Our ancestors did not guess to hide documents underground or in the ocean. Many were killed."

Choyo Chagas darted a glance at the clock, Rodis got up.

"I've taken up lots of your time. I'm sorry, and I thank you."

The Chairman of the Council of Four paused, pondering something.

"I really can't be with you any longer. But if you want..."

"Absolutely!"

"It won't take more than a day!"

"I can make do for long periods of time without food. I only need water."

"You can find water here," Choyo Chagas with a third key opened yet another small door. "Do you see the green tap? This is my line to the water supply," he smirked, "it's safe to drink. You will be locked in, but I left the signal cupboard open. Don't try to get out by yourself. There are too many traps here. You won't be able see the material on the last century in sooner than two days. Can you bear it?"

Fai Rodis silently nodded her head.

"I will come for you on my own. Microfilms with their originals are in these drawers. Live successfully! - As we say in parting."

Fai Rodis extended her hand to the ruler as a gesture of earthly friendship. And he took it, gripping and peering into the depths of the shining starry eye of her guest, so strikingly different from everything, what was familiar to him and on his home planet, and in the ancient films of Earth, which was renounced by his ancestors.

Suddenly this odd man let go, or rather, pulled his hand away and disappeared behind the door. The huge armoured plate slammed shut in one abrupt stroke, like the sound of a mechanical hammer.

Rodis occupied herself with breathing and concentration exercises, in order to charge the body with energy for the impending labour; not only to survey, but to memorize what was seen. It was too late to think about recording across the SDF, and it was unlikely the replaceable ruler of the planet would agree to repeat his fit.

Having sorted through the spools, Rodis saw that Choyo Chagas had labeled one group, which she read as "Man against Man". The second and third boxes were marked: "Man against Nature" and "Nature against Man".

The films "Man against Nature" showed how the forest disappeared from the face of the Earth, how the rivers dried up, how the fertile land was destroyed, scattered or over-salinated, how the seas and lakes perished by being filled with garbage and oil. Huge plots of land, gutted with open-pit mining, scattered with piles of mines or water logged by futile attempts to retain fresh water in the disturbed balance of the water cycle of the continents. The movies are accusations, filmed in the same places at intervals of a few decades. Insignificant bushes are in the place of majestic temples: forests of pines, sequoias, araucaria, eucalyptus and the giants of dense

tropical forests. Silent, bare and consumed by insects are the trees where all the birds were exterminated. It shows whole fields of the carcasses of wild animals, poisoned by the ignorant use of chemicals. And again - the wasteful burning of billions of tons of coal, oil and gas, the accumulation for billions of years of the existence of Earth, an abyss of destroyed trees. Piles of whole mountains of broken glass, bottles, rusted iron, non-biodegradable plastic. Worn out shoes amassed from a trillion pairs, forming an ugly heap above Egyptian pyramids.

The box "Nature against Man" turned out to be the most unpleasant. In the terrible films of the last century, where the crippling strength of technology and colossal masses of people collided with human individualism, despite the enormity of suffering, faded and dissolved in an ocean of common terror and grief.

Man – an integral unit in battle, or intended for the destruction of the crowd – was equal in value to the bullet, or subjected to clearing up rubbish. Antihuman and hopeless disgrace fell on civilization, and its intensity so suppressed the psyche that it left no room for compassion or an understanding of the imminent individual suffering of human beings.

The films in the third drawer considered individuals in a large-scale plan, showing the suffering and illness that arose from a foolish life, broken with nature, lacking an understanding of the needs of the human body, and chaotic, undisciplined procreation. A giant city flashed, abandoned due to lack of water – scattered fragments of rough concrete, iron, blazing asphalt. Huge hydroelectric dams, piles of silt, displacement of the broken crust of the earth. Rotting bays and seas, violated by biological treatment, and water poisoned by the accumulation of heavy water sped up the evaporation of small, artificial pools partitioned by rivers. A giant, lifeless strip of foam along the deserted coast: black from oil dirt, white from a million tonnes of cleaning chemicals dumped in seas and lakes.

Then flashed a mournful procession of stretched, overcrowded hospitals, psychiatric clinics, and shelters for cripples and idiots. Doctors waged a desperate struggle against continuously increasing diseases. Sanitary and bacteriological knowledge of epidemic diseases killed, attacked the human race from the outside. But the absence of a reasonable understanding of biology, along with the elimination of natural selection, shattered the fortress of the body, which had been acquired over millions of years of selection. An unexpected enemy attacked man from the inside. A variety of allergies, the worst expression of which was cancer, hereditary defects, and mental disability multiplied and became a true disaster. Medicine, oddly enough, was not considered primarily a science of paramount importance, and considered the individual as an abstract numerical unit, and was not ready for new forms of diseases. The crude adulteration of food added in even more troubles. Although before the eyes of mankind there has been a sad experience with cassava, sweet potatoes, and corn – starchy foods of the ancient societies of tropical regions, even in the era of ERM they did not heed it. They did not want to see this apparent abundance of food; in fact, it is imperfect. Then there came a gradual exhaustion from the lack of protein, and at this stage of savagery cannibalism evolved. Malnutrition increased the number of frail, flabby men – a burden to society.

Fai Rodis barely had the strength to look at the tortured cancer patients, the pitiful, handicapped children, and apathetic adults; people full of strength, energy, and a thirst for activity that resulted in the deterioration of the heart, the inevitable hard life under the conditions in the past, and to premature death.

The threat of all psychoses was unrecognized, unnoticed, debilitating the human consciousness and distorting his life and the future of these loved ones. Alcoholism, sadistic malice, and cruelty, immorality, and an inability to resist even minute desires turned a seemingly normal person into a disgusting animal. And worst of all, these people were recognized too late. There were no laws to

protect society from their actions, and they managed to cripple the morale of many people around them, especially their own children, despite the exceptional dedication of women – their wives, sweethearts, and mothers...

"Or rather," thought Rodis, "because of this dedication, patience, and kindness, lush flowers of evil blossomed from the timid buds of primary incontinence and lack of will. Moreover, the patience and gentleness of women helped the men to endure the tyranny and injustice of the social system. Humiliating and enslaving him to his superiors, they then took his shame out on his family. The most despotic regimes have existed for a long time where women were the most oppressed and without excuse: in the Muslim countries of the ancient world, in China, and Africa. Wherever women have been transformed into working cattle, they have reared their children to be ignorant and backward savages."

These considerations seemed interesting to Fai Rodis, and she dictated them to a recording device hidden in the wings of the mirror on her right shoulder.

What she had seen shocked Fai Rodis. She knew that the movies were from the ancient starship's special selection. People who hated their planet, lost their faith in the ability of mankind to get out of hell, took all of prejudicial civilization and the history of peoples and countries so that the second generation was shown an abandoned place of incredible suffering: Earth, to which they cannot return in any trial, even though the journey might end tragically. This is probably the same feeling of a break with the past that made the ancestors of the present Tormancians, when they were amazingly lucky enough to find a completely livable planet without sentient beings, to declare themselves newcomers to the mythical White Stars, as offspring of a mighty and wise civilization. Nothing good could come of showing the latest movies and terrestrial horrors. Against this background of modern life, Tormance would look like paradise. But it has become dangerous to destroy the entrenched belief of the higher wisdom of the White Star and its guardians – the oligarchs. Perhaps there were other

motives.

Fai Rodis was tired. After removing the thin fabric of the pseudo-Tormancian clothing, she did a complicated system of exercises and finished with an improvised dance. Her nervous thoughts stopped jumping around, and Rodis was once again able to quietly meditate. Seated at the end of a huge table in the classic pose of the ancient Eastern sages, Rodis focused so that everything around her disappeared and before her mind's eye there was only the home planet.

Even she, a specialist on the most critical and terrible period of humanity on Earth, could not imagine the full scope and depth of the Inferno through which the world had passed on its way to a reasonable and free life.

Ancient people lived in those conditions for life, and had no other. And through this fence of ignorance and cruelty from generation to generation for centuries stretched the golden thread of pure love, conscience, compassion, grace, care, and selfless searches for a way out of the Inferno. "We used to worship the titans of art and scientific thought," thought Rodis, "but because they dressed in the armour of detached works, or knowledge, it was easier to fight through the hardships of life. It was much more difficult for ordinary people – not the thinkers and artists. The only thing they had to defend themselves from being beaten and battered from the blows of life in their troubles were their dreams and fantasies. And yet... there grew new, similar, modest, and unobtrusive good people working towards their own dedicated high aspirations. And from the Era of Disunity came the Era of World Reunion, and the Era of Common Labour, and the Era of Joined Hands."

Now not just in her mind, but in her heart did Fai Rodis understand the immensity of the price paid by humanity for Earth's Communism now, out of the Inferno of nature. She understood in a new way, more keenly than ever, the wisdom of the conservative systems of society, which cannot allow, under any circumstances, even the slightest deviation to continue. Not a step down

the stairs, back into the close abyss of the Inferno. For each step of the ladder there were millions of human eyes, longing, dreaming, suffering, and terrible. And a sea of tears. How great and how right was the teacher Keane Rukh, who started basing the study of history on the theory of infernality! He started it only after he finally found the most important psychological factor of ancient times – the lack of choice. More precisely, the choices were so complicated by social disorder that any attempt to overcome the circumstances grew out of moral and psychological crisis or serious physical danger.

A noted archaeologist, artist, and singer, Veda Kong, represented a lasting ideal for Rodis – one that had endured since her childhood. Of course, Veda Kong's body had been atomized in the blue flash of the high-temperature funerary beam long ago. But the great stereofilms of the Era of the Great Circle had preserved her charming face through the ages, and many young people were desperate to follow in her footsteps. In a society that places history first among the sciences, historical studies are a common academic specialty. However, historians, shouldering the labours and hardships of the periods they study alongside the people of the past, often experience unbearable psychological strain. Most, therefore, avoid the horrors of the Dark Ages and the ERM, the study of which would require a substantial amount of self-control and spiritual training.

Fai Rodis felt the weight of the past deep within her soul, the weight of the centuries where history was not a science but a political instrument, a means of oppression, an accumulation of lies. Propagandists had dedicated much time and effort to humiliating the simple people of the past, as if to compensate for the inadequacy, the mediocrity of the lives of their descendants. Thus, for the people of Earth's new communist eras, who, with much intrepidity and self-sacrifice, devote themselves to the study of the past, the vast suffering encountered therein casts a dark shadow over their entire lives.

Rodis was so absorbed in her thoughts that she did not hear the squeaking of the armoured door, which Choyo Chagas was carefully opening. The ceiling lights cut out. The pale violet rays of the gas lamps were the only thing to slice through the darkness that filled the underground room. Choyo Chagas had not immediately noticed the way his guest's spacesuit clung to her body like a second skin, and eagerly began examining her figure. Meanwhile, Fai Rodis came back to reality, slid off the table in a swift move, and, under Choyo Chagas's constant gaze, directed herself towards the chair on which her clothing lay. Choyo Chagas raised his hand and stopped her. Perplexed, Rodis looked at him, all the while arranging her hair.

"Are all women on Earth this beautiful?"

"I am completely ordinary," Fai Rodis smiled, then asked, "Does the way I look in my spacesuit please you?"

"Of course. You are extraordinarily beautiful."

Fai Rodis folded the thin fabric of her spacesuit into a magnificent turban and wrapped it around her head. Hanging a little askew, the turban gave the regular, fine features of this earth woman's face a malicious and carefree expression.

Choyo Chagas turned on the overhead light and, taking his time, observed his guest with unconcealed admiration.

"Are there really women on this spaceship that are more beautiful than you?"

"Yes. Olla Dez, for example, but she will not come here."

"Shame."

"I will ask her to dance for you."

They returned to the green room, which Rodis had abandoned three days ago. Choyo Chagas invited her to rest. Rodis refused.

"I'm in a hurry. I feel guilty towards my companions; my friends are probably worried. The films of the past made me forget all about them... But I am so grateful to you for your candour. It is easy to imagine how significant it is for a historian to be able to interact with documents and antique works of art that were lost here, on Earth."

"You are one of the rare few to have seen them," Choyo Chagas responded sternly.

"Would you like to bind me to a promise, to never tell the people of your planet?"

"That's exactly it!"

Fai Rodis extended her hand, and Choyo Chagas attempted yet again to keep her hand in his. A slight whistle came from the intercom. The sovereign turned towards the small table and spoke a few unintelligible words. Shortly afterwards, the engineer Tael entered the room. He looked agitated. Stopping by the entrance, respectfully, he bowed to Choyo Chagas without noticing Rodis standing at the back of the room.

"The guests from Earth are looking for their sovereign. They entered the Room of Condemnation and brought with them one of the nine-legged gadgets. What are your orders?"

"I have no orders to give. Their sovereign is here; she will join them presently. But you will stay for the council!"

The engineer turned around, petrified. The metallic Rodis, crowned rather defiantly in her black turban, with her extraordinary green eyes shining just beneath, looked like a powerful creature from an unknown world. She stood freely and independently, something inconceivable among the women of Yan-Yakh, completely available, yet with such distance and inaccessibility that the engineer fell into the most profound despair.

Fai Rodis smiled at him, then turned to the Chairman of the Council of the Four:

"Will you allow me to visit you again?"

“Of course. Do not forget about your Olla and her dances!”

Fai Rodis left. She left unaccompanied, through deserted corridors and deserted rooms. In the first room, where cuneiform script – black arrows and broken lines – decorated the pink walls, Rodis came across the sovereign’s wife, the woman after whom this planet was named. Yantra Yakhah’s beautiful lips spread into an arrogant smile, and accentuated the unkind arch of her brows.

“I see straight through your games, but I cannot say that I expected such impudence and shamelessness from an academic, from the leader of the foreigners.”

Fai Rodis kept quiet, remembering the semantics of thoughtless insults that she had yet to get used to on Tormans. But her silence only angered the Tormacian further.

“I will not allow you to walk around here in this state!”

“In what state?” Fai Rodis responded, confused, “Of course. I think I understand. But your husband said this manner of dress pleased him.”

“Oh, is that what he said!” Yantra Yahah snapped, though trying to choke back her anger. “You do not understand that you are being indecent!” her eyes flashed with unconcealed revulsion as she looked at Rodis.

“According to your morals and customs, this outfit is not suitable public dress,” Fai Rodis conceded, “But at home? Your clothing, for example, strike *me* as being excessively ornate and excessively provocative.”

The Tormancian, wearing a dress whose low-cut top exposed her chest and whose low-cut skirt, composed of thin ribbons, revealed her stomach with every step, truly seemed more naked.

“What’s more,” a faint smile flitted across Rodis’s lips, “in this metal, I am absolutely inaccessible.”

“You humans are either excessively naïve or excessively cunning. Do you not understand that your beauty far exceeds that of any woman on this planet? You are beautiful, extraordinary, and dangerous for our husbands... One need only look at you...” Yantra Yahah nervously clasped her hands together, “How to explain? You are used to physical perfection, it is normal to you, whereas here, it is a rare blessing.”

Fai Rodis put her hand on Yantra Yakhah’s bare shoulder. Yantra stepped back without a word.

“Forgive me,” Rodis said with a slight bow.

She unwound her turban and dressed herself in an instant.

“But you have promised my husband dancing?”

“Yes, and it is a promise I will have to keep. I do not think you can object to that. However, my relations with the sovereign of this planet concern only one thing: contact between our worlds.”

“And I am superfluous in this?” the Tormancian flared up once again.

“Yes!” Fai Rodis affirmed. Yantra Yakhah, silenced by her own rage, stormed out.

