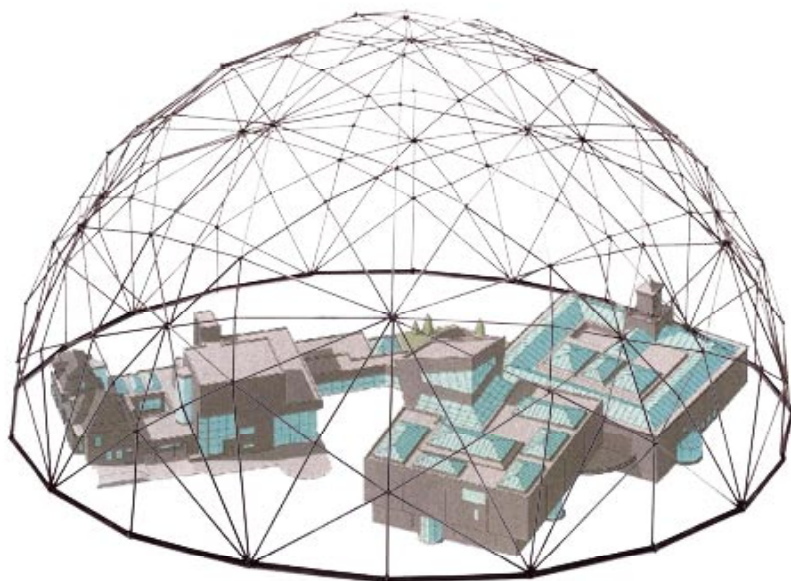


# THE HISTORY OF TOMORROW

## VAN ABBEMUSEUM





# The History of Tomorrow

a short story

by Maarten Vanden Eynde

A billion stars twinkled in the universe, irregularly like diamonds. I woke up in a sweat and tried to crystalize where I was. The heavy window screens were open but I could only feel a pitch-black sky. I rolled over to the side and found my glasses. There, up there on the left, it should be there! Was I still sleeping? I blinked my eyes a couple of times, but was disappointed again. It was gone, it was really gone...

The loss of gravitation first came to general notice on the 15th of June 2008, during the Olympics in Beijing, China. On that day 27 world records were broken. Michael Keane was the first to catch everybody's attention. As the only high-jumper to remain in competition, already assured of the gold medal, he decided on a whim to ask jokingly for a ridiculous world record height of 2m50 and jumped over it without apparent effort. He could not believe his eyes. Nor did the jury or the 32,521 shocked visitors that were present that day at the newly build Qinhuangdao<sup>1</sup> stadium. The equipment was checked and rechecked, but everything seemed OK. He sensed the possibility of an even bigger stunt, and knew he had to seize the moment, now that it felt as if his actions were governed by a force other than his own and he too, like the enthralled spectators, could only watch his unprecedented aerobatics in stunned amazement. He immediately asked for 2m60 and went over without a problem. Elated, he decided to mock the gods and had the bar raised to 2m75. You could have heard a Chinese pin drop, as he concentrated, gradually counting his intended steps on the field, he lifted his head, smeared the tension for another two seconds and went on his way to everlasting glory, all in one sweepingly fluent motion. He flew over the bar with such natural grace that the image of Keane floating in the air with a big victorious smile on his face came to symbolize the impossible events that were about to happen.

'I just can't believe it. It felt like... like flying...' was all he could say before he disappeared into the locker room. Many athletes broke their personal and national records that day, but nobody could reach the mythical heights of Michael Keane. The King of the Air, as he was thenceforth invariably called, was all over the news the next day and the whole world was watching.

Under normal circumstances this would have been physical impossible, an extraterrestrial achievement, but this day was far from normal. It would go down into the annals, not so much as the day with the greatest amount of new world records but as the day when an unexpected and memorable new turn in human history occurred.

<sup>1</sup> The Qinhuangdao Olympic Sports Centre Stadium will serve as one of the Football venues during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The stadium lies inside the Qinhuangdao Olympic Sports Centre on the Hebei Avenue. The construction was started in May 2002 and completed on July 30, 2004. Covering 168,000 square meters, the Olympic-standard stadium has a seating capacity of 33,572.

During the following days another 115 records were broken, all broadcasted live on television. I saw most of them. The Olympics were the best excuse to stay up all night in front of your TV. I especially enjoyed the faces of these young men and women, while they jumped about in utter disbelief, not quite sure how happy they could really be.

For of course the athletes were at first suspected of the use of some new, hitherto undetectable drugs which made them jump higher and run faster than was ever considered possible. They were tested and interrogated over and over again, their homes and training camps were searched, but neither the occasional epo, nor the sporadic, half-forgotten stash of old-fashioned stimulants, nor even the odd bank of red blood cells that were eventually found could account for the sudden dramatic increase of their physical abilities. Although everybody smelled a rat, no one put two and two together. Life did not seem to put the same burden on one's shoulders as it usually did, and the everyday dealings and doings took considerably less effort. Apart from a slightly upset stomach, there was a general feeling of uplifting, as if everybody had gotten high simultaneously. Insecure woman all over the world tipped the scales at exactly the weight that the new diet had been promising. Little kids who dreamed of being able to dunk like Michael Jordan<sup>2</sup> did in the old days, came very close that day. They could almost smell the ring. Even walking the dog became an unpredictable, but satisfying experience. I still remember running into Christoph the next day, one of my best friends since highschool. It was funny, but scary at the same time to see him jump around as if he had just rediscovered cocaine<sup>3</sup>. His eyes were wide open and every word he said sounded like it came from the mouth of a communist or fascist dictator trying to convince a crowd of millions.

‘The branch..., you should have seen the branch floating in the sky... it just wouldn't fall down. I felt like one of those athletics dudes in China, you know? Unbelievable! Did you see it on television yesterday?’

‘Take it easy Christoph, don't be so excited about it’, I tried to calm him down. ‘I have the feeling something very bad is going to happen’.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Jeffrey Jordan (born February 17, 1963) is considered to be one of the greatest basketball players of all time. His leaping ability, vividly illustrated by dunking from the foul line and other feats, earned him the nicknames “Air Jordan” and “His Airness.”

He was unable to stand still, as was Bob, his twelve year old Labrador. It was unclear who was walking who as they changed position constantly, pulled, stopped, pulled, turned, and switched roles every ten seconds.

But Bob finally got the upper hand, and off he went, taking Christoph with him, who could only just pull up his shoulders, make a ‘what can you do about it’ face and yell ‘Carpe diem, motherfucker, try to enjoy life for a change!’ before he disappeared around the corner.

Most of my friends were thrilled, but I was scared from day one. It was as if time stood still, or was slowing down at least. Instead of being a point of balance between future and inescapable past, the present became a spot, spreading out relentlessly like a gigantic oil slick.

The last remark of Christoph kept bugging me as I walked on to my next appointment.

‘Asshole’, I mumbled, ‘take a look at your own life’, but I knew he was right. That was probably the reason why I took it so personally. He knew me long enough to know what a boring and calculating person I was. Not married, no children, not even a girlfriend, with a steady income working as an engineer for the Building Control System Manufacturing Company, installing and monitoring security and air conditioning systems in government-buildings and the homes of the well-to-do.

‘Damned, he’s right, maybe I’m dead already without even knowing it...’ I thought when I arrived at the Museum.

There was a problem with the weight and press sensors and the alarm kept going off like hell’s bells.

<sup>3</sup> Cocaine is an alkaloid found in leaves of the South American shrub *Erythroxylon coca*. It is a powerfully reinforcing psychostimulant. The drug induces a sense of exhilaration in the user primarily by blocking the reuptake of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the midbrain. In pre-Columbian times, the coca leaf was officially reserved for Inca royalty. The natives used coca for mystical, religious, social, nutritional and medicinal purposes. Coqueros exploited its stimulant properties to ward off fatigue and hunger, enhance endurance, and to promote a benign sense of well-being.

Until 1916, cocaine was widely used in tonics (like Coca Cola), toothache cures and patent medicines; in coca cigarettes “guaranteed to lift depression”; and in chocolate cocaine tablets. One fast-selling product, Ryno’s HayFever and Catarrh Remedy (“for when the nose is stuffed up, red and sore”) consisted of 99.9 per cent pure cocaine. Prospective buyers were advised that cocaine “could make the coward brave, the silent eloquent, and render the sufferer insensitive to pain”.

The newly installed smart system was convinced that all the works of art were being stolen simultaneously. I entered, greeted the guard and went to the control room. They were having a major retrospective of the past 100 years and all the top works of the collection were on display, representing millions and millions of euro worth of fine arts and making it imperative that all systems be restored to working order as soon as possible. I couldn't find anything faulty in the control room, so I went on a thorough round of the museum grounds, accompanied by a guard of course, and checked all the sensors in every room one by one. Nothing to report. As we were walking back to the control room we passed a weird sculpture, something like a cross between a huge elastic band and a fat curled up earthworm. It looked like it was floating in the air, not subject to gravity anymore. The guard saw me hesitating for a second and said: 'Don't worry, that's a Richard Deacon<sup>4</sup>. He's known for it'.

Different theories were put forth. Some cosmological fart had changed the course of the planets, disturbing the rotation of the Earth around its axis. That would explain the late sunset on the 15th of June. Or a meteorite had somehow managed to hit the Earth unnoticed, slowing it down for a while. Inevitably, a global conspiracy theory reared its ugly head, this one alleging that clocks worldwide had been "changed" or "stopped" in order to obliterate certain amounts of time during which some unspeakably gruesome secret events had taken place. Even Elvis<sup>5</sup> was called back for an encore to explain the mystery.

It took more than two months for the truth to come out. It was front page news all over the world and caused an avalanche of discussions and even more conspiracy theories. Dr. H.J. Ebbanov rang the bell. He had been working for JPL<sup>6</sup> (Jet Propulsion Laboratory), the brain center of NASA<sup>7</sup>, for most of his life and was a member of a special research project called NEF, Negative Evolutionary Force. He investigated the possibility of a decrease in gravitation resulting in a complete loss of binding forces in the structure of the Earth followed by an all too probable final implosion. Dr. Ebbanov was found dead in Cairo on the morning of the 21th of August 2008. Killed by mobsters, so they said. But before he died, he was able to hand over a memory stick, containing a statement and hard evidence explaining the events, to a seedy local news-hound who was more than happy to sell and spread the word.

## ‘Apocalypse Now or Never!’

Apparently Dr. Ebbanov and his research team detected a first slight change in the gravitational force - only 0,03 Lg (Loss of gravity) - on the 5th of March 2007. They thought, or more truthfully they hoped, that it was temporary, that it would restore itself, and that maybe, just maybe, they had not witnessed a new phenomenon. Maybe it had already happened often in the past, but nobody knew about it because nobody investigated it. And indeed, after 37 hours the gravitational loss slowly restored itself and didn't reappear for almost a year. Suddenly, on February 12 2008 an Lg of 0,02 was measured, which became 0,04 Lg the following day and then rose steadily at a rate of about 0,02 Lg a day. On the 15th of June the Lg meter reached a peak at a stunning 6,84! The incredible and shocking consequences of a gravitational shift of such magnitude were visible everywhere and dr. Ebbanov implored his bosses to make his discoveries public. NASA however decided to keep them top secret as long as possible in order to avoid a general outbreak of panic that would certainly cause chaos on a global scale, beyond any manageable level, and to gain some valuable time to prepare for the worst case scenario, being an implosion of the Earth, later known by the general public under the far more ominous designation ‘The Big Suck’.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Deacon CBE (born 15 August 1949) is a British sculptor. His idea about sculpture is that although it is composed of matter, it is not subject to gravity. This is obviously metaphorical, but he thought of sculpture as being in between himself and the world, rather than sitting in the world.

<sup>5</sup> Elvis Aron Presley (January 8, 1935 – August 16, 1977), often known simply as Elvis and also called “The King of Rock ‘n’ Roll” or simply “The King”, was an American singer, musician and actor. There is little doubt that Presley is the most talked about and written about performer of the 20th Century. He died of a cardiac arrhythmia from an intake of a large amount of drugs.

<sup>6</sup> “Do not go where the path may lead,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail.” That could be the motto of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Trailblazing has been the business of JPL since it was established by the California Institute of Technology in the 1930s. America’s first satellite, Explorer 1, was created at JPL. In the decades that followed, they sent the first robotic craft to the Moon and out across the solar system, reconnoitering all of the planets except one. Pushing the outer edge of exploration, in fact, is the reason JPL exists as a NASA laboratory.

<sup>7</sup> The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), established on July 29, 1958 by the National Aeronautics and Space Act, is an agency of the United States Government. NASA is responsible for long-term civilian and military aerospace research and is widely regarded as being in the forefront of space agencies worldwide.

Of course the President of the United States Of America and the National Security Agency were informed and were advised to speed up the space program and put all available resources into the development of a self-sustaining moon base and a safe means of transportation to get there. For the Americans it was just another space race, like the one during the Cold War<sup>8</sup>, but this time around they had a comfortable headstart of at least one year. By the time the Russians, the Chinese, the Japanese and finally the Europeans inaugurated their Human Preservation Program, the countdown for the launch to the moon of NASA's first building unit had already begun. Thanks to the experiences gained by Biosphere 2<sup>9</sup> and the techniques developed by Buckminster Fuller<sup>10</sup>, they were ready for the next chapter of American History. They would dominate the course of humanity for once and for all.

The vilest ever smear campaign was put in motion to convince everybody that The Big Suck was only a theoretical possibility.

<sup>8</sup> The Cold War was the period of conflict, tension and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union from the mid 1940s until the early 1990s. The main U.S. allies were Western Europe, Japan and Canada. The main Soviet allies were Eastern Europe and (until the Sino-Soviet split) China. The rivalry between the two superpowers was played out in multiple arenas: military coalitions; ideology, psychology, and espionage; military, and technological developments; costly defense spending; and a massive conventional and nuclear arms race.

<sup>9</sup> Biosphere 2 is an unprecedented, ecological experiment, built as a laboratory for global ecology between 1987 and 1989. It is a tightly sealed glass and steel structure on 3.15 acres near Oracle, Arizona in which scientists have created seven complete ecosystems or biomes that mirror those of Earth. The systems include an ocean, a desert, a savannah, a rainforest, a marsh, an area of intensive agriculture, and a human habitat. Eight humans were put inside in 1991 for a period of two years. The whole system had to be self-sustaining, but additional oxygen was put in as the inhabitants were having difficulties producing enough themselves. This could be considered as a failure but valuable experience was gained for future experiments.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Buckminster ("Bucky") Fuller (July 12, 1895 – July 1, 1983) was an American visionary, designer, architect, poet, author, and inventor. Throughout his life, Fuller was concerned with the question "Does humanity have a chance to survive lastingly and successfully on planet Earth, and if so, how?" Considering himself an average individual without special monetary means or academic degree, he chose to devote his life to this question, trying to find out what an individual like him could do to improve humanity's condition that large organizations, governments, or enterprises inherently could not do.

Dr. Ebbanov was discredited in every imaginable way and scientists were paid huge amounts of money and sometimes even free rides to the moon to advance the thesis that the effects on the long run would be negligible. Nothing would ever stop the Earth from turning.

In order to keep the economy going however, structure and continuity were needed. The church bells kept on striking the hours and the atomic clocks kept ticking like they always did. The Gregorian calendar<sup>11</sup> was maintained as well as the Sumerian Sexagesimal System<sup>12</sup>, causing sunset and sunrise to occur at ever more unusual times. Day and night were slowly changing position. The vast majority of people went on living the way they did, in blissful ignorance of the unbearable lightness of being. Only a handful realized what lay ahead. The Museum director was one of them. From the moment he saw Michael Keane jump smoothly over 2m75, he knew nothing would ever be the same again, or... would it? Here finally a challenge presented itself that was fully worthy of his considerable abilities. He would become even more world famous than he already was: he would stop the clock.

<sup>11</sup> The Gregorian calendar was constructed to give a close approximation to the tropical year, which is the actual length of time it takes for the Earth to complete one orbit around the Sun. It is named after the catholic priest Gregory XIII who reformed the calendar in 1582. The reason for the reform is that the average length of the year in the former Julian Calendar was too long, and the calculation of the date of Easter, had slowly slipped to March 10, from its traditional date of March 21. The calendar was finally changed when Pope Gregory XIII decreed that the day after October 4, 1582 would be October 15, 1582.

The switchover was bitterly opposed by much of the populace, who feared it was an attempt by landlords to cheat them out of a week and a half's rent. However, the Catholic countries of France, Spain, Portugal, Poland, and Italy complied. Various Catholic German states (Germany was not yet unified), Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland followed suit within a year or two. However, the rest of Europe did not follow suit for more than a century. Great Britain (and its American colonies) finally followed suit in 1752, and September 2, 1752 was immediately followed by September 14, 1752. This traumatic change resulted in widespread riots with the populace demanding that the eleven days be given back.

<sup>12</sup> The origins of our current measurement system go back to the Sumerian civilization of approximately 2000 BCE. This is known as the Sumerian Sexagesimal System based on the number 60. 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour - and possibly a calendar with 360 (60x6) days in a year (with a few more days added later on)

Immediately the following morning he called a meeting with his staff and disclosed his brilliant idea to preserve the museum, in the exact condition it was in on the 15th of June 2008, for as long as possible. The momentous current retrospective featuring top works from the past 100 years, already much publicized, seemed to offer the perfect opportunity.

I was called in two months later to assist with the necessary transitions, and gradually got more involved, until after another year, considering my familiarity with the Museum's electrical circuitry and climate systems, I was asked to become the supervisor of its experimental preservation project. The temperature had to be 22 degrees Celsius, day and night, summer, autumn, winter and spring, with a deviation of 3 degrees Celsius in maximum 24 hours. The humidity had to stay between 48% and 55% with an equal deviation of 3% in 24 hours. The test frequency of alarms and electrical equipment was increased from monthly to daily. In addition to these precautionary measures, the building of an airtight dome was started in March 2009 and completed in September 2011. The heavy pressure of oxygen inside the dome produced the sensation of an ordinary visit to the museum like some of us were almost starting to forget was considered normal only a few years ago. The rubber on concrete floors were equipped with magnetic layers that could continually be adjusted to the ever changing gravitational circumstances, and special shoes were made available to walk on them with full effect. All security measures were tripled, for obvious reasons. The installation of an artificial lighting system that imitated the brilliance and darkness and all the shades in between of an old-fashioned natural 24-hour day, with sunset and sunrise at reasonable hours, enhanced the impression of a journey back in time. For a long time it was the only structure of its kind in Europe, and sadly the Museum remained the only museum that was able to build it.

In the following years many health and beauty farms, some government buildings and a few fancy bars followed the example. Inside, you could walk around without special clothing and oxygen bottles and they attracted thousands of space tourists, engineers, scientists and nostalgics from all over the world. The visionary act of the director saved the Museum from bankruptcy and closure, which was the inevitable fate of other institutions, and preserved it until the end of time.

People steadily adjusted their lives to the gradual environmental changes, just like they had done at the time of the global warming caused by the greenhouse effect<sup>13</sup>. It's amazing how readily people adapt to a second spring in the course of one year and learn to live in an altered climate. As the world slowed down and life reinvented itself, I involuntarily laid the foundations for my future escape and started to earn my ticket to survival. I learned how to simulate and maintain earthly living conditions and became very adept in adjusting to the constantly increasing difference between the inside and the outside of the museum dome. Because I was 42, fertile, and more qualified for this particular job than anybody else, I was selected as a smart and useful guinea pig to supervise the installation and monitoring of the equipment that would supply living conditions inside the recently built domes on the moon. This assignment would take up two years and it would guarantee a seat in one of the new MTVs (Mass Transportation Vehicles) when the time was near. Scientists predicted that the Big Suck would come around 2025, 17 years after the bad news had been made public. But from 2020 on it would be almost impossible to stay alive outside the artificial living units. Lack of oxygen would render a walk outside into a lethal expedition. Even if another planet was miraculously transformed into a viable environment, only a small percentage of Earth's population would be able to get there in time.

Naturally I accepted the invitation.

The moon was only considered as the first step in the conquest of space and would mainly be used as a temporary base to prepare for the colonization of other planets. Land prices on the moon tripled almost every year and the many legal uncertainties concerning ownership (like who owned the place in the first place) made it into a lucrative playground for fraudulent real-estate agents and their phantom companies. A ticket to the moon seemed like the safest bet on survival. In the long run it would be hard to stay there anyway, since the moon had no resources of its own and radiation was fierce.

<sup>13</sup> The greenhouse effect is the rise in temperature that the Earth experiences because certain gases in the atmosphere (water vapor, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and methane, for example) trap energy from the sun. Without these gases, heat would escape back into space and Earth's average temperature would be about 60°F colder. Because of how they warm our world, these gases are referred to as greenhouse gases.

NASA had already been experimenting on Europa<sup>14</sup>, one of Jupiter's moons, for a couple of years. Europa's atmosphere was slowly manipulated to create the same living conditions as on Earth. If the so called terraforming<sup>15</sup> was successful, the first base would be erected in 2017. The Americans claimed Europa, since they had been the first to set foot on it. After having been the most successful European colony for centuries, and having controlled the world for decades, the United States returned to their mothers womb: Europa. You had to love the irony of it. The lost sons coming back to the land of their fathers.

From the moment I arrived on the moon on the 24th of November 2014, all I could think of was going back. The Moon Treaty<sup>16</sup>, an attempt to secure a peaceful haven for all mankind, was worthless since the United States had not signed it. By setting foot on the moon, I de facto became the property of the USA. The base was a militarized zone with a very strict schedule. For two years nearly all my days looked the same. I got up at 6:00, squeezed some disgusting food out of a tube, and swilled it down with purified H<sub>2</sub>O<sup>17</sup> something like castrated water. It still does its job as a liquid but it lacks any invigorating capacity. From 7:00 to 21:00 I worked inside the domes to install and control the machinery that had to provide life for the upcoming migration wave. This was not merely a silly space race or a very expensive research project to collect stones, it was an ultimate effort to preserve life. Huge domes the size of cities were erected about 1000 miles apart and they all had to be self-sustaining. They were connected by tunnels, but if something went wrong they could easily be isolated and closed off. Solar power was the main energy source, and after the domes were inhabited, biowaste took care of all heating problems.

<sup>14</sup> Europa is the smallest of the four Galilean satellites and the second farthest from Jupiter. It is theorized to have an ocean of liquid water underneath its icy surface; the thickness of the ice is much debated. The probable presence of the water ocean has made it a favored location for modern fictional speculation about extraterrestrial life in the Solar system. Europa is named after the beautiful Phoenician princess who, according to Greek mythology, Zeus saw gathering flowers and immediately fell in love with. Zeus transformed himself into a white bull and carried Europa away to the island of Crete. He then revealed his true identity and Europa became the first queen of Crete. By Zeus, she mothered Trojan war contemporaries Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon. Zeus later re-created the shape of the white bull in the stars which is now known as the constellation Taurus.

Separate nature domes were constructed, each a copy of an earthly biotope, ensuring a back-up supply of oxygen and preserving a biological variety that could not be sustained in a city environment. Although some domes with specific purposes like water management and food control were built, each city dome was perfectly able to function on its own.

It took two months of hard labour before we could walk around without a space suit in the first dome. In the beginning there were almost no modern comforts, so when the biologists managed to harvest a rich crop from their garden, four months after I arrived, a huge party was organised. Some animals were slaughtered for the occasion and we all felt like humans again for the first time in a long while. But the situation was so unreal, so artificial that everybody stayed on alert, ready for anything that might happen next.

<sup>15</sup> Terraforming is a process of planetary engineering, specifically directed at enhancing the capacity of an extraterrestrial planetary environment to support life. The ultimate in terraforming would be to create an uncontained planetary biosphere emulating all the functions of the biosphere of the Earth--one that would be fully habitable for human beings. M.J. Fogg, *Terraforming: Engineering Planetary Environments*, SAE International (1995)

<sup>16</sup> Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies. The Moon Agreement was considered and elaborated by the Legal Subcommittee from 1972 to 1979. The Agreement reaffirms and elaborates on many of the provisions of the Outer Space Treaty as applied to the Moon and other celestial bodies, providing that those bodies should be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, that their environments should not be disrupted, that the United Nations should be informed of the location and purpose of any station established on those bodies. In addition, the Agreement provides that the Moon and its natural resources are the common heritage of mankind and that an international regime should be established to govern the exploitation of such resources when such exploitation is about to become feasible.

<sup>17</sup> Water purification is the removal of contaminants from raw water to produce drinking water that is pure enough for human consumption or for industrial use. Substances that are removed during the process include parasites (such as *Giardia* or *Cryptosporidium*), bacteria, algae, viruses, fungi, minerals (including toxic metals such as Lead, Copper etc.), and man-made chemical pollutants. Many contaminants can be dangerous—but depending on the quality standards, others are removed to improve the water's smell, taste, and appearance. A small amount of disinfectant is usually intentionally left in the water at the end of the treatment process to reduce the risk of re-contamination in the distribution system.

We moved on from dome to dome, installing and checking the environmental control systems. Each cargo ship brought some extra craftspeople along, at a rate of about 20 a month, so that the work could be speeded up progressively. Every arriving ship was hailed like a new Ark of Noah<sup>18</sup>, bringing not only news from our loved ones and valuable artefacts from our distant civilized world, but fresh enthusiasm and new energy too. Some of the ships moved on to Europa to deliver more materials and robots. Others were sent even further away on the Interplanetary Superhighway<sup>19</sup> to investigate new possibilities for future settlements or valuable resources.

After two years, when my contract ended and I could finally return, the moon had a population of 524. It was a huge success. The first attempt to build a base on Europa however had failed. All fifteen pioneers suffocated in the new dome when a hole let in some toxic air from outside. Robots filmed their fruitless efforts to fix the hole and watched them die. They were not programmed to be smart enough to assess the situation and come to the rescue of the crew, nor did they feel any grief or pain when they were left alone. NASA postponed the colonization for another two years.

The atmosphere of Europa was harder to control than they had anticipated and the terraforming was much too slow.

<sup>18</sup> Noah was the son of Lamech, and the tenth generation after Adam. “And [Lamech] called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.” From Noah’s sons, Shem, Japheth and Ham, all the peoples of the world would be descended. When Noah was six hundred years old, God decided to send a great flood to destroy all life, for He was angered at the wickedness of humankind. But He saw that Noah was a righteous man, and warned him to build a vessel for himself and his family, “And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.”[2] And so the Flood came, and all life was extinguished, except for those who were with Noah, “and the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.” “But God remembered Noah,” the waters receded, and the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. (Chapters 5–9 of Genesis, the first book of the Christian Old Testament)

<sup>19</sup> The Interplanetary Superhighway is a collection of mathematically defined pathways (energylanes) through the solar system that allows an object or spacecraft to move much faster without using additional fuel or impulse. These energylanes are the connections between the L-points (named after Lagrange) that are situated around every planet. About five points surrounding each planet mark a tiny zero-gravitation point where a stationed object is equally drawn towards all surrounding planets, creating an absolute standstill.

This was a major blow, and the general mourning caused a depressing mood on the moon, but all I could think of was getting back home with the next ship. I wanted to see the Earth again. I craved to forget the past two years and deep down I badly wished that this infamous loss of gravity would be nothing but a temporary flux and would restore itself.

When I arrived back on Earth the situation was getting worse and worse. Millions of people had died as a result of long term oxygen shortage. Especially the poorer areas of the world were unable to meet demands for oxygen-supplying machines. It was still possible to walk around outside without suffocating, but additional oxygen needed to be inhaled on a daily basis. (Without it your whole bodily system starts to fail. Gravity determines the extent of your body mass, and when it lessens, body mass dwindles. It slows down process creation and accelerates process destruction. Which is manifested by osteoporosis, muscle atrophy, and a reduction of heart size. Actually the entire body shrinks.) The largest migration the world had ever witnessed was causing enormous problems: people tried to get as close as possible to sea level where oxygen was still abundant. Riots broke out, and people rallied daily against the inhuman treatment and the lack of support from their government. The oxygen could have been more democratically distributed, no doubt about that, and more respiration centers could have been build, but most of the available money had been spend on the various space programs. The majority of the world population was left to die.

They put me in quarantine to check my mental condition and to make sure I was not infected with some alien bacteria or virus. It was standard procedure. So was swearing secrecy, again, about my mission and everything that happened on the moon. At first, I had trouble sleeping. The loss of gravitation slowed down the rotation of the earth, turning days into weeks and weeks into months. Day and night were still marked by the atomic clock above the door, but it was dark outside for almost 250 hours now, followed by an equal amount of daylight. Time was surrounding me like a thick moisty cloud. I had trouble breathing and worst of all I felt uncertain of my own existence. A strong voice was weakening my mind: return to low gravity! I lacked resources to perform daily activities, I felt weak and was forced to bed. In other words, I became addicted to a low gravity, the famous astronauts disease. It was out of this unbearably complex mix of emotions that my nightmares were born.

I woke up in a sweat and tried to realize where I was. The tiny window of my cell was hardly big enough for my desperate explorations of the sky, unsure whether I was trying to find the Earth or the moon. I did not know which one I was supposed to see and panicked every time again, no matter what I saw. Was I still sleeping? I lost track of time and schizophrenic paranoia started to take over my mind. They kept me in the center under close observation for a few weeks, until I was able to convince them of my sanity. A weekly check-up was required, however, for at least a year and without fault. And then, finally, I could make my re-entry in the world. I was free again, but instead of relief I felt nothing but panic. Nothing was like I expected it to be. The dream of the world I had left behind was gone. Where should I go? What should I do next?

When I was not doing tests for NASA or ESA<sup>20</sup>, I looked up old friends at the Museum. As a former employee, I was always welcome to pass by for some oxygen or a cup of coffee. My disorientation problems did not benefit from these visits, but I flourished inside the museum. It felt like home. I walked past the long lines of people waiting outside and was let in through the back door. A lot had changed at the exterior of the museum – one couldn't help noticing the heavy defense mechanisms, capable of launching missiles, surrounding the dome behind a deep moat -, but inside it was still the same. Time really did stand still in there and the resulting peace and the ever present highlights of our cultural past were heartbreaking and soothing at the same time. It was hard to leave afterwards and say goodbye. Sometimes I stayed for a couple of days, but I was made to understand that this special treatment could not become permanent. They had to extend the alarm systems and double the guards again, heavily armoured now, to make sure that people left after their allotted three hour visit. The Museum was open 24 hours a day to accommodate as many visitors as possible. Before entering everybody was stripped naked and had to go through several detectors. Eyes were scanned and fingerprints taken in order to prevent terrorist attacks and see to it that no one visited the museum more than once a week.

<sup>20</sup> The European Space Agency (ESA), established in 1975, is an inter-governmental organization dedicated to the exploration of space, currently with 17 member states. ESA is Europe's gateway to space. Its mission is to shape the development of Europe's space capability and ensure that investment in space continues to deliver benefits to the citizens of Europe.

A bracelet was attached around the visitor's wrist so that he could be traced at all times, and a build-in timer started to count down as soon as he passed through the front door. In spite of all the security measures, the high entrance fee and the blatant violations of privacy, the Museum was more popular than ever before.

As one of the world's leading experts in the fields of preservation, climate control and survival, I was continuously offered huge wages, travel expenses and the most exclusive luxury just to come over and take a casual look at some technical equipment at the other end of the world. Sometimes I did, when it gave me a chance of meeting old friends or visiting family members I hadn't heard of in ages. But it was very stressful and many times I regretted going in the end, so I refused most job offers and the mountains of gold attached to them. I wanted to be left alone. I wanted to forget. I wanted to disappear in the anonymous void of existence.

The sun shone down hard during the endless new day and the heat made it difficult to breathe. When darkness finally fell after a sunset that lasted 48 hours, the creatures of the night came out. By 2019 almost the whole world population fell into that category and flocked together in the streets, trying to forget there was no escape. Drugs were helpful, for a while. I walked by the numerous bars, one next to the other, in the city center. Every one of them was filled with desperate people, bringing along a whirlpool of others standing outside. One group was intertwining with the other, creating an endless army of lost souls. They went from bar to bar, greeting each other all the time in a vain attempt to prove their existence. Most conversations were standardized.

'Yo man, where have you been?'

(one's hand reluctantly slapping the other's hand).

'Well, you know, around'

(fists softly meeting in the air).

'You saw Marcus?'

(showing the other is close to one's heart by hitting one's chest).

'Yeah, he was at Fillipo's an hour ago. We're going to the OX later on. Are you coming too?'

The OX was the first oxygen bar to open and still the most popular. You could rent a private cabin or use the cheaper bar tubes for 10 to 60 minutes.

Extra flavours or energy boosters could be added, like a trip to the Alps in spring or a sea breeze in the morning. Your blood ran faster through your veins. You came out reborn, feeling invincible, keyed up to party all night long.

On the central square the fountain was still working, although the water was replaced by a heavier, undrinkable liquid. Roman Gods dressed in marble spit it out, historic figures frozen forever. The sound of water still triggered the same sensations of freshness and life, movement and hope. People loved to hang out there and freeze for a while as well, remembering the past and forgetting the future.

Small UFO's flew through the air. Their fluorescent lights disturbed the quiet, serene atmosphere. The vendors kept shooting them in the air all night long, as if they were hoping that at least one of them would sail beyond the point of no return. An endless parade of small lights drifted further and further away.

A puppet busker entertained people by mimicking Michael Jackson<sup>21</sup> with one hand. His fingers were dressed in the famous red suite that Michael wore in the "Thriller" clip. Two fingers shuffled the best moonwalk<sup>22</sup> I had seen in years while smoke billowed out of the little portable stage and a light show was produced by the busker's feet. He gracefully received a mellow applause and gave his own best imitation of the King of Pop, with a smile that looked more like a sneer.

The old shopping precinct was flooded with street vendors. Banquettes and cardboard boxes on both sides, held down by cobble-stones, made the narrow streets appear even smaller. Everything you could imagine and more was sold on these night markets. Whether you wanted to feel safe, not hungry, beautiful or not present, the simple pleasure of buying things and feeling happy about it, the basic lure of consumerdom remained intact.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Joseph Jackson (born August 29, 1958) is an American musician, entertainer and pop icon, whose successful music career and controversial personal life have been a part of pop culture for the last quarter-century.

<sup>22</sup> The moonwalk or backslide is a dance move that gained widespread popularity after being performed by Michael Jackson on the 1983 television special *Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever*, and has since become his signature move. The purpose of the moonwalk is to give the illusion that the dancer is walking forward while mysteriously moving backward.

During the heat wave of August 2019, when the temperature broke another record and it became hard to breathe outside an oxygen conditioned room, some promising news reached the Earth. NASA announced the successful terraforming of Europa and was urgently looking for immigrants, the more the merrier! They decided to share their knowledge on terraforming techniques freely so that other nations could also create earthly atmospheres around other planets. In the meantime everybody could camp out on Europa or exercise patience on the moon. It was as if a general pardon had been granted. New hope arose in the depressed towns and everybody began to prepare for the big journey. There was no time to lose since it was almost unbearable outside. The loss of gravitation was accelerating, just like the expanding universe. The Big Suck was now expected in 2022, three years earlier than was predicted at first. The initial sweet dreams of timely salvation that had naturally evolved into a full-fledged bacchanal now slowly turned into a horrible hangover as one by one we realized there was not enough time, nor enough place on the MTVs to save everybody. An inferno beyond any imagination broke loose. Nobody kept playing music on this Titanic<sup>23</sup>. The smell of a new chance after all these years of despair turned every human being into an uncivilized mammal. I fled to the Museum that now seemed to lay in the middle of a war zone. The streets were strewn with corpses and the smell of rotten meat was almost worse than the lack of oxygen. No one dared to take them away. Every breath was saved.

The stone lions that guarded the main entrance to the Museum were still hurling at the black sky and the giant old clock above the door still read 17:00. It had been stopped on the 20th of August 2008, at closing time, when the final decision to preserve the Museum had been made. Big spotlights issuing from the flak battery on top of the dome searched the piles of rubbish on the street. Gunshots resounded from the deteriorated neighbouring buildings. Little by little I crawled closer, trying not to move when the lights passed over me. Luckily I was recognised by one of the guards at the back entrance.

<sup>23</sup> Titanic was the largest passenger steamship in the world at the time of her sinking. During her maiden voyage she struck an iceberg at 11:40 p.m. (ship's time) on Sunday evening April 14, 1912, and sank two hours and forty minutes later. 1513 people died.

‘I’m glad to see you, sir. I thought you were gone?’ he said as he opened the heavy metal door.

‘Yes, I know.... I was on my way to the launching site, but I started to feel really bad. I think I can’t handle another trip to the moon, so I decided to stay and defend the dome as long as possible.’

‘In that case, welcome back! There’s always room for a top specialist.’ The Museum was at a high state of alert. No visitors were allowed anymore, only security personnel, museum staff and some of their relatives. Everybody was preparing himself in his own way for what was to come. Marrion, who was responsible for the displacement of the works of art, kept on making her daily rounds. She went from room to room with her cart and checked the position of every item. It looked as if she was insane, marking the whole collection over and over again, but she was probably the most sane person at that moment. The strangling uncertainty about what would happen and when it would happen made most people inside the dome become dangerously mad. I found myself walking through the hallways, up and down the stairs, slowly becoming part of a surrealistic loop in one of Escher’s<sup>24</sup> lithographs. I was lost and did not know what was up or down. A turmoil of emotions was tossing and turning me around. I cried in bitter sorrow and started talking to myself. The Russian avant garde wing turned into an abstract theatre, lines and shapes twirling in perfect harmony. Red lines pierced the walls like swords, wooden squares framed unexisting rooms. Crawling my way up, I arrived just in time to see my favorite work of art, *Victory Over The Sun*<sup>25</sup>, a video installation showing a performance of a weird opera, in which the costumes, designed by Malevitsj<sup>26</sup>, made the actors become a part of the abstract decor. The room started to spin and I grabbed the bench beneath me. A sweet high of low gravity was overrunning me... the lights went off as reality transcended the dome. The videotape got stuck in an endless loop and the actors kept repeating, as if speaking for the entire art collection:

‘The world will die, but we will live.... for ever....’

<sup>24</sup> Maurits Cornelis Escher (June 17, 1898 – March 27, 1972) was a Dutch left-hander graphic artist known for his often mathematically inspired woodcuts, lithographs and mezzotints which feature impossible constructions, explorations of infinity, and tessellations.

<sup>25</sup> In 1913 Kazimir Malevitsj was asked to produce a series of costumes and set designs for the “first Futurist opera,” entitled *Victory over the Sun*. The music was by Mikhail Matiushin, and the main text was written by the poet Alexei Kruchenykh. There was also a prologue written primarily by Velimir Khlebnikov. The opera was performed in 1913 on a double bill with Mayakovsky’s play *Vladimir Mayakovsky. A Tragedy*. For his costumes, Malevich provided radical, anti-realist designs that combined volumetrically-shaped body coverings and shocking color schemes.

<sup>26</sup> Kazimir Severinovich Malevitsj (February 23, 1878 – May 15, 1935) was a painter and art theoretician, pioneer of geometric abstract art and one of the most important members of the Russian avant-garde.

## Emergency Links:

- 1) <http://en.beijing2008.cn>: The official website of the BEIJING 2008 Olympic Games
- 2) 4) 5) 8) 10) 12) 14) 17) 18) 21) 22) 24) 26) [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org): The biggest multilingual free-content encyclopedia on the Internet
- 3) <http://www.cocaine.org>: In search of The Big Bang. What is Crack Cocaine?
- 3) <http://www.biopsychiatry.com>: The responsible parent's guide to healthy mood boosters for all the family.
- 6) <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov>: Official JPL website. JPL is a NASA center staffed and managed for the government by a leading private university, Caltech
- 7) <http://www.nasa.gov>: Since its inception in 1958, NASA has accomplished many great scientific and technological feats in air and space. NASA technology also has been adapted for many nonaerospace uses by the private sector. NASA remains a leading force in scientific research and in stimulating public interest in aerospace exploration, as well as science and technology in general.
- 7) <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov>: The purpose of NASA's Earth Observatory is to provide a freely-accessible publication on the Internet where the public can obtain new satellite imagery and scientific information about our home planet. The focus is on Earth's climate and environmental change. In particular, we hope our site is useful to public media and educators. Any and all materials published on the Earth Observatory are freely available for re-publication or re-use, except where copyright is indicated.
- 9) <http://www.bio2.com>: Official Biosphere 2 website. For the first time since the structure was built more than a decade ago, visitors can explore inside the 3.15 acre structure on a fully guided tour. This tour utilizes a new trail traversing most of Biosphere 2's wilderness ecosystems that allows easier access to the public.
- 9) <http://www.biospheres.com>: Information on Biospherics, Biosphere 2, Vernadsky, Biosphere Publications, Books, & Conferences
- 11) <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com>: Eric Weisstein's World of Science contains budding encyclopedias of astronomy, scientific biography, chemistry, and physics. This resource has been assembled over more than a decade by internet encyclopedist Eric W. Weisstein with assistance from the internet community.
- 13) <http://www.epa.gov>: The mission of the Environmental Protection Agency is to protect human health and the environment. Since 1970, EPA has been working for a cleaner, healthier environment for the American people. View the Agency's complete strategic plan, annual report, and policy resources.

**15) <http://www.redcolony.com>:** Red Colony is composed of people from around the world who are interested in the possibilities that colonization and Terraforming of Mars may bring. We feel that our dreams will be accomplished through support of private funding and corporate investment, not through government agencies.

**16) <http://www.unoosa.org>:** The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) is the United Nations office responsible for promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. The Office serves as the secretariat for the General Assembly's only committee dealing exclusively with international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space: the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS). The Committee has two subcommittees: the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Legal Subcommittee.

**19) <http://www.caltech.edu>:** The mission of the California Institute of Technology is to expand human knowledge and benefit society through research integrated with education. We investigate the most challenging, fundamental problems in science and technology in a singularly collegial, interdisciplinary atmosphere, while educating outstanding students to become creative members of society.

**20) <http://www.esa.int>:** The European Space Agency is Europe's gateway to space. Its mission is to shape the development of Europe's space capability and ensure that investment in space continues to deliver benefits to the citizens of Europe.

**23) <http://titanic.ovenman.org>:** Website dedicated to the Titanic victims, made in 1998 for practice and use for anyone.

**25) <http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu>**

\*GHB is de straatnaam voor het middel GammaHydroxyButyraat, dat oorspronkelijk werd gebruikt als inslaapmiddel bij operaties. Vanwege de trage inwerking en de ongewenste nawerkingen wordt GHB niet meer op deze manier gebruikt. Het zit in de populaire drugs XTC en werd in vloeibare vorm beter bekend als 'rape'-drugs. In kleine hoeveelheden geeft GHB een ontspannen, vredig gevoel en werkt het seksueel (zeer) stimulerend. Bij hogere doseringen van GHB kunnen misselijkheid en duizeligheid optreden. Uiteindelijk valt de gebruiker als een blok in slaap. Dit lijkt veel op het effect van een grote dosis alcohol. Bij het wakker worden is de gebruiker vaak erg alert en soms zelfs wat agressief. Het doseren van GHB is zeer moeilijk en gaat vaak mis. ([www.elsevier.nl](http://www.elsevier.nl))

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