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**Into the Future or Back to the Past?**  
**How inequities of the future can revert our ethics back to that of a troubled past**

What do we envision when we think of the future? The idea of a utopia for me brings to mind images of harmony, peace, and happiness for all. It presents a space where individuals use technology to facilitate their everyday routines and where communities come together to ensure that no one gets left behind. Unfortunately, this idealistic vision of a futuristic utopia is rather under-represented in some of the sci-fi that I've read up to this point. Specifically, Anatoly Dneprov's "The World in Which I Vanished" (Russia, 1962), Luigi Cozzi's "Rainy Day Revolution No. 39" (Italy, 1965), and Gabriel Bermudez Castillo's "Opportunities Galore" (Spain, 1978) share distinct but similar visions of a future where technology has worked to widen the gap between the upper and lower classes. Whether fueled by issues of class conflict or by issues of overpopulation, the three stories share a fear of a future that lacks human empathy and compassion. Through an analysis of morality and ethics in these three short stories, produced in diverse times and spaces, we can come to better understand the ever-present anxieties and fears that accompany speculations of proposed futuristic utopias.

Can we call the fictional worlds presented in these stories utopias? Starting with Dneprov's "The World in Which I Vanished", the protagonist, a suicide survivor named Harry, is placed in a simulation named Eldorado. Eldorado was created by Dr. Udropp as a way to find the perfect conditions for a model of a harmonious state, in the hopes of profiting millions from such a discovery. At the onset, we feel that the protagonist has been rescued and given a second

chance at life, fulfilling a purpose that is noble by helping to discover the key to harmony. However, we quickly find out that Dr. Udropp does not intend to be fair to his new employee. When Harry jokingly threatens Dr. Udropp with filing a complaint for being starved on purpose, Dr. Udropp responds, “You won’t file any complaint—you don’t exist... You’re still dead” (Dneprov, p.64-65). In fact, the only rationale for using Harry instead of a robot is because “it would be inefficient and too expensive to model this with an equivalent limited-memory electronic robot” (Dneprov, p.65). Harry was not saved, he was enslaved.

Similarly, Castillo’s “Opportunities Galore” presents an alternate universe where one can sign up for odd jobs that pay handsomely, offering the opportunity to escape financial disaster quickly but at the risk of death occurring at any time during the job. The two individuals that we meet—Mr. Ivan Mendoza and Ms. Krasga de Nar—are not enslaved directly, as they maintain the ability to leave whenever they desire, but the structure of the opportunities and their reward are made to be enticing and addictive, essentially a psychological trap for people desperate enough to take these jobs. Despite the early reassurance by Mr./Ms. Hollister that the jobs “...are perfectly legal” (Castillo, p.52), the employers are given anonymity by the recruitment agency that Hollister works for and any follow-up questions regarding safety are quickly shot down by Hollister who says “we don’t ask you for any kind of explanation, Mr. Mendoza” (Castillo, p.52). The sexual nature of the interactions with Hollister and the rapidly increasing payout of the jobs almost ensures that individuals are trapped once they sign up for their first job.

Finally, Cozzi’s “Rainy Day Revolution No. 39” places us in a world reminiscent of Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy (2011), which was itself inspired by exhibitions of the Colosseum of the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. In this world, the protagonist, Lester

Aharddaysnight, walks us through a regular day, which to us is far from normal. The world in which Lester exists is ruled by Administrations and Parties, which care little about the well-being of its constituents. Particularly evocative is the sacrifice that is necessary in order to ride the Underground, a public transportation system. At the train station, Lester paints the scene saying “all was quite normal—youngsters raping candy virgins in the twilight. Infallible Militiamen sleeping on one another’s shoulders” (Cozzi, p.198). When the train entered the station, a “...thanksgiving sacrifice in honor of the God of the line was held...” (Cozzi, p.198). Instead of being disgusted or appalled by these scenes of evil, Lester is insensitive to these horrors, mentioning that “...Lester knew very well what he had to do. He had been well trained by years of experience. Ten years he had been forced to catch the Underground twice a day... Ten years—without an incident” (Cozzi, p.199). Everyone seems to know the routine, the sacrifice is what is necessary to keep society going.

All three stories presented above portray fictional societies that might be perceived as utopias by the upper-class, but by writing through the lens of lower-class citizens, can be seen to be extremely cruel and unfair. For Dneprov and Castillo, the inequities established by class difference have caused people to lose empathy for the poorer classes. These societies have essentially reinstated forms of slavery as a means to benefit from human production and work without having to pay appropriate wages. In Dneprov’s story, Harry loses his free will when he is purchased from the morgue. The saddest part is that, in the words of Dneprov “There was nothing unusual about it...” (Dneprov, p.61). Even if Harry refused to work, we find out that the price of a body is only about fifteen dollars flat, making Harry easily replaceable. Similarly, the customers in Castillo’s world pay a flat fixed rate, regardless of who is completing the job. As Mr.

Medoza explores more dangerous missions, he "...[comes] to understand only too well the reasons the customer paid five hundred credits a day" (Castillo, p.61). In contrast to the greedy and capitalist motives of the upper class in Dneprov's and Castillo's stories, Cozzi's upper class obtains protection by simply avoiding public transportation. The sacrifices made with each train ride do not serve as a direct source of material or monetary benefit but as a means to "...support the overpopulated society of the parties" (Cozzi, p.199). Those who can afford to stay off the Underground are granted special privilege, while the rest pay the price for society. These acts harken back to the displays put on by the Roman Colosseum, which often placed deaths on display for people's entertainment. Except the Romans at least placed prisoners to face such punishment. In Cozzi's world, the sacrifices are somber and its victims are, more often than not, innocent.

It may not appear obvious at first but a common thread connects these stories at their core. There are strong anxieties about the ethics and morals of future societies. Advancing technology can seemingly deepen disparities among the rich and poor, heightening the inequities that underlie society even today. But the future does not have to be like this. These gloom predictions of the future can be avoided if human compassion is never compromised. As long as society strives for a utopia that can be experienced by the population, not just by the individual, then we may never have to lay witness to the dark and cruel worlds imagined by these authors.

### **Bibliography**

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