

Deportation

The Meganesia Cycle

Mini-Novel — transutopia

Author: Alexander Rozoff

Translated by: Agent Krom

Prologue.

CNN, Lanton, Tintung Island, Nelson County, Meganesia. Camera. On air.

The camera shows a smiling bald man in the middle of a plaza framed by thick flowering shrubs. In the center of the plaza, on a bulky stone pedestal stands a silver statue of a young girl dressed in lava-lava.

“As you know, Meganesia is currently in the center of a major international scandal, and I am reporting from the main square of its capital, Lanton, located on the Tintung island. Formerly, this place was the governor’s residence, but it was blown up during the so-called aluminium revolution. Only a piece of the foundation remains, and it now hosts the monument for Queen Laonirua, or, as the locals call her, Queen Lao.

The real name of Queen Laonirua was Lisa Korn. Ms. Korn, born in Boston to an African American and a Chinese, began her career by performing in musicals at the virtual theater of Nicholas Skinner. Later, as Skinner was convicted of tax evasion, together they escaped the US and moved to Lanton, which at the time was the administrative center of British Oceania. Here they got involved in a Batak nationalist revolt which attempted to restore the monarchy that preceded the British dominion. Ms. Korn presented herself as an heiress to the ancient royal family, using her resemblance to an aboriginal. This clumsy scam would only have remained a joke if Ms. Korn wouldn’t get accidentally shot during a clash between Bataks and the colonial authorities, right as she’s been singing Louis Armstrong’s “Go down, Moses”.

A dead Ms. Korn made a far more convincing Queen Laonirua than a live one, and the next day the local ultras were chanting “Let my people go”, a refrain of the song and also a line from the book of Exodus. The crowd, however, was confronted by the police with water cannons and tear gas. In response, the ultras invited mercenaries, the Hutus and Vietnamese military instructors, who staged mine warfare in Lanton and on the Tintung island. Same day all the administrative buildings and barracks of the colonial troops got destroyed. The mercenary raids forced the British troops to leave the island, then the entire Nelson archipelago, and later the nearby archipelago as well. The rebels established Meganesia, an independent confederation of four archipelagos, and adopted the “Magna Carta”, a weird mixture of communism, fascism and Rousseauism.

The self-proclaimed National Convention appointed a technocratic government, and established the Supreme Court manned by elected judges, granting it draconian powers. The best of the mercenaries formed the police force to carry out the decisions of this court. The archipelago experienced a wave of repressions and nationalizations. The Batak nationalist party tried to remind of its role in the coup, but was cruelly drowned in blood. The revolution, as always, devoured its children. The Supreme Court banned all political parties and all state institutions, declaring state an anti-national idea and a stronghold of the old regime.

These reforms have attracted a significant number of leftist groups from South America. They were promptly organized into an armed force. Their lack of experience was compensated by extreme brutality of their operations and terror acts. After a bloody incident involving the US-Japanese concession Pan Zhong, the Supreme Court declared terrorism an official military doctrine. This caused a half a year long international isolation of Meganesia, which was interrupted only due to the need to maintain navigation in the area. By then the confederation has accreted several additional archipelagos, which made many Pacific trade routes find themselves within Meganesian waters, or at least in their two hundred mile zones. The region was quickly discovered by private investors attracted by low taxes. The freedom of private business has mostly been preserved in Meganesia, and in some cases it exceeds that of the West. Natural resources and certain industries were nationalized, and while the practice of so-called social observers sometimes appears scary, that did not stop business ventures attracted by the tax carrot.

Despite the absurdity of the resulting regime it proved viable, embarrassing political analysts who predicted its rapid collapse. There is nothing new under the sun, and in fact something similar has happened the last century in Cuba. Like Cuba, Meganesia was jokingly called the "Island of Freedom". The two countries have a similar population size and land area, except Meganesia is scattered across thousands of small islands and atolls of the Pacific Ocean, making its naval area larger than the area of the whole African continent. The local regime is very different from the Cuban, and it's even more repressive. One witty commentator called this regime a dictatorship without a dictator, and an anarchy without anarchists. Another paradox: Meganesia placed 34th in the global well-being rating, just behind the developed countries. To the tourists it may seem the state of the art, with the absolute freedom of everything, not constrained even by basic decency. But if one breaks the tiniest of the rules of the local Magna Carta, the repressive apparatus will come after them with all its might. This happened recently with several humanitarian organizations when the police opened fire on peaceful demonstrators without warning, injuring dozens of people and killing two. Nineteen public and religious leaders were thrown to jail. Their organizations were banned, the property — confiscated, and they were sentenced to death, softened later to immediate deportation.

What was the crime of these people? It turns out they just demanded respect for their religion and morality, as guaranteed by the international human rights accords. For more about how meganesians understand their freedom, we are switching to my colleague, Michael O'Donnell, who is now in Strasbourg where the representative of the Meganesian Supreme Court has recently made a scandalous statement.

With you was Ken Wilson, exclusive for CNN from Lanton.“

1. Graendal Vlkov, a Supreme Judge by lot

To avoid drawing unwanted attention, Graendal wore tinted glasses through the flight, and queued last in the border control line. Nobody paid attention to the taut man, a little taller than average, forty years old, dressed in loose pants and a gray linen shirt.

Only during the face control did he take off his glasses, and the young lieutenant immediately lost his official phlegmatic posture.

— You are the Graendal Vlkov? The judge?

— Yes, don't I look like him?

— I have just learned. I saw yesterday on TV. Wow you made them squirm!

— Really?

— In my opinion, yes. Here's your card, sen Vlkov. Welcome back home. Good luck!

— Thank you, sen officer.

The home, at the Sonfao atoll, has been 700 kilometers away, but homey spirit surrounded him as soon as he got onto the train from the airport to the Lanton bay pier. A motley crowd of all races and colors, dressed in all possible styles of clothing, from mild tropical denim suits to traditional sarongs and lava-lava, gesturing animatedly, chatting with each other and on mobile phones in all eight primary Meganesian languages. Sunset time is a kind of a rush hour in Lanton.

The announcement of the contest for social administration was less than a month away, so the political agendas advertising, *languen guangao* (join our wishes), or «*soc4u*» (in the SMS jargon) have filled almost all the posters, *tusinbao*, along the route.

- Are you wealthy enough to not care about utility costs? We are not. Vote for the quota for the poor in the supervisory board of public utilities. It is profitable to you.
- Most professions require two higher educations. You want an efficient economy? Vote for social payment for the second higher education.
- Don't want to live in a country where everybody is the same as you? Then vote your support for the Aboriginal islander communities today, because tomorrow no money will bring them back.
- I have a dream to see the world, but I do not have enough money. Don't want to be surrounded by boring people in ten years? Vote for the financing of children's social tourism.
- Tired of high prices? Not satisfied with the quality of goods? The Hi-Tech development is controlled by ignoramuses! Vote for the qualification requirements for social observers.
- Do we want to see a healthy new generation? Then why do families with sick children receive more social financing? Vote for the eugenics program!

- I work as hard as you and pay the same social security contributions. Are you not ashamed to distribute my money without consulting me? Vote for equal suffrage for working teens!
- 90 percent of crime can be prevented by citizens. Vote for the inclusion of a basic police training program in schools, and security will become cheaper.
- Think that money spent on particle accelerators or space research goes to waste? Think again. Think of your grandchildren, who will not have enough energy and space. Fundamental science is our future, vote for it today!
- We all love wildlife, but not as much as to go back to the caves! Vote for reasonable limitation of the environmental requirements and costs.
- Half of the medical officers are charlatans! Half of the medications are more harmful than piercings and implants! Down with the medical control of body art salons!

Next to this poster loitered two dozen noisy off-dressed young men. Their bodies were painted and decorated with shiny appliqués. Nearby, a police car has been parked. Two uniformed policemen, one Indian and one Irish, were discussing some matter with a blue-haired young mulatto with a silver ring in her nose and a loincloth of luminous fabric around her waist.

Graendal snorted. He could understand body painting, but completely disapproved piercings and the like. However, everyone has the right to decorate their bodies as he sees fit — tastes do differ.

At the piers that radiated from the square named after Che Guevara swayed hundreds of hydroplanes of different designs, sizes and colors, carrying emblems of transport firms, in Chinese characters, symbols of the aboriginal tribal totem Utafoa, and just whatever came in handy, according to the artistic taste and the fantasy of the owners. A few dozen such machines were scurrying into the air and rolling in the water, taking off or landing. The bay was lit with dozens of spotlights and bright taxi advertisements. Agents of the trade union of individual aerial rickshaws, mostly teenagers, strolled along the area carrying banners with flight directions and prices.

Having found themselves here, foreigners usually get lost and purchase the tickets at the office of the central agency of internal transport, in the glass pyramid in the middle of the square. But Graendal was a local, and it only took him five minutes to find an affordable rickshaw to Sonfao. The cheapness was primarily due to the presence of two fellow travelers flying to the Terarua atoll: a Chinese woman in an almost invisible bikini, and a Russian in bright orange Bahama shorts. This made Graendal's road about fifty kilometers longer.

The secondary circumstance has been the lack of public certification of the aircraft. The rickshaw disclosed that, as he was obliged, to the passengers.

— *Da huya sya* (oh, cool) — said the girl ironically, and climbed into the back seat .

— *Po huy* (no difference) — added her boyfriend succinctly and followed her.

Graendal shrugged and sat next to the pilot. Any Meganesian knows rickshaws ignore certification. A machine that conforms to the standards is much more expensive than a simple fiberglass «fly-wing» with a compact yet powerful alcohol turbine.

Rickshaw made sure the passengers are buckled, closed the fairing and muttered something into the microphone. Then he turned on the lights and the turbine. The aircraft ran a hundred meters in the cool water and soared into the air. For a while Graendal looked down at the ocean, dotted with scatterings of bright colored lights indicating shipping lanes and fishing areas. At some point he lost the border between the ocean and the starry sky, and dozed off for two hours, until the landing in the Terarua lagoon. The rickshaw pulled up to one of the piers, the couple climbed out and inside came an 80 year old man, who looked like a purebred *Utafoa*.

— To Ragaiu — he grumbled.

— Through Sonfao, twenty pounds.

— Fifteen.

— Seventeen — threw the rickshaw.

The grandpa nodded slowly, counted out the bills, handed them to the rickshaw and began to stuff self-grown tobacco into his long pipe embellished with intricate carvings.

The light aircraft turned to the lagoon exit and soared back into the air.

Ten minutes later the cabin was filled with fragrant smoke. The pilot sneezed a couple of times and opened the ventilation louvers a bit. As a matter of fact, one was not supposed to smoke aboard, but most Meganesiens didn't bother noting that to the elders.

Graendal pulled out a mobile phone and poked the icon with the image of the lodge.

— Hi, honey!

— Aloha! Where are you?

— A hundred miles to the south. Be there in half an hour.

— OK. Irji will meet you with the boat. Hungry?

— Hell I am!

— It's good. I love to feed you.

— And I love you.

— I love you too. See you, kisses.

— Your wife? — asked the grandfather from the back seat.

— Yes.

— Beautiful?

— Very.

Graendal held the firm conviction that Laysha was the most beautiful woman, at least within our galaxy.

— Many children?

Graendal silently showed two fingers.

— Wah! — outraged the grandfather — no good! A strong man, a beautiful woman, should make a lot of children. Who will live under the sun, if you are lazy?

— We are working on it, — replied Graendal diplomatically.

The old Utafoa mumbled something and turned back to the window. Evidently, the answer did not dispel his concerns about the size of the next generation.

After some time, a small spot of light shimmered in the distance: the tiny Sonfao City was teeming with nightlife. Soon, one could distinguish the lights of the houses along the coast, and the yellow dots on the mast lanterns of the fishing *proa* around the atoll. The mobile squeaked.

— Hi, Dad! I see a light two degrees to the south, is that you?

— Hi, Irji. I think so, no one is flying nearby.

— Aha! I'm in the lagoon, I'll now fire a red signal.

In 15 seconds a bright scarlet star appeared in the middle of the lagoon. Graendal touched rickshaw's shoulder and pointed.

— Picking you up? — He asked, slightly shifting the headphones.

— Yes. My son.

— Wow! How old is he?

— Thirteen.

— You let the boy sail in the ocean during the night?

— Very good! — interjected the old man — I was sailing between atolls in the night when I was 10 years old.

— You're *Utafoa* — said the pilot — you sailor skills are in your genes.

Grandpa chuckled snidely.

— Said a scientific word and you think it's all explained?

— Anyway, a lagoon is not open ocean — said Graendal.

The plane touched the water, made a long arc and stopped a few hundred meters from a small boat. The pilot pulled back the cowl.

— Good luck!

— Good luck in the sky! — Graendal said, got out of the cab to the right float, and jumped into the boat, which was already near him.

Irji gravely sat at the helm. Thin and dark-skinned, he could pass for a native, if not the red hair, green eyes and freckles that the tan could not quite hide.

— They were freaking annoying, yes, Dad? — he asked, aiming the boat at a distant pier.

— Who?

— Well, the — the boy shook his left hand in the air — Western offies. Our *ekostory* teacher says they are schmucks — and have always been. How do euros and the yankees live there?

— He says that?

— Well, not exactly, but close. Is that not true?

— What can I say — Graendal scratched his head — of course, the politicians there are rotten. But people adapt. They survive and perceive the politicians as a nuisance. And how are the things here?

- Fine. Sabi and I fixed the windmill turbine yesterday, while ma was at work.
- What, you dragged Sabi to the tower? Don't you understand she's too young?
- She wanted to, why do you blame me?
- Did you at least use the safety belts?
- Of course, but ma is still cursing.

They were approaching the house. The building, as it's common in Meganesian suburbs, consisted mainly of terraces, balconies and canopies. Except that here in the center there was a reinforced concrete box, wooden staircase entwined with plastic and covered with a roof in the shape of a butterfly spreading its wings. There was a butterfly proboscis, or more precisely, a hose dipped into the pool: the roof doubled as a condensing water collector and a solar battery. On the sides were the wind turbine tower, a pole with a satellite dish, an antenna and the tanks of the local water supply system. This level of autonomy was commonplace here. Many even produced fuel alcohol from fermented algae in the backyard. The Vlkov family preferred to buy not only fuel, but also fish in the city market, earning the reputation of the somewhat lazies among the neighbors. Alcohol, people could understand, but buying fish when the ocean is full of it? On the other hand, the Vlkov's orchard was the subject of envy. How, people were asking, did they manage to grow not only the usual plants like pumpkins and bananas, but even grapes, from which they made an excellent grappa? No one believed that this is only a consequence of Laysha's agroengineering knowledge, and attributed her talent to her Italian origin. Everything, they said, is in the genes. From the front terrace, a wide staircase led down to the pier at the ocean shore, where stood another canopy. The canopy hosted the usual array of cheap aircrafts and a small SUV. At the pier was moored a *proa*, not a heavy one, with a trawl winch for fishing like most, but of a lightweight and sporty kind. Pampering, people would say.

On the tip of the pier, between the two marker beacons, hands on hips, stood Laysha. She was wearing shorts and a T-shirt that has been white once, but now was covered with spots of fruit juice. For a native Calabrian farmer, she was lacking in the volume of the breast and thighs, and a higher education didn't bring her closer either. But these small things couldn't really stop Laysha if she decided to take on the role.

- Horror! — She said, casting a mocking glance on her husband with bright green eyes — Sunken cheeks, green face. What the hell did you eat in this barbaric Europe? To the table, now!
- Phew — Graendal hugged her, burying his face in the coarse hair the color of dark bronze — To the table sounds great. And if somebody poured me a glass of grappa...
- You'll get it after you take a shower and throw your rags in the washing machine. Looks like you have collected all the dust from this dirty continent.
- Nothing like that — he said — there's plenty left.
- I'm happy then. The Europeans won't have to change their habits. And now, to the shower.

2. Magna Carta and the world press

After taking a shower and wrapping himself in a lava-lava, Graendal finally felt fully at home. The whole family gathered on the central terrace, which doubled as a living room. However, Irji was already sitting at the computer doing something on the Internet, and Sabi slept wrapped in a blanket in a wide armchair in front of the TV in the far corner of the terrace overlooking the garden.

— Seeing the cartoon about these stupid polar bears again? — He asked, patting her behind the ear.

— They are pandas, not polar bears — she mumbled without opening her eyes.

— You think that makes a difference?

— It does. They are not stupid, they're funny — she opened her eyes, — Hey Dad, when did you come back?

— About ten minutes ago. Honey, do you think it would be better for you to sleep in the kids' room? We're going to make noise here.

— You can make noise — she allowed generously, turning to the other side — won't bother me. It's boring in the kids' room.

— Come on, leave it, — intervened Laysha — let her sleep here. And come to the table already. I poured you the Ein-Topf, it ought to be taken hot.

— Ein what?

— Ein Topf. It's a Bavarian soup.

— Ah — he said, coming to the table — smells delicious.

— Yeah, eat already — Laysha said — and, by the way, explain me what happened there? On the TV it looked like a circus. I could understand nothing and turned it off.

— I didn't understand either — he said, swallowing the first spoonful of soup — we should have sent Jella or Macrin instead. Or, at least, Ashura. After all, they are judges by rating, and I am one by lot. They could explain things much better.

— Macrin called yesterday and said that it's good you went.

— What else did he say?

— He said they divided your work among them, to give you a day off. Kind of a gift from colleagues.

— How nice of them, — muttered Graendal with his mouth full.

— Do not grumble, Gren.

— I'm not grumbling, — he said — by the way, where's the grappa?

— To your left in a plastic bottle.

— Ah, I see — he filled his glass and licked his lips.

— Pa, what does "fascist" mean? — asked Irji.

— Are you too lazy to look it up in encyclopedia?

— It says that the Germans were criminals, they created a state, banned criticism of the government and killed everyone who disagreed with the way they organized the community. And they started a war, even though nobody attacked them.

— Well, it's more or less correct.

— Pa, why then «Europe monitor daily» calls you a fascist?

Laysa turned to Graendal, shrugged, and said:

— Tough luck. Now you'll have to explain the kid who the Nazis are.

Graendal shrugged, took a small sip of vodka and:

— Irji, do you know why I had to fly to Strasbourg?

— Because you're kicked some fags out of the country and some other fags raised a fuss about it.

Laysa clasped her hands:

— Hey, where did you hear that word?

— From you, ma — calmly replied the boy — this is how you explained it to uncle Wang Ming. And who are fags?

— People who turn sexual orientation into a political issue — intervened Graendal — but let's first deal with the Nazis. Firstly, I did not take the decision to deport all by myself, there was the panel of supreme judges chosen for this year. You know how...

— I know — Irji interrupted — they teach it in the first class.

— Good boy. Now please print out the article that calls me a fascist.

Irji made a few mouse clicks, and the printer spew out several sheets of paper. The first had a bright headline:

"Shocking statements by a Meganesian Inquisitor." Below was a picture of Graendal and commentary by Nurali Abu Saleh, Commissioner for Human Rights of the European Council: "For the first time in its history, the European Union provides a tribune to a fascist."

The text went on, with fragments of Graendal's speech in bold. The selection was impressive, the journalists did a good job with the scissors.

- "Magna Carta stands above all moral authority and all religions with all their history"
- "We have the right to use moral terror on any group of people and their customs"
- "If some people do not like our rules, they should leave our country"
- "There are no compromises. The court issued an order, and the police is obliged to fulfill it"
- "Your democracy is a fig leaf covering the slave collar on your neck"
- "You will be put on your knees by anybody who knows that your tolerance is just cowardice"
- "The government has no right to allow itself luxuries such as conscience or compassion"
- "We keep the efficient military so that they can use the weapons without hesitation"

— Wow — said Laysha, looking over his shoulder — could be worse, they only you called a fascist and not, say, a cannibal. Judging by the quotes, you would deserve being called cannibal. Gren, did you really say all that?

— No, Laysha. I mean, I really said it, but this is all taken out of context. These devils just collected all the pieces and made a spaghetti.

— On TV it sounded much better — supported Irji — you should have seen it, Ma. By the way, I recorded it all. For the history and you know, if it ever comes useful.

— I couldn't see it, it was so long, and to listen to all the nonsense from those self-important idiots.

— They're funny — said the boy — they speak English, but make no sense at all.

— It's called "political rhetoric" — Graendal explained — a trick to confuse the audience and distract them with all sorts of nonsense.

— Same as you do when you're too lazy to do the homework — added Laysha.

The phone beeped. Graendal sighed "here it starts" and took the phone.

— Hello, ... Oh, hi mom... Okay... Yes, no, not really... Well, all of them... no, honestly, I do not want and will not... Ok, give him the phone... Yes, dad... Wait a minute, I'll explain...

Graendal explained for quarter of an hour. Then he hung up the phone and silently poured himself another glass of grappa.

— What is it? — asked Laysha.

— The parents also read the "fascist" article — he replied — my father urged me to email the coordinator of Foreign Affairs, asking him to send a note of protest to the European Commissioner, and to deny Abu Salih and those journalists a visa to the Confederation.

— And they are contractually obligated to do it?

— Yeah — he said, slurping the cold Ein Topf — dad even quoted the paragraph number something, obligations in case of hostile acts of foreign officials upon public officers of the Confederacy. But why? Well, we deny the visa to these freaks, what next? It's like suing your neighbor for his cat shitting on your porch. You might win a coin, but you let everyone know that your porch stinks.

The phone beeped again.

— Eat, Gren, I'll take this — threw Laysha — Hello, who is that... what... oh, I see... me?

Laysha, people say I'm his wife, could be true... what... In fact, he is eating soup... are you sure you have to do it today? Maybe just over the phone? ...ah, and let him review the notes? Okay, I'll ask him.

— Who's that? — asked Graendal.

— Press. A guy from "Pacific Social News" asks for a visit. He says that it is written in your contract.

— I know, and it says "immediately". Damn, why couldn't he meet me when I landed. At least he doesn't want to come in the middle of the night.

— So, shall I let him come?

— Well, yes, we have to.

— You can come — said Laysha into the headset — we'll meet you in the lagoon, just call 20 minutes in advance... You need no help? Oh, if it's the latest model... Ok, call if you get lost.

— What did he say? — asked Graendal.

— He has some fancy satellite guidance device, we'll see. His name is Malik Sekar. He promised to arrive in an hour.

— Is he a journalist? — Irji asked.

— Yes, son.

— I hope he will not be as hungry as the last one, who ate all the apricot jam. How did he only eat that much without getting sick?

3. Malik Sekar, reporter for “Pacific Social News”

A military-style hydroplane jet approached so quickly that the audience got anxious, first for the fate of the reporter, and then for the fate of the pier, which narrowly escaped getting crushed by the heavy machine. However, the landing ended smoothly, with the aircraft only slightly scraping the deck. Almost immediately, a young sporty guy jumped out. He looked like an Indonesian, was in his 30s or maybe even younger. He brought a huge fruit cake, immediately improving Irji's opinion on the reporter folk.

— Sorry for the late hour — he said, shaking hands with Graendal — I thought you had nothing for tea.

— That's how you think of me? — fumed Laysha.

— Oh, sorry.

— That's fine, I'm kidding. Take your stuff and sit down at the table. Want some grappa, sen Sekar?

Sekar looked at the half-empty glass in the corner of the table and nodded.

— A little. If sen Laysha also...

— I'll join — she snorted, taking another two glasses — how expensive is that brutal thing you came on?

— No idea, it's the company business — he replied, plopping the cake on the table and unpacking a laptop and a small video camera — the newspaper bought it from sea patrol when those guys upgraded. It's outdated for patrol but fine for the press.

Irji, meanwhile, possessively pulled the cake closer to himself.

— Just don't overeat — warned Graendal and turned back to the reporter — I'm ready, sen Sekar. Let's start. Hey, what are you typing already?

— Introduction, first impressions — he said, with his fingers flying at an incredible rate — the usual stuff. What is your profession, sen Vikov?

— In the college I studied automated home appliances, and my second specialty is rapid technical diagnosis. So I solve customers' problems with generators, computers, refrigerators, microwaves, stuff like that.

— Does your profession help your work as a judge?

— Hard to tell. On the one hand, yes, lots of experience dealing with angry people. On the other hand, this was the reason the board delegated me to go to the fucking... I mean ...

— I understand where. Go on, it's very interesting.

— Nothing interesting. All three social regulation experts were rejected. Ashur and Macrin because they are smartasses, and Jella — for extreme sharpness of judgment. Tin Fan was rejected since as a programmer, she has no experience working with people, and Dolphin — per his occupation. He's a ship mechanic, and his vocabulary...

— Well, you did not hold much reservation in your speech either.

— Yes, but I have kept from swearing, if you know what I mean.

— I quite understand. What do you think about the actions of the social administration? I mean, about the movie that started it all?

Graendal sighed and filled the glasses, made a small sip and scratched his head.

— Briefly, sen Sekar, I believe that the police should have prevented the riots.

— But police activities are constrained by Magna Carta privacy rules.

— So what? The company that competed for the administration contract knew the conditions, so they have to deal with the complexities. That's what the community is paying them for, isn't it?

— They warned the government of the possibility that the "Children of troglodytes" could cause social unrest. They proposed a number of general preventive measures.

— I expressed my private opinion, and I think that the police will be fined. They signed up for providing security, not general measures. But then, Jella Argenti is handling this matter, you better ask her.

— Yes, I know, I have an appointment with sen Argenti.

Graendal smiled.

— I bet she will invite you at one o'clock, at the rock sports club on Akorera island.

— How did you guess?

— Four months are enough to learn some of your colleagues' habits.

— I see. So, what can you say about the movie? Have you watched it?

— I did. Eight true stories about sexual experiences of students. In the style of Romeo and Juliet. The common theme is: fundamentalist families are the source of the tragedy. A woman throws sulfuric acid in the face of a teenage girl, because she is "a whore" and "seduced" her son. A man shoots an eighth-grader who "corrupted the innocence" of his daughter. Another man throws a homemade bomb at teens having a nudist picnic, because they "incline classmates to sin". And so on.

— Do you agree, sen Vlkov, that the film excites hatred towards patriarchal families?

— Rather to their way of life. Anyway, it does not matter. The director has the right to show the problems of society as he sees them. If he had called for physical violence towards these families, he would have violated the Magna Carta, but he only gave a moral evaluation.

The reporter thoughtfully rolled the glass in his hand and finished the drink. It was timely because Laysha brought a large Chinese teapot with four translucent porcelain cups.

— Thank you so much, sen Laysha.

— Go on, boys, it's all very interesting.

— I anticipate your next question, sen Sekar — Graendal continued — what if this moral evaluation is used as a moral justification for terror against a particular style of life, family life, religion, beliefs? Right?

— Well, yes. I mean, these were the Vatican representative's arguments.

— Then I'll answer you the same as I told him. Magna Carta prohibits enforcement of moral choice. Anybody has the right to bring moral terror to any group of people whose practices are unacceptable to free people. This group has the right to do the same to us. The government is not allowed to intervene, and is only obliged to stop physical violence and threats of violence. This is the rule of non-interference in private life, right?

The reporter smiled and nodded.

— Of course. But, as we remember, Abu Salih had a counter-argument: the Magna Carta teaches ethical nihilism. What freedom of moral choice can you talk about, if one of the ethical teachings is proclaimed supreme law and is upheld by governmental coercion?

— My answer to him was long, to you I'll reply briefly and clearly. Everyone has their property rights, agree?

— Yes. But what ...

— Is this camera your property?

— Yeah, why?

Graendal winked at him, took the camera off the table and put it in his lap.

— Now I took it and it's my property. Any objections?

— Why is it yours, sen Vlkov?

— Well, because here I have it as you can see.

— But you have it because you took it from me, — objected Sekar.

— Then you can call the police — stated Graendal — Irji, please play a policeman for us.

4. Irji Vlkov, a Meganesian schoolboy

The boy wiped cream from his face, pointed his index finger at Graendal and said in a stern voice:

— You're under arrest for robbery! Return the camera to its legal owner and follow me!

Graendal quickly returned the camera to the table, raised his hands up and said.

— You see, sen Sekar, what is the difference between the possession of own and stranger's property? Same goes with a moral choice. It belongs to a person, and the person may take it whichever way he chooses, as he wants and when he wants.

— In particular, choose in favor of patriarchal morality.

Graendal nodded vigorously.

— Yes. But only for themselves and not for the neighbor. If a person forces morality on their neighbor, they are appropriating someone else's rights away. As I did with your camera. No one would call the ban of taking things from others is "nihilistic attitude to possession", right? It's the opposite: it protects the ownership rights. The Magna Carta provides the same protection for moral choices. Where do you see nihilism in that?

— Um — said the reporter thoughtfully — this is clear, but there is a significant difference. In contrast to the freedom of ownership, moral freedom is limited by social norms. I mean, the ban on socially dangerous acts such as robbery and others.

— No difference — Graendal responded calmly — same rules apply to owning things which would be a threat to everybody if they were in private hands. People agreed that individuals should not own atomic bombs or national power grids.

— There are countries where the national grid is in private hands.

— Yes, and in these countries they plunder with impunity those who own the grid. Try to punish them, they will turn off the electricity, end of story.

— Aha — said the reporter — let me try to phrase it. Hence, the ability to impose their morality on others, is as dangerous as private possession of an atomic bomb?

— Gren, you did not say that — intervened Laysha vigilantly, while pouring the tea.

— I know, my dear. However, even though these are sen Sekar's words, they sound right to me.

— I just wanted to get to the question of capital punishment — the reporter continued — in fact, the patriarchal-minded citizens only broke a few windows in several shops, clubs and cinemas. The sentence for that would typically be a fine and a short prison term?

— That's right — confirmed Graendal — but their crime was not misdemeanor, but rather an attempt to intimidate the citizens and the government, and to force the beliefs of their social group. Even a child knows how is that called.

Irji pulled away from the tea and blurted out.

— It's called "tyranny", and is punishable by the supreme measure of humanitarian self-defense

— he illustrated his words by unequivocal gesture of tying an imaginary rope around the neck.

— Wow! — amazed Sekar — where is this knowledge from?

— As if you didn't learn it at school — it was the boy's turn to be astonished.

The reporter scratched his stubbly chin thoughtfully.

— I did not know they teach this in school.

— And rightly so — intervened Laysha — we've had enough of all sorts of higher interests of the nation, and our children don't have to repeat the same mistakes.

— Fortunately, Magna Carta allows us to replace the death penalty with deportation — defused the situation Graendal — I would not want to impose nineteen life sentences.

— And if there were no such alternative as deportation? — Asked the reporter.

— This alternative was invented by the ancient Greeks. Who knows how history would go if they didn't? We live in this reality, not in a fictional world.

Sekar smiled and spread his hands.

— All right, sen Vlkov, let's get back to reality. How do you comment on the statement by the Human Rights Watch that the Confederation created, I quote from memory, "a situation of total mockery for the ideals of religious and cultural communities whose morals and whose views differ from the government's"?

— Sure, let's go back to reality — agreed Graendal — let's imagine going to one of the larger islands nearby, say, Nuku'alofa. And let's look at the first open-air cafe on the shore. What will we see?

— Nothing special — suggested the reporter — people eating, drinking, and...

— We'll see — interrupted Graendal — wildly different people, behaving according to their tastes, but at the same time complying with the necessary minimum of common rules. Someone can be there in an evening dress, another in a bathing suit, someone in a lava-lava, and maybe even naked. It is a private matter. But nobody has the right to break furniture or attack others, and everyone has to pay for what they eat and drink. Right?

The reporter nodded and Graendal continued.

— Of course, some people may not like the look or style of behavior of others. For example, a Puritan would be embarrassed to see naturists, naturists do not like Muslims wrapped from head to toe in dark fabric, and the Muslims would be unhappy that the majority of women are not covering their heads and other body parts. A person can argue with another about taste and decency, but the other is entitled to keep their opinion, down to refusing to discuss the subject if they are not interested. What a person is not allowed to do, is to impose their tastes on the others. If a Puritan tries to pull a suit on a naturist, and that begins to rip off clothes from the Puritan, there will be chaos.

— You are right — agreed Sekar — but what if someone is offended by appearance of another, hurting as much as by a slap in the face? Would it not be better to compromise?

— No it wouldn't, citizens do not have to suffer because of someone's neurosis, and neurotic citizens don't have to go to public places.

— Ok, that makes sense at the beach — said reporter — but what about the place of work or a classroom?

— At such a place, one should work or study, not stare at the colleagues, and in general, as Gandhi said, everyone should mind their own business and let others do theirs. Otherwise, no amount of social regulation will help ... Irji, if you intend to continue playing Doom, either go to the second floor or turn down the volume.

The boy snorted and adjusted the tuner so that the roar of machine guns weakened to about the level of cicada chirp.

— And really, you should go to sleep already, — said Laysha.

— But ma, I want to listen.

— Are you not afraid you'll oversleep the breakfast? Remember, nobody would wait for you.

— I'll set the alarm.

— Okay, I warned you.

— By the way, about children — said the reporter — parents have the right to educate their children in whatever system of values they consider to be correct. It is written in the Magna Carta.

— Let's look — Graendal stood up and picked a thin book from the shelf — what does it say about the family ... Yeah, I read. "Individuals who have dependent children by power of kinship have the right to freely choose the ethical system for their education, but only as long as they do not subject the children to suffering and as long as they do not violate the common security". Apologies, the role of a judge warrants pedantry. You, sen Sekar, have been inaccurate.

— I can not say, sen Vlkov, that I fully understand what you have read.

— It's actually quite easy to understand — said Graendal — I will explain using the example of the history of Aboriginal islanders. Just a quarter century ago, most of them were forced to live in reservations. Not because someone made them, but because they had no idea how to survive in the man-made environment. At best, they would immediately get arrested for petty theft — as they had no idea of private property. Worse, they did not know anything about the traffic, electricity, household chemicals. Regular things, that surround us since childhood, became killers to the aboriginals.

— But, sen Vlkov — interrupted the reporter — you can't call the assimilation policy flawless. Why not allow them to live on reservations, as they were used to?

— Do you ever realize what you are suggesting? — Laysha intervened — the life expectancy in reservations has been only thirty years, and one in ten infants died before the age of one! The natives are people as much as Europeans, Indo-Chinas or Anglo-Saxons.

— And are all citizens of the Confederation, like all of us — said Graendal.

— They might be same as us — said Sekar — but their culture is disappearing.

— What?! — Indignantly said Irji — *Ato utafoa iine la kaa to iruo anootari!*

— Ugh — the reporter pulled back — what was that?

The boy sniffed condescendingly and translated:

— Utafoa people will not disappear as long as moon and the sun are shining. Culture is not someone else's, it's everyone's! Like the sky or the ocean.

— Well said! — Laysha said, patting her son on the head.

— *Eitona-tone raa le* — agreed Graendal.

Sekar almost dropped the cup.

— What did you say, sen Vlkov?

— I said, "These are the words of a man". It is a serious praise.

- How do you know the Aboriginal language?
- It is the second official language of the Confederation.
- I know. But I thought it's just a formality.
- Nothing like that. It has been in the school curriculum for eight years. Laysha and I learned it along with Irji, that's it. A beautiful language, by the way.

5. Your tolerance is just cowardice

The reporter held up his hands in submission.

- You win, sen Vlkov! The issue of Aboriginal culture is dismissed.
 - Not yet. There still remains a challenge of saving the unique crafts and fine arts related to everyday life. It's not that straightforward to turn an authentic Utafoa village into a modern suburb. But we've deviated from the subject, haven't we?
 - Yes, indeed. We talked about the patriarchal families in another sense. I mean, that their children do not have the problem which the aboriginal children faced.
 - Why not? — Graendal said — the same problem exactly. Children from patriarchal families are not able to live in the information environment created by a technogenic society. You said it yourself, for people from a patriarchal culture someone's appearance is like a punch in the face. A child with patriarchal upbringing comes to school and gets hurt as if hit by a series of slaps. Now back to that point of the Magna Carta ...
 - Wait, not so fast! — pleaded Sekar — whatever is written in that paragraph, the foundation of the Magna Carta is that no one is allowed to bring violence to other people for arbitrary reasons!
 - Arbitrary objective violence — said Graendal.
 - A slap in the face — is that not objective violence?
 - A real one is. But an action that only this particular person considers a blow to the face, no. Should I explain in more detail?
- Sekar nodded, not looking up from his laptop. His fingers flittered over the keyboard. Graendal continued:
- I'll echo the explanation I got once. Take an individual who suffers when someone stepped on his shadow. In some tribes, the shadow is considered a part of the body, so this example is from real life. Should we now respect this custom and protect human shadow as well as the body?
 - It's a bad example, some absurd superstition.
 - That's why it is a good example. Stepping on one's shadow objectively does not affect the human body, but he equates them with physical violence. To account for such superstitions, we would have to restrict people's freedom of movement, which would be objective violence against them.

— Okay, let's go with your example. Of course it's nonsense to protect the shadow, but on the other hand, deliberately stepping on another human's shadow would be mean. And as Dr. Ahmadi said in his speech...

Graendal stretched wearily and yawned:

— Well, of course. We inflated this piglet to size of an elephant.

— Almost — agreed the reporter — about three meters in diameter.

— No, sen Sekar, I mean the piglet from which it all started.

— I'm afraid I'm not quite following, sen Vlkov.

— The story started in one school. A family asked the teacher to ban pens with pictures of the popular cartoon piglet in the classroom where their child studied. They were Muslims, and they have special taboos against pigs. The teacher argued that such matters are the responsibility of the parents. Then the father of the child raised the piglet issue on the parents' meeting, but he wasn't tactful enough. As a result, he was threatened by the police, and the incident became known to all schoolchildren. A few days later the other children came to class wearing T-shirts with large pictures of the piglet, and even posted stickers with the same piglet around. The Muslim child was hysteric, and the Muslim community appealed to the court against "torture and discrimination". The court questioned the teachers and students, but found no objective action that could qualify for it. Of course, that was an annoyance to children and their parents, which caused, according to the press, "a pig boom". The culmination was, as you know, in huge helium pig balloons which many residents have raised above their homes, cafes and shops on the Halloween eve.

— Which caused riots that required police intervention — said Sekar — so was it reasonable to let that happen?

— Reasonable for whom? — asked Graendal.

— I mean, maybe it was better to spare the boy's feelings and to compromise on kids' pens? The world doesn't spin around the pig.

There was a pause. Graendal thought for a quarter a minute and then said:

— Pens are the kid's issue, but the problem is the grown-up one. It's always tiny things that become the problem: pens, T-shirts, balloons. Our freedom is made up of these tiny things. We teach children to be free on such trifles. As an old book said: freedom is the ability to openly do what others don't like. In my opinion, that's a very good definition.

— Are not you afraid that in this way we educate children against mercy?

— No. Mercy, as I said to Dr. Ahmadi, cannot be forced. Mercy is the desire to take care and to protect, not to obey and suffer. Remember what happened fourteen years ago, when the government intended to pave a road through Leal Imo?

— Leal Imo, the Ancestors hill on the Votalevu island?

— Yes. Back then, as you remember, utafoa monuments were not yet protected by the government, and the protection of utafoa personal rights was problematic.

Sekar smiled:

— You bet I remember! My father and older brother stood in the living chains.
— And nobody forced them, right?
— The opposite. Mom was afraid that there would be a fight with the police.
— And we met each other in that chain — Laysha pushed Graendal in the side — remember?
— Yes — he winked to his wife — you even said "it looks like we're gonna get our butts kicked".
— Aha! And you said, "bet a beer cops will chicken out".
— That's interesting! — said the reporter — tell me more.

Laysha snorted.

— Oh, nothing special. We stood the whole day face to face with the cops. They shouted into a megaphone, "You are resisting police illegally! We will be compelled to use force!". And we shouted into our megaphone, "read your contracts before you get yourselves fired! This is no man's land, and we will stand here until there is a court decision!". By the evening of the second day the bailiff came with papers, the cops got into boats, and went away. That's how I lost the bet, and had to buy this guy a beer.

— I paid for the snacks — recalled Graendal.
— In the pub you did, and later at my home you ate everything I had in the fridge.
— Oh, what was there? A skinny chicken and a slice of cheese.
— An what about four-egg omelette for breakfast?
— Er... I counted them with the chicken, for brevity. Anyway, this is a thing of the past.
— Yeah... remember how you found these warehouses?
— Yes, and you called them dinosaur coffins.
— Which warehouses? — asked the reporter.

Laysha laughed.

— You did not notice? The house is constructed around a warehouse. The nearby ones too. Many atolls had military bases and warehouses, and after the revolution, the foreign military got kicked out of them. They stripped away, of course, everything they could, leaving bare concrete boxes, and the government began to sell them. Right then me and Gren decided to move in together, and were looking for a cheap house. With the money we had, so to speak...

— To be precise, we had no money at all — interrupted Graendal — and then I found an ad about these warehouses. They went for £2000, as good as free.

— They weren't worth even that — said Laysha — Four walls with holes and no roof.

— I added the roof in a week — he reminded.

— Yeah, you did. You know what he did? Ganged up with two of his neighbors, Wang Ming and Rohan Vijay, as madcaps as him at the time, and ransacked the area. Found a broken Second World War aircraft, dragged it ashore with a tractor and tore it apart. So instead of a roof we had half a wing and a piece of a fuselage. Like, a loft with a balcony. And the boarding ramp for stairs.

— Come on, it was just fine, — said Graendal.

— Well, yes. Except that the first storm almost blew us out into the ocean, otherwise all cool.

— Almost does not count. And remember how I made a windmill out of a propeller?

— You bet! It hummed so loudly that it scared the fish in the lagoon.

— But we saved on fuel for the generator. And anyway, are you saying it was bad?

— It's been great, Gren — she said simply — and it's great now.

— Why have you never told me this story? — wondered Irji resentfully.

— You never asked — Laysha smiled — and, by the way, now is really time for you to bathe and sleep.

— A minute. Let me just get to level 9.

— Ten minutes, okay?

—Fifteen.

— OK, but not a minute more. Sen Sekar, do you intend to publish all that? I mean, the things we just told.

— Well, actually — the reporter hesitated — I think your participation in protecting the Ancestors hill and the history of your life here, with neighbors of different ethnic origin and, I guess, a different religion, right?

— Yes, different, — she said — no big deal.

Sekar nodded vigorously.

— Thus, this story — it is a very important detail. So, if you don't mind, I'd publish that.

— I do not mind — Laysha shrugged — nothing wrong with it.

— I do not mind — echoed Graendal — although I don't quite understand the importance.

— Here's why it's important. When you, sen Vlkov, were charged of intolerance towards people with views different from yours, you told the Speaker of the European Commission: "your tolerance is just cowardice". Your words have been interpreted as an apology for uncompromising ideological unification.

— Please speak straight. You mean fascism.

— Generally, yes. And after all your stories, these accusations are laughable.

— OK, you're the press, you know better.

The reporter smiled and nodded again.

— To clarify your position, I'll ask another question: talking about swine boom, you mentioned that the father of the child haven't presented his claims tactfully enough. Could you explain how could he do it right?

— He said something along the lines of: "Islam teaches pig is an unclean animal, and you do not have the right to insult my faith". He began to dictate free people what they are allowed to do and what they are not. Had he presented the case of his son's suffering because of this pig, and proposed, if the picture is not essential, to please ask the children to use pens with different pictures, the reaction would probably have been different.

— Mercy? — asked the reporter.

— Something like that. In the beginning nobody wanted to terrorize the boy with these piglets. The moral terror only began in response to the coercion attempt. When a vegetarian comes to visit us, we do not put meat on the table. Not out of respect to the vegetarian doctrine, but simply so as to not offend people just in spite.

— So — said Sekar — if vegetarians demanded you to stop eating meat in public places...

— ... I would defiantly go to the central park and barbecue sausages for everyone to see.

— And if they just asked, but not demanded?

— Then I would not have paid attention to it. Everyone has the right to campaign for what they want, within the limits of Magna Carta, but this specific agitation would not persuade me.

— In other words, you are willing to accommodate odd traits of an individual, but not of a social group?

— Right. Because each individual has some odd traits, but in public life, this is inappropriate.

— But in the case of the Ancestors hill you, however, have made concessions to the odd Aboriginal religion.

Graendal made a movement of his hand, as if pushing away an obstacle.

— Nothing like that, sen Sekar. We stood in a human chain to protect the objective rights of the people who, for objective reasons, could not do it for themselves. Everyone has the right to preserve their sanctuaries, what's odd about it? The Inu-and-Tano religion and her sanctuary Leal Imo is no exception. The Magna Carta is one for everybody.

— What if the government decided to pave a highway through a Muslim mosque, would you, sen Vlkov, stand in a human chain then?

— No. But if I, as a judge, received a complaint, I would have banned destroying the mosque.

— I'm sure you would — said Sekar — but you would not personally defend Islam sanctuary is protected sanctuary Inu-and-Tano. Do not you consider these religions equal?

— I do not.

— Is that not against the Charter?

— Why so? The Charter requires direct action of citizens in three cases: if a person is in danger, if justice is trampled, and if power is usurped. Erroneous destruction of someone's sanctuaries is none of these. A citizen may intervene in such a situation at their own risk, but is not obliged to do so.

— But does the Charter not oblige us to consider all religions as equal?

— No. It only speaks of equal religious rights. Anyone can practice whatever religion, and no one can stop them, as long as the practice does not violate others' rights. But a person can feel sympathy to one religion and revulsion to another. Which is why, during the "swine boom", the court decided to withdraw the "Muslims out of the country" posters, but did not touch the "Islam is shit, Muslims are pigs" ones.

— All the same, it's cruel. Most Muslims were not involved in the riots. What are they guilty of?

— I understand, they feel it's unfair — Graendal said thoughtfully — I think their problem is that they have not condemned their radicals. If they acted like our Hindu in the incident with the

smash hit "Krishna avatar", or as our Roman Catholics in the history of the papal encyclical "on the satanic nature of eugenics", there would be no problem.

— But our Catholics were excommunicated for this — recalled Sekar — I do not think that was nice.

— Yes, probably, but they have to make a choice: to be citizens or servants of the church authorities. I think the choice they made is the right one. Now they have their own Catholic Church, with the statutes approved by a resolution of the Supreme Court, and I did not observe our Catholics suffering from this situation much.

— I do not know — noted the reporter — the Vatican and the World Council of Churches did not recognize this decision and have dragged through a resolution in the UN condemning confiscation of church property.

— Who cares about the UN. These clowns have not implemented any of their own resolutions in the last 20 years.

— Can I quote these words in my report, sen Vlkov?

— By all means. As long as the UN gives the right to vote to cocaine traffickers, sex maniacs, fanatics, terrorists, and cannibals, it can not claim to be an international authority. I said exactly that to their envoy.

— I can imagine how he took it — said Sekar, splashing through the keyboard — as you know, the chairman of the World Council of Churches called the Great Charter "a new dangerous and aggressive religion".

— Oh did he? — Graendal asked — why am I not surprised. When we announced the deportation of their mission, their representative shouted that the Confederation is dominated by Satanists. Satanism, I think it's also a religion. Do you know about it?

— I'm not sure, sen Vlkov. Probably yes, at least, Satan is mentioned in the Bible.

— Right, I'm not sure either. Sen Sekar, it is certainly up to you, but won't you be late for the meeting with Jella? You have a powerful machine, no doubt, but Akorera is nearly a thousand kilometers from here.

— Ugh! I'll try to get there on time. One last question: do you consider yourself religious?

— Me? Well, well, I think that there is something out there, but what exactly — I have no idea.

— May I record that?

— Sure, why not.

6. Jella Argenti, Chief Justice by rating

Compared to Sonfao, the Akorera island seemed huge, even though it was just 80 by 30 kilometers. The rock sports club, designed by the genius Hyun Tuan a few years ago, was located on the narrow northern tip of the island. Two gothic towers seemingly rose straight out of the ocean, and between them stood a three-tiered glass and concrete pagoda, half embedded into the rock. The composition was supposed to symbolize a postmodern synthesis

of Western and Eastern cultures, but instead the local youth named it after Homer's Odyssey: the pagoda was called Ithaca and the towers — Scilla and Charibda. When Malik called Jella, she asked to meet her at the Charibda side on the upper floor of Ithaca.

The central part of the floor was occupied by a huge cylindrical aquarium with colorful fish, with a lobby bar adjacent to it at the nearest side to the rock, and the rest of the room resembled a materialized fantasy of Salvador Dali — a burst of intricately curved designs that served as seats and tables. Malik turned left to the Charibda side and looked at the visitors. The audience, dressed in a variety of bright sports or swimming suits, or simply wrapped in pieces of cloth, sat at different heights, like a flock of exotic birds on the branches of a baobab tree.

— Hey, bro, looking for someone? — asked the bartender phlegmatically, without taking the Javanese cigar out of his mouth.

— Yes. Jella Argenti.

— Then you have come at the right time. She just finished a game, but hasn't picked up anyone yet. Turn a bit to the left. See a quarter of the butt in the lilac scarf?

— Ah! — appreciated the reporter.

— Yeah! — agreed the bartender.

After Malik approached the curve of the bridge and climbed half a turn of spiral stairs, he found himself facing the subject of his search. A strong short girl, about 27 years old was dressed only in a rectangle of thin fabric, which passed under her left armpit and was fastened on the right shoulder by a fibula in the shape of a dark red octopus. Her open left shoulder and right hip were painted with two bright luminous green Rongorongo symbols, an arrow and a fish. The picture was completed by dark straight and coarse hair, high cheekbones, a small upturned nose and huge, almost black eyes. In short, Jella made quite an impression.

— So — she said — if you don't mind, let's just call each other by name. No ceremonies. Yo?

— Yo — he agreed.

— Then fall down here at the table and turn on your device. Do you drink sake?

— Socially.

She took a ceramic jug and splashed a badly smelling liquid into cups.

— Ok, let's start.

— Uh ... — Malik took a sip of sake — what is your profession?

— Conflict resolution. I work in naval aviation. Sometimes I have to handle cases so convoluted that this judging job is like a vacation to me.

— And how did you win the competition for the panel of the professional Supreme Court?

— The usual way. By rating of my public appearances. I have the knack of speaking simply about complex matters. In the Navy you won't get anywhere without it. Get it?

— Bit by bit — said Sekar — could you just explain how you made this decision?

— Decision to deport? Easily. Do you understand how our politics work?

— Probably not enough to ...

— I see — interrupted Jella — then let's start from the beginning. Here, let me draw a chart.

She took a napkin, scribbled several squares, circles and arrows and began to explain:

— This circle is a citizen. He is employed or has his own business, no difference. Makes some money and buys something for himself. Besides food, a home and a car, he buys social order. Order is a commodity same as any other, see?

— Order is established by the government.

— Exactly! And the thing is that this is a natural monopoly. After all, the rules should be the same for everyone, right? What does that mean?

— That there should be only one government — blurted Sekar.

Jella waved.

— That's obvious. But the main thing is: it must deliver what citizens need, and not all the excess garbage, and the price must be fair. Got it?

— Yeah.

— Now we get to applications, requests and tenders — she continued — the form of ballot application is defined in the Charter. You ever filled out ballot applications?

— Of course.

— Ok. So the applications of citizens are summed up and compiled into the public request. The government is not allowed to do anything beyond that request.

— Well, let's say, that much I know — Sekar sounded a bit offended.

— Yo! Next comes a competition of the bidding teams. Coordinators — one, funds — two, army — three, police — four, Praetorians — five. In each of the five areas, the team that offered the lowest price to satisfy the request gets the contract. The team of coordinators is the government. It has the right to collect fees from the citizens equal to the combined price of all the five contracts.

— That I know too.

— Next come three levels of courts: municipal, county and confederation. The courts consist of six people, three of them are laymen chosen by lot, three are professionals chosen by rating. The only authority above the Supreme Court of the Confederation is the Magna Carta, and if someone fails to understand that, we have Praetorians to shove some sense into their brains. If someone outside wants to impose a different order, the army must extinguish it, not subject to any rules. Understand why?

— Because it's hard to wage a war by the rules, — suggested Sekar.

— Because it's cheaper without rules — corrected Jella — although what you said is true. What rules can there be during war? Roughly, this sums up the politics. Yo?

— Well, yes. Approximately like I imagined. Not too complicated, right?

— That's right, Malik. According to the Charter, the political system should be simple enough to be understood by anybody with secondary education. Otherwise, the people will not be able to take meaningful part in governance of the country.

Sekar sipped the sake and asked:

— Jella, but what does all that have to do with the deportation decree?

— Right, bro. Those folks requested the government to do something it has no right to do.

— So here we come to the difference between the government and the state?

— Exactly.

— And could you remind me the difference briefly?

— The government serves the people and the state controls them.

— That's probably too short.

— That's right — Jella smiled — Ok, let's explain in simple terms. When you order house cleaning, you want your house to be made clean for a given price, and do you not care who specifically does it. Now what if when you ordered, you said who will do it, but did not specify exactly what to do and how much. You come home and you see the so-so cleanliness, but the books on the shelves and pictures on the walls are not where you've put it, the drawer was opened, the letters were thrown away, and instead there is somebody's robe in the bathroom and pajamas hanging in the closet. The cost of all that is included in the bill and the postscript at the bottom says: we decided that it is better this way.

— Why that?

— That's because the state entered your home. The state is a caste society that prescribes all sorts of laws and charges people with all sorts of taxes. Oriental despotism does it in the open, Western democracy hides it behind elections, but the essence is the same. The state can make you report all income and pay any portion of it into the budget. The state may impose on you the business rules that will keep you poor. The state can fine you and your girlfriend because you drink wine and sleep together without a special permit.

— That is, the state can do anything it wants to the people?

— Yo! 500 members of this caste assemble together, write down a law, and that's it.

— But there are elections. You can choose another caste.

Jella made a characteristic gesture, slamming the palm of her left hand on the bend of the right elbow, and then explained:

— Not a chance in hell. The caste permeates the whole management structure and all channels of media. Elections are arranged so that only the members of the caste have a chance. I personally know only one proven way to change that.

— The Aluminium Revolution?

— Yes, this one.

— So — continued the reporter — the objective of the Aluminum Revolution has been to make sure no one can decide for people what's better for them?

— Yeah. And if someone does try to decide, they will be executed or deported, depending on the circumstances.

— Got it. I think we got to the bottom of the case, eh?

— Yo — Jella nodded energetically.

— In this case, help me resolve the dilemma with the rights of citizens. Citizens can in fact resort to street actions, if their rights are violated?

— Of course.

— Here, — continued Sekar — a group of citizens came out to the streets demanding an end to discrimination based on their religious and moral convictions. What's wrong with that?

— Be specific with their requirements. What do the banners say?

— As I recall: Stop the humiliation of faith. Down with the cult of depravity.

— Well, where do they see discrimination? If they do not like how someone talks about their faith, that is their problem, and depravity — the Charter could not care less about that.

— But their statements explain they are subjected to discrimination as a social group.

— Bullshit — she snapped — only individuals can be discriminated. None of these dudes was personally limited in rights compared with other people.

— Are you sure?

— Absolutely. No social profile even contains the column "religion". This is a private matter, as much as digestion.

— Speaking of digestion — he said — what about schools?

— What do you mean?

— Human biology lessons. Some religions consider them unacceptable.

Jella snorted.

— Bro, this issue has been clarified eight years ago in the Oscar case. According to the Charter, the school exists to give young people the skills and relevant knowledge about nature, man and society. To accomplish this, one has to show the properties of the human body. If some religions have a taboo on it...

— Then what should its believers do? — interrupted Sekar.

— It is their problem. What if someone considers the multiplication table obscene?

— But this is religious discrimination, do you agree?

— No. If one has holes in their matriculation certificate, their problem is lack of knowledge, not religion. The Oscar family referred to the practice of the countries that do not teach what is considered unacceptable in their religion, but the court explained that it is contrary to the Charter.

— How so?

— Because they demanded to restrict the rights of the other students, not to get more rights for themselves. An obviously destructive requirement. See?

Sekar scratched his head.

— I'm not sure. Do you have a reverse example on the same topic?

— Easily. The Chinese and school swimming pools. When we signed a friendship agreement with China, half a million families came to Meganesia. Then, surprise: most of their kids can't swim, and the ocean here is for kids ... well, you know.

— You bet! — agreed the reporter — no school picnic is complete without it.

— The Chinese have established parent committees, and threw complaints all over: why do sports lessons not teach swimming? Observe the Charter! Before that, it didn't occur to anyone, as our children generally learn to swim before they walk, but not these kids. Swimming is a relevant skill, and the school should therefore be obliged to teach it.

— So the pools were created for the Chinese immigrants?

— Exactly.

— So — concluded Sekar — they wanted something for themselves, and this is constructive?

— Yo!

— Got it. Now let me tell this in my own way, and can correct me.

— Go ahead, — she said, reaching for the sake.

7. The rules are for the man, not the man for the rules

The reporter followed her example, and opened up:

— A child comes back from a Communist meeting. His father asks: what do they want? The son replies: they want there to be no rich. Father replies in surprise: why don't they want there to be no poor?

— Well — mused Jella — something like that. Idee fixe, a procedure for its own sake.

— You lost me here.

— It's elementary, Malik! Take the school pools. There was a committee, "Our Family", which demanded to keep them closed during recess. Teenagers didn't want to deal with wet clothes and many went swimming naked. The Committee argued it is immoral, and human rights should be constrained by requirements of morality. The court said that even if morality has such a requirement, that is not fair.

— And how to determine whether something is fair?

— The Court went with Plato's argument: Justice is the system under which every person fully realizes their natural potential.

— The rules are for the man, not the man for the rules?

Jella clapped her hands in approval.

— Yo! Any other interpretation would be against the Charter.

— Clearly — Sekar nodded — One more question. You're judging the case of police negligence?

— Yes, why?

— Of course, I understand that before the decision of the court ...

— Bullshit — she interrupted — I can share personal views with the press. Ready?

— Of course. I'm all ears.

— Let's see. Ideally, riots should be stopped immediately, but the ideal would cost more than the police is funded with. The police is required to eliminate the usual threats to citizens and report unusual cases of social tension. It did escalate the risk of riots concerning the "Children of troglodytes". Everyone could have taken action, but no one did. Seven buildings were destroyed in ten minutes, and then the emergency reaction group interfered and has stopped the pogroms. Ten minutes is within their standard terms of service.

— But at the Gandhi Square, where the rally against the "troglodytes children" took place, there were three police officers, they had ...

— What should have they done? — interrupted Jella — open fire at the crowd? Can you imagine the results?

— But the "emergencies" did open fire right away.

— Well, they handle emergencies. They are trained whom and how to shoot during the riots. Why do you think the casualties were minimal?

Sekar thought for a few seconds and said:

— Are you saying that if those three police officers opened fire...

— Massacre — again interrupted Jella — a burst of machine gun fire at a thick crowd would mean several people dead or injured. And one salvo would not be enough.

— So I understand, the police acted appropriately?

— Let's just say satisfactorily. Of course, in hindsight, you can think of a lot of things, but no one expected those crazies would dare to do pogroms. Indeed, the handling of the "swine riots" sent a clear message: this is not Europe, there will be no ceremony in handling the fanatics.

— And who will pay the damages?

— We will likely fine the police for property damage costs. They have an insurance for this, after all. But I will not support claims on lost profits from missing customers. These scandals have been a good advertisement, the clubs have already increased their clientele.

— The logic is clear — he said — and even the issue of deportation. Jella, and on what basis were those specific nineteen people picked? The public opinion in the world is that there have been reprisals for ideological reasons.

— It's bullshit, bro. They incited against public safety and the Charter.

— How so?

— In the usual way. For example, that pastor who was shouting into a megaphone.

— Jeremy Woodbrok — he suggested.

— Yes, Woodbrok. The video shows him calling to burn and destroy. After that, the glass facade of the cinema was broken and a Molotov was thrown inside.

— He says that he was just quoting the Bible. I checked it, he's saying the truth. Deuteronomy, 7: *"This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire"*.

Jella snorted:

— A pig will find dirt anywhere. Not only in the Bible, even in an ABC. The court doesn't care what he was quoting.

— But for some the bible is a holy book, which true in every word.

— These are their problems.

— It's their right, the freedom of religion is there in the Charter.

— The freedom of religion does not imply the freedom to bring everything that is written in some holy book to the streets — she snapped — see the difference?

— This refers to Woodbrok, but other representatives of the World Church Council were not seen in the street riots. But the human rights activists from the Committee of Fourty Eight...

— Clearly — cut in Jella — wait a moment.

She bent down, picked her gym bag and began to rummage in it. Out came lots of different objects: a tennis racket, an Air Meganesia cap, an issue of "Spearfishing" magazine, a mobile phone, a diving mask. Finally, she produced an electronic notebook.

— Found ya! Why do I always make such a mess?

— They say that a mess in the purse is a sign of femininity.

— Oh, it feels much better that way. Okay, let's start with the World Church Council. They issued a statement of "Faith and the Law", which literally states: "The so called Great Charter protects the right to sin, and sin must not be protected, it must be fought against and eradicated. Testimony of faith requires actions. Society must be made free of laws that justify immorality, that make mockery of faith and morals". Signatures. This is a public call for the destruction of the Charter, which is punishable by the highest measure of humanitarian self-defense.

— They say they are repressed for their faith, and refer to the experience of other countries where they are not persecuted for the criticism of moral relativism.

— No problem, other countries is precisely where we sent them off to. Now, regarding the human rights defenders, it is more complicated. The painful issue of family rights.

Sekar nodded, not looking up from the keyboard.

— Sen Vlkov already said that. Constraining the family rights when it comes to choosing the children's education?

— Yo! To put it bluntly: the conflict between the rights of the child and the rights of their parents. Parents want to raise kids in certain tradition, but then the kids are fucked up, as modern society is not built according to their tradition.

— Obviously.

— Not quite. The Human Rights Committee 48 pressed on the fact that the government is obliged to seek a compromise. And in the Charter states that first, this not in the competence of the government, and second, there is no compromise since child's rights take precedence.

— Is that written in the charter?

— It reads: "From the moment of birth, the government guarantees every citizen's basic rights, as well as their complete and unconditional protection".

— But parents also have rights — said Sekar — it is their child.

— The charter states: "no one has any rights on another person, except in the case of compulsory civil restrictions and compensation".

— So you're saying that my child is not really mine?

— Yours, but not in the same sense as your chair. You can saw a leg off your chair, but your child...

— Brrr. Jella, you really go far with examples!

— A little exaggeration for clarity — she explained — bringing a child up in the tradition of Puritanism, or say, Parsism, creates a disability. It objectively deprives a person from the ability to adequately communicate with peers, to receive full education, to participate in social and cultural life, to find a decent job. Children are people, not their parents' property. They are protected by the government. The government is obliged to intervene into family matters as it is necessary for the protection of individual rights, as the Charter says.

— But ... — tried to insert the reporter.

Jella stopped him with a warning gesture.

— Do not interrupt, Malik. Yes, the government actions are tough, but we have virtually no domestic violence. Humanitarian organizations even suspected us for cheating and collected independent statistics. They had to admit: we are ahead of the entire world by a wide margin. Then, they suspected us of excessive government pressure on families, but turned out that we have a lot less of that than other countries. Finally, we were accused of total suppression of cultural communities. In response, coordinator Nakamura published the communique of the government, from which I will read a small quote.

She poked into her electronic notebook:

— Yeah, that one: "The Charter only recognizes a person as the subject of rights. If any group of people wishes to assert their collective rights, they form a corporation, representing only those registered in it, and only on issues they have delegated to it. Ethnic or religious affiliation is not a membership in a corporation. This implies no one can claim the rights of an ethnic or religious group and speak on behalf of all people belonging to it. Statements of this kind will be ignored by the government". The end. The Supreme Court found the communiqué true to the Charter and within the government contract.

Sekar shook his head:

— That's really tough.

— Yo! — Agreed Jella — but the approach paid off. The government is openly wholly unconcerned about the requirements allegedly emanating from all Hindus, all Christians, or all Europeans, and it turned out the so-called "all of them" are a bunch of political manipulators. Their views are not shared by the majority of their cultural community. Everything got much simpler. For an example, consider the case with the papal encyclical on eugenics.

— Yes, Sen Vlkov mentioned it.

Jella nodded and continued:

— In the aftermath, most individuals belonging to cultural communities were also cured from the "all of them" illusions. There were studies of the spectrum of opinions. Increasingly, the

teenagers are talking about the general Meganesian culture which has contributions from Europeans and Africans, Chinese and Indians, all ethnic groups, cultures, and religions, that were being mixed for over 200 years.

— Yes, probably — agreed Sekar — when I blurted out about separate Aboriginal culture, Jr. Vlkov looked at me like I was a moron, and cursed me in utafoa.

— What did you expect? This is like saying that Shakespeare's sonnets are a separate culture of the British.

— You got me confused. We say that our culture is not protected at all, but on the contrary, it is protected better than anywhere else.

— What, ruff her jets, protection! — she burst out — the culture is the life of the society, and it is inseparable from the society itself. As long as the society is alive, nothing can happen to its culture. Try messing with the culture, and the society will trample over you.

— Then why are there acts for cultural rights protection? — asked the reporter.

— Because some states don't like the culture which their society produces and consumes naturally. Just look into what gets protected under the guise of culture! Not Homer, not Shakespeare, not even Mickey Mouse.

— That's right. Then what actually is protected?

— That's the right question, bro — approved Jella — what is protected is not something that the society needs, but what those who speak on behalf of "all of them" wish to be protected. We solved the problem firmly, while the Western politicians folded at the face of a bunch of crooks and mentally handicapped scum. They chickened out and are trying to get away with it through tolerance. As in, let's pretend that we do not notice their mental infirmity. To avoid conflicts, we indulge these freaks in everything they want. Let us avoid anything that could offend them. The inevitable result: ordinary people have to behave as if they too were mentally mutilated. A tolerant society is built to suit the freaks. The norm gets considered a deformity and deformity — a social norm. You know, bro, what's the reason for the scandal around the "troglodytes children"?

— I'm not sure. You tell me.

— Okay, I will. There — Jella waved in the direction of sunset — various freaks are used to that in a humane post-industrial society everybody gets out of their skin to suit them. No fucking fundamentalist would show off like that in Vietnam. There they have a Marxist industrial technocracy, and if you try it — she took her forefinger at his forehead — bang-bang and that's it. And here they came to expect everything to be built for them. They can only dream.

— But what does all that have to do with Committee 48?

— Everything. The report they published reads: the Charter has sixteen contradictions with UN regulations on family and cultural rights, and it recommended the General Assembly to take economic sanctions against Meganesia until the contradictions are eliminated. Without this report they would not be brought to trial, as we respect the freedom of speech. This is a public call for the destruction of the Charter.

— What, do you think the sanctions could take place?

Jella thoughtfully moved the cup around the table.

— God knows, I'm no expert. In my opinion, they don't have the guts.

— Of course. Can you answer a few questions about yourself?

— Easily. What do you want to know?

— General stuff: family, hobbies, religion.

— Depends on what you call family. At least, that's me and my three year old son. But, as I'm a mobile girl, he spends a lot of time with my mother and her third husband, the dad, and his second wife, or my ex-boyfriend, his biological father. To tell the truth, Andy, the guy with whom I basically live, prefers us to be more involved with the boy. He's making sense, because if we go for another child (and why not?), the experience ...

— Stop, stop — Sekar helplessly raised his hands — I'm confused.

— No wonder. I sometimes get confused myself.

— Um, can I write this: lives in a large family, has a son?

— OK. What else? Hobby: diving. Religion: Catholicism.

— Catholicism? — said the reporter with surprise — are you a Catholic?

— So what? After all, why should there — Jella jabbed a finger up — not be someone who created this cool universe.

— No, but let's say, you don't really look like ...

— Bullshit. The Catholic Church teaches he — she again pointed up — doesn't give a crap. He's got a decent sense of humor after all.

— The Catholic Church teaches that? I would never have thought. Oh yes, you separated from the Vatican.

— More precisely, we drove them the hell out of here. Our consultant, a doctor of theology at Oxford, has scientifically proven popes are impostors, and wrote a good catechism about it in 5000 characters. It's easy to read on a mobile or elnote — Jella tapped the electronic notebook — it's used not only here, but also in South America, India and Australia. On our bishop's website you can download the text and the audio.

— I sure will — the reporter said.

8. Hernando Torres, the coordinator of the government

In the office of "Pacific social news" there was a traditional mayhem accompanying the release of the morning edition. Political news chief of department, muttering something about molasses, snatched the memory stick and the folder with paper copies from Sekar's hands, and rushed into the elevator to the floor where the layout was being done.

"No hello, no how are you", muttered Sekar into space.

The clock was showing quarter past four. This meant Helena has already been seeing her seventh dream, and there was no reason to hurry home. Having decided that, he thought to sit in the cafe for an hour, get a grasp of the latest news, and chat with the colleagues. As a matter of fact, most of the breaking news shift did the same, and there already were half a dozen people. Sekar heard loud clapping, stomping and whistling, and wondered for a moment whether people were watching football. Nothing of the sort. The TV was tuned to ABC-online, showing some round table, and, judging by the gestures of the participants, it's been close to the boiling point.

The emotions in the café were also over the edge, and in the eye of the storm was Inaori Atairoa from the IT department. She was dressed, as usual, in faded denim shorts and a dazzling white shirt with short sleeves. The shirt was unbuttoned and tied to a knot around the navel, and it was possible to describe the figure of a girl almost completely. The trick, however, was not in the shape, but in that elusive plastic of movement that distinguished utafoa (one could see from a kilometer away Inaori belonged to that race). Usually, five or six men would be buzzing around her, but this early in the morning, there were only two.

The first was the always smiling Ernst Oakwood, an electrical engineer wearing his uniform overalls as if it was a 5 thousand pounds tailored suit. He moved to Meganesia relatively recently, in his own words: "because here it is a lot more fun than in Glasgow". Apparently, this was indeed the case, since he had to spend the last two years at home in a barred room due to the fact that some work he did on the alarm of some bank qualified by the laws of the United Kingdom for a "complicity in a burglary". He got caught purely by an accident, so no one really doubted his expertise.

The other was a tall, athletic Sikh (not to be confused with a Hindu, or else he would be offended), with a deceptively dreamy expression on his face. His name was Lal Singh, in a past life he was a lieutenant of the Meganesian Rapid Reaction Corps. Two years ago, during an operation in the Emirate of Al-Shana, a piece of mine shrapnel got into his knee, putting an end to his military career. He could live on a pension insurance, but that was boring. He tried to work in the police, which proved to be boring as well, and perhaps because of that his reports appeared to resemble literary miniatures. Soon, nudged by his colleagues, he tried his luck in a journalism contest, which ended up with him getting the position of a military observer with "Pacific social news".

At the moment, these three were outnoising the TV, and it was absolutely impossible to understand what was happening on the screen.

The couple at the central table, on the contrary, was ignoring the foreign policy on principle. They played international draughts and considered that to be much more meaningful than any talk show. However, this was the only thing common between them, and everything else was in ultimate contrast. Vikskef Engvarstrom, a criminal news reporter, was a typical Norwegian, fair-haired, gray-eyed, almost two meters tall. Chez Joey of the science news department was tiny and of unclear ethnicity. She could equally well pass for a Malay, Chinese, Spanish, Latin, or a North African native. The knowledge of five languages and a natural talent for the most reckless flirtation allowed her to ingratiate herself to anyone, and the two academic degrees of hers, in physics and philology, allowed her to make good use of any information so obtained.

At a table in the corner sat Zhang Zhang. He was the one Sekar went to, knowing from experience that this Chinese has a remarkable talent to notice everything that happens and to express it clearly. He was of an uncertain age, somewhere between 50 and 60. Actually, everything in his biography was uncertain. He arrived to Meganesia (more precisely, still British Oceania back then) two years before the Aluminum revolution, as they say, for ideological reasons, was directly involved in mine warfare against the colonial administration Tintung island, and then he was a sergeant of mercenaries during the suppression of the Batak coup. However, these were rumors, and Zhang answered questions about his past with meaningful quotes from Lao Tzu ("One who talks a lot — often fails" or "Who knows — doesn't tell, who tells — doesn't know"). Presently, he led the environmental department, but people came from all floors for consultations on all matters, from stock prices to cat treatments.

— Noisy — stated Zhang, smiled, and poured the colleague half a cup of flower tea.

— Yeah — agreed Sekar — what is happening?

The Chinese shrugged.

— A woman.

He was clearly referring to Atairoa, who, like a typical young islander, could work up any number of men within seven feet from her.

— I meant: what's on TV? — clarified Sekar.

— Coordinator Torres is in Montreal, fighting off a pack of dogs — said Zhang succinctly.

— For how long?

— About 27 minutes.

— Oh, that ... did they bite him badly?

— Not really. They are stupid. Interfere with each other.

— And why is this nervous old man with canary-yellow tie shaking his pen?

— He's some kind of a lawyer from the Sorbonne. I think it's his way of conducting public appearances. He argues that the current Meganesian system of equal social land rights came to pass in an uncivilized way.

— Is he succeeding?

Zhang smiled and shook his head.

— He stumbled on the question of the bases of private property rights on these lands. He tried to derive these rights from the announcement of trans-Malaysian islands as a British crown possession and their transfer to the East Indian Company, but he forgot that utafoa already lived there for a thousand years. Torres explained that the aluminum Revolution restored utafoa law on the equal rights of all citizens to the lands and fishing waters.

— Judging by professor's reaction, they don't teach that in Sorbonne — said Sekar.

Hernando Torres was about 50. The coordinator, an agile, dark-skinned man of average height with a neat belly, was dressed very informally. He wore loose gray trousers, bright Hawaiian shirt, and a scarf tied in cowboy style around his neck. The scarf displayed the Meganesian flag — black, white and yellow trefoil on an azure field. In the opinion of the revolutionary

Symbolists, it meant the union of three races inhabiting the atolls, but the far from grandiloquent meganesians long ago started to refer to it simply as "our propeller".

The seasoned reporter's eye of Malik Sekar immediately spotted that Torres was not in a business of winning the debate, and not interested in his opponents at all. He was delivering a show, working hard to impress the audience, while using the opponents as a backdrop.

In the meantime, a noisy trio settled down somewhat so that Sekar could hear Torres speak:

"... in a bit of a loss. Do I respond to those accusing the Meganesian government of economic anarchism, or to those claiming we are throttling businesses with total regulation and abusing property rights. Maybe our host could hint me as per where to start".

The show host shifted in his chair, smiled with all his 32 porcelain teeth, and said:

— You know, Mr. Torres, such hypocrisy is not new, it was invented by Goebbels long ago. That is, the shopkeepers are free to sell beer, but the land and bowels belong to the German nation, which is above all else, that is, to the Reich, because the Reich is the nation...

— Wait a minute — interrupted the coordinator — in Meganesia there is no Reich, and the stuff you mentioned belongs to the nation directly, without intermediaries.

"The Communists in Russia said the same", shouted someone from the audience, "everything, they said, belongs to the people, and even a cook can run the state. Actually, the people were poor and powerless, and everything belonged to the only ruling party allowed".

— I have to admit — Torres threw up his hands — that Meganesia neither a cook nor anyone else can run the state, and nothing can belong to a party. Both state and parties are banned by Magna Carta. Thus the land, bowels, and waters are owned by the citizens directly. Each resident owns an equal share, which he can use personally or pass to someone else.

— Shallow words! — shouted the same speaker — what do you mean by directly? Can a cook sell me part of the Meganesian aquatory?

— No, she is not allowed to sell it, as I've already explained. But to lease for a period of up to five years, sure. For that, she needs to just sign a contract with you and to send a copy to the economy and the nature registry. I, for example, rent my share of the waters to Snailbot, and it pays good dividends. There is some risk of income loss, but normally, I get 25% more than in the fund. If you would offer more, I am ready to sign a contract with you and ...

The end of coordinator's sentence was drowned in the noise the trio resumed making. Sekar thought that the guys are as excited as football fans, at least judging by the loudness. When they finally calmed down, someone who looked as a Victorian era professor was asking Torres:

"... developing my own private business, suddenly social observers show up and say: Give us half the shares of your company. If this is not robbery — then what is it?"

— Robbery — replied Torres — is taking something without giving anything in return. Like taxes in Western countries. And when you exchange it for the equal value of shares of any investment fund of your choice — it's antitrust policy. The society takes preemptive measures against economic violence on the part of individuals. Each country does that, but only in Meganesia this is done fairly and openly. Would you argue with that?

— You bet! Of course I would! — said the professor sarcastically — antitrust authorities only prevent the entrepreneurs from creating artificial scarcity, taking monopoly overcharges and other similar abuses. And your observers are forcibly exchanging people's assets into something else.

— You are making a mess of words. Ownership is the ability to use the property of your choice, regardless of the will of a third party, in any way that does not threaten others physically. If an official behind my back, determines how I should use it, then I'm not the owner, but a dummy, and some other player is playing my cards.

— Wow, — snorted his opponent, — how comes then that the business leaders are not outraged?

— Simple — Torres smiled — because officials can be bribed, and then the whole society becomes dummies. That is exactly what happens in most developed countries.

— Do you think we do not fight corruption? — protested the professor.

— I know for a fact you do not. Your laws allow lobbying. Large companies do not make huge donations to political parties for no good reason. Investments in policies have proven themselves highly profitable. "Who pays the piper, calls the music", as they say. Your supposedly democratic government politicians sing to your sponsors.

— And in Meganesia you imply, candidates for Parliament election campaign pay out of pocket? Torres smiled again:

— You just do not know. Meganesia has no parliament.

— No parliament? What do you mean?

— None at all — confirmed the coordinator.

9. A short debate on political economics

Inaori, Ernst and Lal burst in laughing in unison, so that the opening of the speech of the next speaker, a stately gentleman in an expensive suit, was impossible to hear.

"... injustice. A simple worker pays as much tax as a millionaire."

— In Meganesia there are no taxes — reminded Torres gently — there are contributions to the production of public goods. They do not depend on how much money a person has, but only on how much of these goods he consumes. A millionaire would normally pay a lot more than a worker, not because he has more income, but because he uses more facilities, police, environmental services, emergency services, etc.

The gentleman shook his finger: "You are pulling wool over our eyes! Take the example of Hyun Tuan, one of the most fashionable architects in the world. He makes 4 million pounds a year, and his family pays the tax of only 10 thousand. As much as a handyman's family.

— Your information is out of date. Average contributions of handymen families are of around twelve thousand pounds, accounting for about 150 square meters of housing, two trucks, and a boat. Dr. Tuan's family pays less because they have an ordinary house, and only own a scooter

as the means of transportation. Dr. Tuan has no office, he works from home, and it's totally within his right to do so, isn't it?

The host intervened again. Smiling again in all his 32 teeth, he asked:

— Mister Torres, don't you find it unfair that a wealthy architect pays 0.25 percent of his earnings in taxes, while a poor worker has to part with 30 percent?

— I don't. And the unfair thing is that in your country, the worker pays 70 percent.

The host's smile widened even more.

— Wrong. Our income tax for employees is only 16 percent.

— I'm right — said the coordinator dryly — I summed up the income tax and his share in the amount of corporate taxes.

— I do not understand your logic. What does corporate tax have to do with it?

— Elementary. Do you know the meaning of "added value"? Corporate taxes are paid on the added value, which is the contribution of the workers".

— Are you a Marxist? — asked the host.

— Does one have to be a Marxist to understand goods are produced by workers, and not appear upon a flick of a magic wand by the directors?

— You are evading the question — said the imposing gentleman — confusing quarter a percent and thirty.

— I got distracted, and I'm back to answering it. When you dine at a restaurant, get maintenance for your car, rent a hotel room — you pay for the service. Your bill is counted in money, but not as a percentage of your annual income, right?

— You are again trying to...

— Nothing of the sort, — interrupted coordinator — I am firmly on the core issue. Do you find it unfair that a lunch at a restaurant costs the same to a cleaner as to you, while the pin on your tie is worth more than her annual salary?

The cafe burst with a friendly roar of approval. The guys cheered the coordinator as if he were a boxer and has just knocked out his opponent. Even Vikskef and Joy made a brief pause in their checkers game.

— Composing haiku helps sharpen speaking skills — quietly remarked Chang.

— What are you talking about? — Sekar was surprised.

— Torres writes haiku. It is a serious hobby for him.

In the meantime, the host started talking again:

— But let's say your citizen is just not earning enough to pay taxes, or contributions, to put it your way. What then, Mr. Torres? Will the police stop defending him?

— Why would he not earn enough?

— It does not matter. Just not enough, that's it. Let's say, he has a low paying job.

Torres shook his head.

— Impossible. Magna Carta prohibits employment for less than four times the social minimum.

— And if a corporation can not pay that much?

— Then its management are out of their mind lunatics. They'll to learn to manage well or will have to look for another job. No reasonable company can be organised so that the revenue does not cover the cost of labor, that is, ordinary life needs of employees and their families. Meganesia has enough businessmen who are well capable to run businesses effectively.

— And if someone can find no job?

— Then he goes to the economy agency and gets retraining. He will be receiving a scholarship during the study. The cost of scholarship will be paid by the company that later employs him. This is a fair deal, as everyone benefits.

— And if he can't work due to a disability?

— Then he receives insurance. It is a common practice in our country, as well as in many others.

— Really? — doubted the host — but where from comes insurance for a child who was left without parents.

— This is a question from a completely different area.

— So what? Does it never happen?

— It does. To clarify, are we speaking of a healthy kid or a disabled one?

— Both — replied the host — and let's not forget the poor families with multiple children.

— Then let me answer one by one. There are very few children who are both orphans and disabled, these are supported through social contributions. This is a paltry sum to which no one has ever objected. Ordinary children left without parents are usually taken by relatives and families who have no children or only have one. Our customs in that respect are archaic compared with the West. It is believed that it is better for a family to have two or three children, and it is less important whether they are biological or foster. This also solves the problem of children in poor families.

— I did not understand the last sentence.

— Simple. The children are withdrawn from families that are not able to adequately support them. After that, same deal as with orphans.

— Just like that, withdrawn? — shouted a thin middle-aged woman sitting on the other side of the table — by what right can you remove a child from his mother?

— You know very well by what right — cut her Torres — judging by your badge, you are from the family protection league. Your organization has been deported from Meganesia for activities incompatible with the Magna Charta. The judgment contains a written resolution to your question, does it not?

— Do you not dare to repeat that resolution?

— Try me. I can and I will. According to the Charter, any person, from the moment of birth, is protected by the government, which ensures their basic rights. If those supporting the infant do not sustain the conditions for full realization of these rights, the infant is transferred to other

people who are ready to provide for his well being. Any third party preventing this will be prosecuted in the course of society's humanitarian self defense.

— Self-defense? — the woman was red with outrage — bullshit! It was us who defended the rights of the unfortunate mother. The police broke into her home, arrested her husband, pulled a one year old child out of her hands. It was inhumane! It was...

— Completely justified — interrupted Torres — as well as the removal of the woman's other two children, aged two and a half and three and a half years, who were begging at the beach. May I remind you, ma'am, that we are talking about a Somali family living in an abandoned construction trailer, not in a house. The husband did not work on principle, and the wife could not work because she was either pregnant or nursing all of the time. They subsisted on petty theft, begging and digging in the trash. Leaving children in such a family, that is what would really be inhumane.

— Oh, shit! — commented Lal Singh — I know this story! Remember the disco on the northern shore, the one kept by a Tanzanian guy with his wife?

— Exactly — supported Inaori — I could not understand how they had one child, and then one day, bang, there were four. Here is how.

— These can afford a dozen if they want — voiced Vikskef — on weekends, half the port is in their bar. They get the coins by shovel, wonder how the counter doesn't crack under the weight.

— Whiskey there is trash — said Ernst — I think it's all moonshine.

— He has since written "homebrew" — said Joy punctually.

Vikskef shrugged:

— A whiskey is a whiskey.

Ernst chuckled sarcastically:

— For you, kerosene would pass for whiskey, you Norway shaft.

Scandinavian gave him a scornful look:

— What do you understand, dandy.

10. The Cold War, pirates, and convicts

— Guys, let me listen already! — shouted Inaori — Warren Dixon is there.

— Who is that? — Vikskef asked.

— He advises the most serious governments on both sides of the Atlantic.

— Oh, that's interesting.

"... poorly disguised international robbery — the adviser was saying — compared to which, even offshores look harmless. Offshores introduce dumping to the tax market and suck financial resources from developed countries. But finances can still only operate in the real economy, so they have to be repatriated. And you have created a de-facto tax-free zone for low capex hi-tech and sucked in the most advanced production technology and the most effective developers. Your economy appropriates the fruits of huge investments in science and education made by

the developed countries. That's the source of the fantastic growth of your economy and your wealth that was "created from scratch". This is just piracy. Do you think you can get away with it?"

— How nice — smiled Torres — at the turn of the last century, when the West brain drained the countries of the Eastern bloc, somehow it has not been not piracy. Your governments were talking about free enterprise, economic competition, and globalization. Where are these words now? Hottentot morality? If I stole a cow from you, it's good, and if you stole one from me, it's suddenly a bad thing?

— That is, you admit that I'm right?

— Nothing like that. On the contrary, it is you admitting that you are in the position of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. You are losing the economic competition thanks to your bureaucratic management, as well as taxes and regulation that crush private initiative. Your politicians can now only, as Nikita Khrushchev did in the last century, bang a shoe on the UN podium and threaten to bury us.

Dixon laughed.

— You overestimate the influence of backyard players on the world politics.

— I might — Torres said, and rubbed his nose thoughtfully, — although, you know, at the end of the XVI century the Netherlands were a backyard of the sacred Habsburg Empire. Fast forward 50 years, and the Netherlands becomes a prosperous Republic, their possession spanning three oceans, with the Empire as their backyard. The history does sometimes repeat itself.

— And are you authorized to make such statements? — asked Dixon — Or do you want to provoke another international scandal on your personal initiative?

— Statements? — coordinator replied — no, I just quoted something from the history.

— You're just trying to use the show to advertise your country.

— Of course. As an employee of the Meganesia government, this is one of my duties.

— Well, at least, you answered this honestly.

— Answering the questions honestly is my responsibility as well.

From the table stood a stern elderly gentleman wearing the badge of International Bureau for Human Rights: "Are you willing to honestly admit that your government ignores all international humanitarian acts?"

— To be honest — I just do not know all the acts on this subject. I'm actually not a lawyer. Please list which ones have we, in your view, violated.

— I'll open up with the methods of warfare. They violate the Convention of 1907, 1929, 1936, 1949, 1977, and 2005. Your armed forces are engaged in sabotage on civilian objects on land and at sea, and in terror against the civilian population.

— Never heard of such a disgrace — said Torres — could you be more specific?

— Certainly. Your armed forces operation in the El Shana emirate two years ago. Seventeen civilians killed, the power plant, the central water supply system of the capital, the civil airport runway, and two interchanges on the main national highway were all destroyed.

— Wait a minute. Which civilians were in the residence of Sheikh Farhad? If you mean his guards, they were armed.

— His wife, five children, the staff.

Coordinator shrugged.

— Well, you know, it's still a war. Our army, at least, did not bomb the residential neighborhoods, as is customary in the military practice of so-called civilized countries. None but the immediate surroundings of Sheikh were physically hurt. The residents, of course, did suffer logistical, water and electricity supply inconveniences, but at war times these losses are inevitable.

— But Mr. Torres, to declare the war, to physically destroy the family of senior officials of the state, and to threaten the total destruction of the infrastructure of the country because of a minor misunderstanding with several citizens!

— It was not a minor misunderstanding — he snapped — the authorities of the emirate El Shana captured a civilian airliner, took hostage a group of tourists among whom were our citizens, and ignored our demand to release them to freedom.

— But there are diplomatic methods.

— There is the Magna Carta — interrupted Torres — every Meganesian citizen is under unconditional protection of the government. This protection does not depend on any policy or diplomacy, and is carried out by any means possible, with no exceptions.

— Do not play with words! — cried the lady from the Family Protection League — What kind of protection of the citizens may declare a government that legalizes slavery? Slave trade violates all conceivable norms of civilization!

— Slave trade? Slavery? — he asked — what are you talking about?

— Your practice of trafficking convicts.

— You probably mean the renting of law offenders companies with residential complexes in the protected perimeter? Which law is broken here? Why should society bear the costs of the prisons?

— What about the guards with whips? — asked the lady.

— On that, I'm afraid, you were misinformed — chuckled the coordinator.

— But the prisoners also forced to work, or will you deny that?

— I'll deny it, it's a hoax. We have the principle of informed consent. A convict can give it up and sit behind bars in a single box though the whole term. But it's uncomfortable. Of the approximately 8,000 prisoners in the country, less than 50 chose the option.

— And hard labor — that, in your opinion, is comfortable?

Torres scratched his head.

— That's not a resort, but no international commission on the rights of prisoners found any violations. According to them, the conditions on the closed Meganesian plants are about the level of Swedish prisons. Nutrition, lifestyle and health care is almost the same. They have

better sports equipment, but we have the sexual aspects covered. We have mixed contingent, without any restrictions on voluntary intercourse. The Swedes do not have this.

— What? Did you say? — the lady blushed, — you want to say that there ... in this prison ... your men and women are to each other ... it's disgusting!

Coordinator shrugged.

— I do not understand your frustration. The court sentenced them to prison, not to abstinence. According to the experts, our methods promote corrective recovery and socialization of offenders.

11. The problem of having sex in a collar

— Looks like the old lady has had it — Inaori giggled nastily.

— Yes — agreed Ernst — and this hag's sexual life isn't any better.

— Scary as a nuclear war — added Lal Singh.

— But look, the one who just replaced her is way better — said Vikskef.

His remark referred to a young woman, dressed in "military" style, with a sign on her chest saying "Jeanne Rohner".

— The report of the Human Rights Office suggests your inmates wear collars! Collars, on human beings. Try to have sex in a collar!

— I'd actually consider trying — Torres got up, untied the scarf and threw it carelessly on the table. There was a murmur in the studio, all eyes turned to the coordinator's neck, which was encircled by a translucent ring 2 centimeters wide — come here, Miss Rohner. Do not be afraid, I will not bite.

— He's trying in vain, — muttered Lal Singh — she won't sleep with him.

— How do you know? — retorted Inaori.

— It's clear.

— Boo! One Sigmund Freud you are.

— What makes you think I'm afraid? — replied Jeanne defiantly, and came around the table, to within arm's reach from the coordinator — well, I'm here, now what?

— As you can see, I'm wearing a tracking collar. You can test it and see it is the same as what our prisoners wear. I wear it on by the requirement of our security department, in accordance with a paragraph of my contract on the measures in high-risk environments.

— Big deal! — she snorted — you can always take it off.

— Unlikely, unless I learn to detach my own head. To remove it you need 4 hours with a diamond saw.

— Or just to know where to click to unlock it — added Jeanne sarcastically.

— It has no lock, Miss Rohner. It is a solid ring, you are more than welcome to check yourself.

— Oh I will — she said stubbornly, and putting forth her hand, began to feel the collar. The studio was very quiet. A few minutes later, the journalist got a pocket nail clipper out of her sleeve and looked at the coordinator.

— Go ahead — he allowed.

Once the blade came into contact with the collar, a cell phone in Torres's pocket rang. He answered the call, said, "under control, don't worry, I'm fine", and put it down.

Jeanne, meanwhile, tried hard to make a dent on the collar. On the next attempt, the nail clipper slid off the smooth surface and thrust a few millimeters in the coordinator's neck.

— Oh shit! — she said.

— You be careful there — he muttered — I'm alive after all.

At this point his cell phone rang again. He sighed and said into the phone: "That's okay ... I told you, no reason to worry ... yes, under my responsibility ... well, I'll take it into account. Lights out."

A few droplets of blood rolled down on his neck, gradually forming a fair red spot on his shirt. Photographers clicked their cameras excitedly.

— Mr. Torres, let me call the doctor and the police — said the host.

— Drop that nonsense — threw the coordinator unhappily, fitting a napkin he took off the table around his neck — it's just a scratch. But the charming Miss Rohner has just got on the front pages. Right, Miss?

— I'm sorry — murmured Jeanne — it was an accident. Can I somehow...

— Yes, you can. A dinner with a bottle of red. I was going to try the local Vineland. The advertisement declares their wine is made according to the ancient Vikings recipes. Exotics. Agreed? Good. Let's move on then.

Inaori giggled and turned to Lal Singh.

— How's that, Dr. Freud?

— Now is a different story. Who knew that she would poke a saw in him.

— Or maybe she did it on purpose — Joy suggested — we, the women, can be insidious.

— Oh! — Inaori shouted — look, the dude really looks like a penguin!

— ... Johnsen — said the penguin-like guy — I... uh... from ocean carriers association. We are concerned about the safety of navigation, in spite of... the... uh...

— Piracy — helped Torres.

— Yeah. Right. That.

— This is a problem — agreed coordinator — Piracy exists in these waters for more than 300 years, and we have not eliminated it entirely yet. But our government suggests all ship owners to install a satellite tracker. Figuratively speaking, same collar I have, but for the ship. In the event of an attack, we guarantee the arrival of maritime attack aircraft within a quarter of an hour. Any pirate ship will be destroyed, along with the crew, unconditionally and immediately. Pirates know it, and they never come closer than 10 miles to any vessel emitting at the frequencies of our system.

— We know that, sir.

— Is that so? — Torres was surprised — What's stopping you then from engaging in a contract with our armed forces? The price is three times less than the average shipping insurance premium. What is the problem?

— Our government prohibits relationships with... — Johnsen hesitated — ...with organizations like your armed forces. I would lose my marine license.

— Ah, that's it. In my opinion, this prohibition smells of directly aiding piracy.

— I do not know, sir Torres. We just ship goods. Politics are not our business. I would like to ask, perhaps, to if there is a diplomatic solution...

— There is no call for diplomacy here. You simply hire a team consisting of sailors in a Meganesian union and fail to notice they carried a tracking unit onboard. That's it. The rest is none of your worries.

— Really? — Johnsen was surprised — Why we did not know this?

— This question is certainly not for me. I recommend you establish regular contacts with our Maritime government agency. Informally, perhaps, if your officials don't endorse it. Unlike some governments, we do business, rather than put a spoke in the wheels of business for political reasons.

— I'm sorry — remarked the host nervously — we are running out of time.

— Our government is established to ensure humans' realization of their natural and inalienable rights, — continued Torres — these rights are: equality, liberty, security, property. That's what the revolutionary French Constitution did in 1793, and what the Magna Carta of Meganesia does today. We adhere to these guidelines and do not depart from them ever, under no circumstances, and under no pressure.

— Yes, of course — said the host even more nervously — thank you, Mr. Torres, for agreeing to do this meeting in the ABC-online studio, and I hope that...

The trio broke into wild laughter.

— Shat in his pants — stated Ernst.

— Exactly — supported Lal Singh.

12. Humanitarian self-defense and good publicity

After coming home at six o'clock in the morning, Malik slept in until noon. Helena, of course, has long since left for work, leaving a note on the refrigerator.

"You are reading this so you have already opened your eyes. I hope you'll have the energy to crawl to the beach at the rock python by 5pm, there will be a party and so on. Love, kisses".

Instead of a signature there was a bright-purple lip imprint. Helena insisted on never using a lipstick of a regular human color. Style...

Malik smiled, scratched his head and habitually poked two buttons, turning on the coffee machine and a computer, the major instruments of a professional journalist. A minute later a robot spew out the list of the trending articles.

The top ten included "an interview with the governor in a collar", Green world press. Malik whistled. Jeanne Rohner flawlessly capitalized on the nail clip mishandling. The episode with the sawing was presented in a photo. The subtitle said: "Our business is to serve the collective needs of our citizens for a bargain price (Hernando Torres, coordinator of the government of Confederation Meganesia)".

The article began with an incident in the studio: "Torres demonstratively refused to see a doctor, and continued the conference as if nothing happened. I thought originally he is playing a simple guy. Later, when we were sitting in a small cafe and drinking wine like a couple of clerks after work, he told me how he got into government and I realized: he wasn't playing.

Illustration: A photo of Torres in a cafe — apparently taken with a mobile phone.

"Torres is an entrepreneur in the field of tourism", wrote Jeanne. "He enthusiastically talked about the small hotel chain which he owns together with a companion. According to him, this job gave him the experience that allowed him to win the social competition, that is, the process by which the government is appointed in Meganesia. When I asked why he wanted to this, Torres said that it gives a good practice in business and also is a good advertising. This, according to him, is a commonplace motive for participation in tenders for the execution of government functions.

Illustration: The org chart of the Meganesian government.

"I asked Torres the same four questions I ask all politicians. Your biggest failure? Biggest achievement? Funniest accident? What are your dreams?

Here are his answers:

Failure: I've failed to convince Meganesian consortia to dramatically increase investment in fundamental sciences. The increase they approved is insufficient. We need our fundamental science to be the most dynamic in the world in order to maintain our strong growth in nuclear power engineering, computer science, and robotics.

Achievements: I will name two. First is the global police surveillance system. Now, all the key settled territories and highways are monitored by terrestrial and satellite webcams. Video streams are analyzed by computers 24/7. In case of any suspicious event, the police receives the alarm in a few seconds. I already mentioned the marine security system, it was created by the previous government. My second achievement is the creation of VECOM, our public system of higher education and distance training. This made it possible to double the number of students, primarily due to the fact that young women do not drop out of the educational process after giving birth.

Illustration: The screenshot of social advertising: a pretty woman with a baby at the laptop monitor. The baby stretches her fingers to the keyboard. The monitor shows the words: "Virtual Education Center Of Meganesia. Join now!". The subscript reads: "Hey kid, do you want to have a bachelor degree before you learn to walk?"

The funnies incident: international nudist motor rally. The police stopped them for driving without helmets. To solve the problem, I asked the security department to lend them helmets from stock. What I did not realize that the helmets wore insignia of the service. Imagine that?

Illustration: screenshot of a CNN report: twenty nude bikers in colored helmets with the logo of Road Police. Subscript: «Nude police patrols in Meganesia»

What do I dream of? Upturn the travel business, damn me! How? It's very simple! When it's winter in Montreal, people want to go to a warm sea. Where to head? Florida. And if you were in Europe? Egypt then. The trick in the price of the flight. A bit over 3,000 kilometers away from home — and the flight becomes more expensive than the hotel, besides, a few hours in an airplane seat is by itself no fun at all. Two years from now you will fly to Meganesia. For this, you will need to reach the seashore, and take a boat 12 miles from the shore. There, you take off from the sea, and within an hour you are on a Meganesian island. The ticket is 200 pounds round trip. The hotel is no frills, but the price is just £30 per day and it is first row to the ocean, we don't have other options, really. Oh yes, I forgot: during the trip, you will practically travel to the outer space, cruising at 20 Mach at an altitude of 60 kilometers. It's real!

Insert: a photo of an unusual aircraft, the subscript: Meganesian Starcraft erases distances. Europe — space — Pacific atolls, within 50 minutes. Visit our website for the details.

"Turns out it's not just a publicity stunt — writes Jeanne — Torres shared the history of the project. Unmanned cruise missile interceptor was first transformed into a manned attack aircraft of the ocean guard. Based on it, they developed a transport aircraft for rapid deployment of paratroopers. And then Torres came up with a partner to rebrand it into a 20-seat airliner. At one point, I even forgot I'm speaking with a politician and not a businessman. Then I realized: in Meganesia there is no political elite. Not even the concept of a political career. No sacred caste of statesmen we here are so accustomed to take for granted. A man comes to work in the government for 3 years, then returns to his everyday business. For him, government role is something like an internship for advanced training in conjunction with the chance to explore the world more widely, to see what you're worth, and to demonstrate the ability to tackle real challenges.

In Meganesia, the whole stratum of symbols associated with the government and seen as something sacred has vanished from people's consciousness. Meganesians have a special word — "Offie" — that refers to any officials or politicians of any country. If you ask about the relationship of Meganesia with the Philippines, you will hear a lot about Filipino traditions, folk medicine, and national cuisine, and nothing on politics. You proceed to ask about the Filipinos, and find yourself in a conversation about specific ethnic Filipinos, of which there are many in Meganesia. You may ask: what about Caroline crisis over maritime boundary? They will say the crisis is not with the Philippians, but with Philippine Offies. There is a huge difference. A Meganesian history textbook says, "1/9/1939 German Offies sent an army to Poland" and "20/09/1941 Japanese Offies sent aircraft to bomb Pearl Harbor." You will not find that one nation attacked another, and captured it, or that a country freed itself from colonial rule another. "In 1950 the British Offies lost control of India" — as it says. Reading this interesting tutorial, I stumbled upon a well-framed definition:

"State is a system of open violence against the people, exercised in the interests of oligarchic clans. Oligarchic clans are narrow groups of people which have, by force, bribery, or fraud, assumed unlimited political power and exercise it, allegedly on behalf of the people. The oligarchic clans are distinguished according to their way of assuming power:

1. aristocratic or feudal (armed seizure of power)
2. plutocratic capitalist, or (bribery of the crowd)
3. ochlocratic and theocratic (mass fraud)

Plutocratic and ochlocratic regimes often disguise as democratic. According to the law of the Confederation of Meganesia, any attempt to create a state is considered a particularly severe crime, and is punishable by the supreme measure of humanitarian self-defense."

In search of the meaning of this mysterious phrase, I flipped through the book and found:

"After the proclamation of the Magna Carta, the so-called Batak National Party (NBP) has made an attempt to seize power by force, and to establish a state. This performance was prevented by the army of Convention. 47 NBP leaders appeared before the Supreme Court and were sentenced to the highest degree of humanitarian self-defense: execution."

After that, I realized why our official press opposes Meganesia so aggressively. "The founding fathers" must be uncomfortable to realize their habit of speaking on behalf of the nation could in one day end up with "the highest humanitarian measure of self-defense". Especially as, looking at the clinging to the power of our political elite, this idea does not cause much internal protest.

Of course, I am not so naive as to believe the words of coordinator Torres and a history textbook. Some things should be checked at the face value. I now have in my pocket a ticket and a bright color booklet with photos of the atolls with the words "Welcome to Meganesia", along with a memo from the US government: "Meganesia, as a country with an extremist political regime, is recognized as particularly unfavorable for tourism. Going there, you are putting your life in danger", Well, the risk is for a noble cause. Read my next report from the capital of Meganesia, three days from now.

Under Jeanne Rohner's article was a blinking banner: "this is one of the most discussed topics of the blogosphere". Malik scratched his head and clicked the mouse.

The top 10 headlines were:

1. The memo is boolshit. I visited Meganesia last month. No problems with either the border control or the police. The festivals are to die for. Beaches, girls, everything. Three times cheaper than Hawaii.
2. Meganesians are fascists. You can be shot on the street without a trial. Or sold into slavery in the mines. Easily. And no one will help you.
3. Last year at a festival in Meganesia. Cool! Really a free country! And in Washington, too, it is time for stand someone against the wall. Long live Magna Carta!
4. Meganesia is same as Cuba, same commies only worse. They and the Chinese have already divided the entire Pacific Ocean. That way soon the white man will have no place in the world.
5. Meganesians rob the civilized world, poaching our brains. They are worse than computer pirates. Why has the West not teamed up against them?

6. I'm sick of islamists in Paris. The government is afraid of them. Police does not do a damn thing. Why don't we have such a charter, same as Meganesia? Enough is enough!

7. Meganesia is a satanic country. A nursery of pornography, prostitution, illicit sex and nudism. The churches conduct black masses. The most horrible place in the world.

8. I am from Edinburgh. I teach higher mathematics in Meganesia through the Internet. I do not know what's up with fascism, but their students are stronger than ours, and the pay is better.

9. Hey People! A noon, 3 days from now, in Frankfurt, a flash mob for Meganesian great charter in Europe. 4000 people are already in. Details on my website.

10. In my workshop, half of the income goes to taxes. I'm tired with feeding idle migrants. Selling my house in Stockholm and buying one in Meganesia.

Malik chuckled and took a sip of coffee has already cooled down.

"What a sleazy guy, this Torres!", he thought, "from a hostile stage, such an advertisement for his enterprise, all at public expense. And at no point his contract was violated, which he looks accustomed to. Maybe I'd invest in Meganesia Starcraft stock? Sure as hell, it's about to skyrocket".