I

The Airplane Made of Glass

July 19, 2104

The airplane has been in flight for a while. Julia presses herself into the glass chair and stares at the pilot, who is making headway against the fuming clouds. Display panels and dozens of lights are blinking. Down below, in the freight hold, suitcases and packages are tipping from one side to the other. Otherwise, nothing happens for miles.

"That's how the future looks, Pathein," she says quietly.
"An airplane made of glass."

"A beautiful future," Pathein groans.

His expressive eyes, which stand out against his otherwise delicate facial features, shine darkly. He's wearing a yellow skirt, a white top and a shiny, golden-yellow cap that covers his black hair. They are the clothes native to his homeland: Myanmar.

The plane softly leans into a left turn. The young man in the cockpit takes a step to the side, yawns, and stretches out his arms. Frazzled, Julia looks from her light blue chiffon dress down to her ankle boots. Red shoes that race through the clouds. When she first saw a glass airplane last year at the Doha airport, she had promised herself she'd never get into such a thing. So much for that. She sighs and then closes her eyes.

The plane's rocking reminds her of a camel ride in Chaur al-Udaid a year ago that she had participated in on March 29th, 2103, during the 50th anniversary of the worldwide ban on fossil fuels and atomic energy. In the evening, thousands of people attended the extinguishing of the lights during Earth Hour at the commemorative event at the continental sea. Texts were read aloud conveying with what awe people in the year 2053 spoke about the ban and that they didn't think it was possible for something like that to happen. But it did happen. Like so many other things.

Julia gets goosebumps on her arms. She pushes a blond strand of hair out of her face and looks over to Pathein.

"What do you think, will all of the nation-states come?"

"Let's see what else they come up with," he answers without raising his head. "No one has canceled so far."

Everything is different now that all parts of the world are becoming increasingly interconnected and suddenly everyone has access to information that had previously been reserved only for CEOs and ministers. Driven primarily by politically committed young people, in quick succession a large number of social enterprises have emerged that dedicate themselves to the community instead of to maximizing profit, and they use new, digital processes to rely on transparency and sincerity. Just like they depend on the pricing machines that make it possible to find out what the production cost of each product is. Suddenly, customers express

their discontent in stores if products are offered at inflated costs or if manufacturers in other parts of the world are cheated. Now, no one dares to deviate from the profit standards calculated for them or dares disregard environmental or social standards.

What also belongs to the new culture of transparency are fact-based decisions about citizens, that anyone, anywhere in the world can use to independently inform themselves about everything and take a political stance on issues. It's astonishing how united people can be about allegedly complicated political questions, even though, after decades, the heads of states have never pulled off this kind of unity. In a short matter of time, the quarrels that caused many years of fights and even wars were set aside.

A green flashing light above the pilot indicates the landing approach. The red-brown landscape is permeated by an interplay of light-colored, salty white and dark-gray black spots. The dark spots continue to dissolve into individual structures.

"So there are the weapons," Pathein says. They are becoming increasingly visible: tanks, drones, artillery and combat robots—robots with artificial intelligence that can kill people automatically.

Julia also looks down in deep concentration. "What on earth are the states thinking! This stuff must go. It worked with chemical weapons too."

"It is what it is," Pathein mumbles. "They'll come to their senses, eventually."

They hear the pilot through the loudspeaker, “Mrs. Avalux, Mr. U Tin, we’ll be landing soon.” In the middle of the desert, a spot of green emerges from the bronze-colored landscape. Julia feels a little excitement running through her, just like back in the day, right before moderating a television show. She secretly looks over at Pathein, who radiates nothing but calm. With a quiet smile, she thinks, once an engineer, always an engineer. That’s something you can rely on.

They can already see the regional landing strip. They land, nice and soft, thanks to modern, magnetic devices that have replaced the old landing gear all over the world. In the light of the evening sun, one can see a few houses surrounded by trees and bushes, and a hill behind the settlement that’s crowned by a prominent tree. Several dozen airplanes are already waiting on the maneuvering field; among them are two enormous transport aircraft, which were evidently used to bring weapons to Anninarra. Some airport buildings are recognizable in the background; they all appear improvised, like the tower which has been welded onto the roof of a public bus. Slowly, they circle around the airplanes that are parking and stop directly next to a red carpet that leads to a big, blue-gray hall made of corrugated iron.

A middle-aged woman in light-colored clothing approaches them. She’s accompanied by a swarm of camera drones.

“Well,” says Pathein, as he quickly stands up, “we’re now on air.”

Julia puts on her beaming smile for the camera. Likewise, she stands up and casually straightens her dress. Despite wearing flats, she’s still a foot taller

than Pathein. With a hissing sound, the cabin door opens and a gush of hot air seeps in.

When Julia and Pathein walk down the stairs and onto the rug, they feel a light breeze that makes the evening heat more bearable. The woman in light-colored clothing radiates calm and confidence. She walks toward Julia and Pathein and greets them with a friendly smile.

“Madam President,” Julia says and indicates she’s going to bow. Pathein nods curtly. In addition to a cream-colored pantsuit,
Ghazala Hussain wears a translucent, white veil with a fern pattern that reaches down to her back and nearly hides her dark-blue colored hair. The subtle green of her eyeshadow emphasizes the forty-five-year-old’s dark eyes. Earlier, she had been a pediatrician in Peshawar, but now, she is the president of one of the most important institutions in the world.

Accompanied by camera drones, they walk through the corrugated iron hall, which is usually an ordinary hangar, and pause there. A diverse babble of voices greets them.

“We’re all here,” the president says and smiles gently. The red rug continues through the hangar up to a flat stage, next to which a flagpole stands. The seats for the state representatives are arranged around the podium and are completely filled. Almost reverent, Julia, Pathein, and President Hussain regard the scene.

"We now welcome," echoes through the hangar, "Ghazala Hussain, the President of the Circle of One Thousand, the organization of the creative and courageous, as well as Julia Avalux and Pathein U Tin at her side."

"Were all the seats really raffled off?", Julia whispers to the president.

She nods and smiles mischievously. "No one protested."

She gives a sign, and all three of them set themselves in motion, past the President of the Republic of Korea, Choi Bo-seon, and past Tanaka Takeo the Prime Minister of Japan, who are huddled together, a row ahead of them. The President of the European Union, Dr. Jordranka Scheljaskow, is up in front, and looks across the rows of seats behind her. Covertly, Julia searches the faces in the crowd. The mood is much better than she expected. She thinks, maybe we even took a weight off their shoulders in the end, because now all of the weapons are here. What head of state would want to be a murderer?

Halfway to the podium, they walk past a group of a dozen people who are standing in the way. One of their signs reads: "We are the people," another reads: "Give the states back their weapons."

President Hussain, Julia, and Pathein stop in front of the protestors, while camera drones gather above them to capture the scene. Whenever influential people come together for important events, there must be a prominent opportunity to speak out in opposition. Even this recommendation, which the Circle of One Thousand once gave many years ago, has, in the meantime, become self-evident for the entire world.

A man about age seventy with white, slightly greasy hair, steps forward from the group. “We demand,” he calls into the hall, “that the states get their weapons back. Right now! States have always had their own weapons. It’s part of their sovereignty. You can’t simply overturn a law of nature that has always existed.”

President Hussain looks over to two women from the security service who have already discreetly positioned themselves. “The only law of nature that people have to answer for is plain and simply to survive,” she answers him. “Whatever helps this planet continue to exist is welcomed. Whatever destroys us and our environment, like weapons of war, needs to disappear. That is the only law that we can really follow. All the states have agreed to this; otherwise, we wouldn’t be here today.”

The man continues to look grim, but then he steps aside with all the others. The arguments are exchanged and made available to the public for anyone who is interested.

Followed by Julia and Pathein, President Hussain continues with rapid steps toward the stage, where all three of them sit down on white chairs. With Pathein in his yellow longyi, Julia in her blue chiffon dress, and President Hussain with her almost see-through veil, they radiate an authority that is hard to resist.

It’s finally time. The president stands up and looks engagingly out into the crowd from the middle of the stage.

“The last instruments of war,” she calls into the assembly, “have been brought to Anninarra this morning. Concurrently, all of the states of the world

have agreed on the complete demilitarization, including the dissolution of all military structures. With that, we've fulfilled the essential objective to which we committed ourselves in the Agreements of Maropeng. Never again will a state have the opportunity to wage war. As much as we're unwilling to tolerate violence between individuals, we can no longer tolerate the use of violence between states. I thank you all, honored heads of state and government leaders, that in the end, you energetically supported this great change that grew out of the ranks of the world's population."

Pathein looks over at Julia, who has her head tilted to the side. Sure, there were states who rather quickly agreed to demilitarization. But there were also those who fought for their weapons until the very end. Without having broad support from the world's population, today's result would not have been achieved.

Ghazala Hussain turns to her left. "In the last decades, an almost infinite variety of ways of life have emerged throughout humanity. No robots or machines can replace what every individual on this earth contributes with their creativity and intelligence. In its now over fifty-year history, the Circle of One Thousand has been a part of this development. Our name is closely connected to the fight against human rights violations and for disarmament worldwide. That's how, in the year 2057, we helped keep the fight for the Lomonossov Ridge in the North Sea from turning into a war. It was our voting platforms at the time, which ensured that the leaders of government could no longer push through a military confrontation in their own countries."

Joy shines in President Hussain's eyes. Denmark and Russia were at war. A fight for the use of natural resources in the Artic Ocean. Within a short amount of time, so many people were mobilized that the governments could demand what they wanted. No one followed them. The Danish Head of Government Niels Ørsted von Det Konservative Folkeparti and the Russian President Adelina Prokofjeva of the Demokratischeskaja partija Rossii both had egg on their faces. There were neither injured nor casualties, only some property damage to a Danish frigate. Since then, there were no more military conflicts. What for? In a globalized world, war means as much damage for oneself as it does for one's opponent.

"For us it was a matter of course," President Hussain says, "to support the initiative that Julia Avalux and Pathein U Tin started for the permanent demilitarization of all the states. It was a long and arduous road, but it was worth it."

Once again, the president turns a little more towards the rest of the audience. "The agreements of Maropeng, which by now have been signed by all the states, have taken us a significant step forward, even if we didn't achieve our original goal of making all weapons unusable. Just as on earlier occasions, I say in all openness that I think this is a mistake. Nevertheless, I supported this decision, in order not to endanger the success of the entire project. For the negotiation process, the states of the world as well as the Circle of One Thousand must make concessions: every state will receive ten percent of the weapons stocks present today. But these weapons will be stored here in Anninarra and we, the Circle of

One Thousand, will take over the supervision. Independent examination commissions will monitor the further demilitarization of the states, and I say it here very clearly: If we become aware of any appropriation of weapons or rebuilding of military structures, we will make it publicly known and we will persecute those responsible with the utmost vigor. Don't underestimate our capabilities to mobilize people again and, with the help of the agreements from Maropeng, to achieve a conviction before an international court."

The president's voice is loud. She falls silent for a brief moment, then she continues: "And we have engaged the two people who initiated the demilitarization campaign to supervise the weapons warehouse. Both of them have led organizations that couldn't be more different. Nevertheless, it was important to them to work closely together on this important issue, which is so fundamental to humanity. That's why Julia Avalux and Pathein U Tin have taken over the leadership of the weapons warehouse. Ladies and gentlemen, you will not regret putting this great responsibility in our hands."

The president takes a step to the side. Three women and three men wearing blue work overalls stand next to each other in front of the flagpole. A general comes towards them. She is about fifty, and her light-colored uniform is decorated with medals. Julia and Pathein stand up, and along with them, the entire audience. Somewhere from the vast space, a quiet "Att-ten-tion!" can be heard. It gives the impression that some of those present are actually adopting a military stance. Two co-workers begin to slowly and respectfully take down the flag of the defense alliance. That is the organization that has been commissioned by the

states to bring the weapons to Anninarra. Then, in a kind of military ceremony, they step back in line with the others and begin to fold the flag until it only looks like a colorful package with three corners. One of them goes up to the general and gives her the small, cleanly folded bundle. Without showing any emotion, the general bows to the delegation, rigidly turns around and, with a spring in her step, walks to the general secretary of the defense alliance. Emeka Asma'u is a man around sixty years old who comes from Nigeria, where he was president for many years.

"This flag," the general says loudly and in a celebratory way, "represents all states of the world."

With these words, she bestows the bundle of material to Emeka Asma'u. An era of the military comes to an end. The general takes three steps back and for a few seconds remains standing behind Asma'u. Then she salutes one last time and turns to President Husssain, who has been following the proceedings from the edge of the stage.

The general takes off her necklace, which has an oval stone attached. She hands this, together with another necklace that someone hands to her, to Ghazala Hussain. The president holds both necklaces, one in the left hand, the other in the right, up high and subsequently gives them to Julia and Pathein. She indicates to both of them that they should raise their right hands and formally repeat after her: "We swear to faithfully implement the agreements of Maropeng and with that protect the rights and freedom of the world's population, as the Book of the World's Identity is our witness!"

President Hussain grabs their hands; each of them holds a stone plate with a colorful key.

“I’m handing you both a control key to the weapons in this warehouse.” One after the other, she takes the necklaces out of Julia and Pathein’s hands and lays them around their necks.

“In addition to these two keys, a third one will remain with the state that has warehoused the weapons, and a fourth key will be randomly given to another state. A fifth and final key will remain with me. Only with all five keys together can the weapons be unlocked and used.”

With these words, President Hussain takes a step back and bows slightly. Julia and Pathein also bow towards the audience, who express their joy over the new achievements.

President Hussain ends the event with a few final words. The hangar empties out surprisingly quickly. Soon the first airplanes start up. The president also says her goodbyes to Julia and Pathein.

“I wish you much success. You’re probably looking forward to finally getting started.”

Without waiting for an answer, she sets off down the red carpet. Julia and Pathein look after her. “Well, that would be a job for you,” Pathein whispers to Julia and smiles provocatively.

“Never! Let someone else do it. I could use some peace and quiet.”

“We probably won’t overwork ourselves here,” Pathein says. “And that would be good for us, after all the excitement of the last years.”

A woman steps onto the stage and comes over to them.

"Saliha Mujaj," she introduces herself. "I'm the senior administrative officer in Anninarra. I'm pleased to meet you."

Pathein and Julia shake her hand. In the meantime, the hangar is nearly deserted. Employees and their robot assistants begin to put aside the chairs and take everything apart. The only thing still laying there, untouched, is the blood-red carpet that stretches from the podium in a straight line to the airport. The carpet leads out of the hall into the deep black of the night.

"Come please," the administrative officer says. "I'll show you where you'll be staying. We should hurry; the festivities for Survival Day will begin soon."

2

SURVIVAL DAY

July 19, 2104

A glass car waits before the hall. The seats glow a light blue.

"At least we're not flying," Pathein comments dryly.

Julia abruptly stops while getting in the car.

"What's that buzzing?" she asks. She hears an unpleasant, scraping noise, quiet, but penetrating.

"Oh, that," Mujaj answers, "that's just the robotic fighters. They have to move around once in a while. It's a technological requirement for them to stay functional."

Julia looks at Pathein and tries to imagine what that could mean: hundreds of robotic fighters, as big as small cars, that propel their four legs more or less rhythmically through the air.

“Don’t worry, they’re outside of the settlement. They can’t hurt us,” the administrator assuages Julia and gets into the car.

Between their feet, a countdown appears on the see-through floor of the car. Three, two, one, then they’re off. Julia and Pathein look with curiosity at the houses along the street, which are decorated with colorful lanterns. After a short time, the self-driving car turns right and stops a hundred meters later on the left-hand side.

They’re standing in front of a flat building with an entrance and six windows on either side of it. The air smells slightly sweet of resin.

“That’s the back part of the Roadhouse,” Mujaj explains. “The main entrance is at the front, around the corner.”

She gestures in the direction of a small, illuminated courtyard, which may have once been a gas station for internal combustion vehicles. Mujaj opens the door to the Roadhouse and shows Julia and Pathein the way to their rooms.

“See you in half an hour?” she asks Julia on parting, and Julia and Pathein nod.

At the agreed-upon time, Pathein is the first to appear back on the street in a fresh cotton suit. Saliha Mujaj is already waiting for him. She’s wearing a modest evening gown and has combed her hair back. Julia arrives after a few minutes wearing an elegant, dark-blue dress and luxurious jewelry. Pathein

mumbles a compliment that makes Julia turn red. Although he is ten years older than Julia, he suddenly feels young again.

Together they pass the two-lane main street that lays deserted before them, and they reach the foot of a mountain. Some muted lanterns guide their way up, where everything is illuminated in all the colors. In the distance, one can hear voices and music.

Both women walk ahead. Bit by bit, the exuberant voices and music get louder. They take a break at a bend shortly before their goal and look back at the settlement, a colorful, glittering sea of lanterns. Everywhere in the world, the same spectacle is taking place: Everywhere you look there's blinking and flashing; in apartment complexes, in suburbs, in villages, in the country, in the forests and deserts, in the ocean and the mountains, every light as unique as an individual person. That's how Survival Day is spent—the first festival on Earth that is celebrated by all people together.

Moved with emotion, they walk the last few meters up the hill. A group of happy people are standing together at the top; others dance to loud music, laughing and celebrating. A man walks backwards, so Julia and Mujaj unexpectedly move aside. Pathein grabs the man by his arm. The man turns around and at first, he looks at Pathein confused, before, with a glass in his hand, he hugs him in a friendly way and then continues walking. Further to the right, two women and a man have taken each other's hands. First, they raise their right, then their left leg, then they turn around in a circle. Julia laughs behind her hand.

The rhythm of the music spreads to Pathein. Nondescriptly, Pathein begins to tap his hand on his hip along with the beat.

In the semi-darkness behind the party guests, he recognizes a tree, perhaps a mangrove, with colorful lights on the branches. The tabletop in front of it bends under the abundance of food and drinks. Pathein stands still for a moment in order to enjoy the view.

Every day we are haunted by negative headlines about world events that make it difficult for us to believe in a positive future. We all fight every day to ensure that our children and grandchildren will also have a good life on Earth. But what would a world look like where humanity has solved fundamental problems like war, hunger, and environmental destruction and secured its long-term survival on Earth?

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Christian Buske lives and works in Schleswig-Holstein. The daily negative headlines about world events and their literary interpretation in apocalypse dramas and dystopias prompted him to develop an alternative vision. What might a world look like where humanity's fundamental problems, such as war, hunger, and environmental destruction, have been solved and humanity’s long-term survival on Earth has been secured?

Further information can be found on his blog:
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