

Utopiasphere

by Darryl Purcell

WHY WE LIKE IT:

There's a curious cleanliness at work in this hermetic futuristic flash and we like the way Purcell creates a credible alternative reality. Every detail is as matter of fact as chairs and tables in our own world. The voice, which reaches into the bot-o-sphere, is a synchronization of Kubrick's 'Hal' and Max Headroom. And there's some yucks, too. Quote: 'Brad is a piece of shit,' Karl thought, but would never say out loud. 'I wish he would fall off into a pasteurization tank.'

Third Level Homogenization Director Karl Stanley arrived at the Gardenia Dairy Creamisphere early Thursday morning with a feeling of dread.

“Good morning, Sir,” the great clock said as Karl pushed his face into the sand recognition box. Once the machine identified him, it punched his card. “It is 3 a.m., Thursday, May 22, 1952. Enjoy your day, Mr. Stanley.”

Karl stepped onto the sidewalk belt that took him toward the Creamorial Tower. As he progressed through the first floor and upward toward his destination, he watched the large glass tanks being filled with milk unloaded from dairy trucks. He couldn't help but think how much the corporation's technology had progressed over the last five years. Where there were once more than 150 employees, he saw the current contingent of seven dairy engineers operating the automated loading docks.

“Amazing, but sad,” Brad Sullivan said as his belt united with Karl’s on its way to the Tower. “In a mere 13 years, America has gone from a jingoistic warring nation to a country of science and peace. Our technological growth has flourished while we have also learned to live together in an atmosphere of tolerance. On the other hand, there are only a few of us still employed. Our utopia is beginning to fray.”

“Brad is a piece of shit,” Karl thought, but would never say out loud. “I wish he would fall off the belt into a pasteurization tank.”

Karl, who had worked for Gardenia since 1940, had quite a few reasons for his hostility. Brad had been with the company for less than a year – a year where more than half of the company’s employees were laid off – and was now also a homogenization director. He was obviously Machiavellian in his efforts to succeed. The suspicion was that Brad must have revealing pictures of Company Manager Thomas Loman with Gardenia Mascot Bertha the Grinning Cow.

The two men arrived at the Creamorial Tower ready to conduct a rhapsody of dairy product transportations. The circular room with the glass dome stood high above the open-design, ground-and-air dock structure. All the way around the base of the room was a color-coded, continual, switchboard system. Brad stepped to the ground exchange while Karl began setting the aerial plugs.

As Brad pulled plugs out and shoved them into jacks, giant robotic arms mirrored his actions on the dock floor by moving and attaching hose lines to tanks where the milk was being pumped for in-house processing. Karl did the same to conduct the flow of the finished product into the giant white autogyro-drones that were loading up to deliver the dairy products to front porches all over the city.

“You realize that someday robots will be standing here instead of us,” Brad said.

“We direct the robots, Brad. Robots can follow our directions, but they can’t think, therefore, they cannot direct.”

“Yet,” Brad said in a voice that could have curdled a vat of cream.

As much as Karl hated Brad, he knew he was probably right. The gift of technology was souring. Karl remembered his enthusiastic optimism when he attended the 1939 New York World’s Fair. He had completely embraced the event’s vision of the World of Tomorrow. Humanity had reached a crossroads in 1939: Develop weapons of mass destruction and prepare for a global war *OR* embrace peaceful technology for the betterment of mankind and accept and tolerate diverse cultures.

Karl saw the amazing growth of mechanization during the early 1940s as most Americans agreed with his philosophy, including Peace Party candidate Charles Lindbergh who was elected president in 1940. While Europe and Asia boiled in barbarism, the United States prospered and advanced beyond what Alex Raymond had predicted in his comic strip.

American businesses and farms joined together to become giant corporations with government-assisted research and development programs. While nations on the other side of the world spent their fortunes on military weapons, President Lindbergh and Congress transferred all military spending into technological research. California and New York became the biggest robotic manufacturing centers in the world. Most Americans were employed in the construction of metal-laborers.

America was protected by the amazing size of its two oceans, and a president who believed that problems could be better solved through diplomacy instead of destruction. In 1941,

Lindbergh brought home the Declaration of Peaceful Existence signed by the chancellor of Germany and the emperor of Japan.

And, by 1946, one out of every four American homes had an autogyro-car in the garage. In 1949, President Lew Ayres carried on Lindbergh's legacy by signing the Americas Non-Aggression Pact with the presidents, chancellors, premiers and chairmen of National Socialist Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina, Fascist Brazil and Cuba. Hollywood boomed with its technologically superior motion pictures that were shown on 360-degree screens throughout the country. Most citizens were amazed at how much that industry had improved from the inferior products the film studios produced in 1939.

But by 1951, Karl began to see a chink in the American mechanization. The market for metal laborers was becoming saturated. Robot manufacturing plants began the great layoffs. Many other industries, like Gardenia, had replaced most of its employees with unique metal transfer systems – robots.

“Did you watch the government channel this morning, Karl?” Brad said. “Our utopian society is in a lot of trouble. With 50 percent of the men in this country unemployed, we have a lot of families who feel betrayed. And President Ayres is going to take the blame. The voters are going to demand change.”

“It was Ayres and Lindbergh who pulled us out of the Depression and put everyone back to work!” Karl said as he pointed to the milk delivery drones above the plant. “Just look up there. We have a sky full of peaceful drones carrying Gardenia Grinning Cow dairy products to families. I see a large tri-plane loaded down with televisions and cigarettes being flown to poor people in Canada. Fathers are flying their families to the beach in their autogyros and the Brooklyn Dodgers Commuter Zeppelin is headed for LaGuardia Field.

“Sure we’re going through a period of high unemployment,” he said, “but things will get better. President Ayres hasn’t wasted a dime of taxpayer money on military spending. He’s putting all his efforts into rebuilding our economy. And just today, he returned from a meeting with Chancellor Wernher von Braun and announced that Germany is now ready to engage in free trade with the United States. Prosperity is just around the corner.”

Brad didn’t get to respond, as both men turned toward the first explosion. The sky lit up with aerial combat between hundreds of jet-powered Heinkel fighter planes and unarmed milk delivery drones, family autogyros and commuter zeppelins.

“Looks like those night classes in German will come in handy,” Brad said as the first of many V-9 rockets began to drop out of the sky.

AUTHOR’S NOTE:

I enjoy reading both real and alternative history. Throughout the last century, there were so many pivotal time periods during which Western civilization could have made very wrong turns, with drastic consequences. Obviously, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s rose-coloured fantasy and declaration of ‘peace in our time’ had nothing to do with Europe’s reality of September 1938. And, at that time, there were also several members of the United States congress who didn’t see Hitler’s Germany as a threat. Quite often the best laid plans of rodents and politicians can land folks in a rattrap.

The question: ‘What if...?’ opens a writer of alternative history to so many possibilities that one just has to make a choice and follow the characters. What if the American peace movement of 1939 had taken hold enough for the U.S. government to turn a blind eye to Nazi atrocities? ‘Utopiasphere’ answers that question with one of many dire possibilities.

Having started off my adulthood in the Vietnam War, I tend to be a bit of a cynic concerning politics. That cynicism worked in my favour during my later years as an editorial cartoonist. In that occupation, I questioned everything while illustrating real political actions in a manner that readers would find thought provoking and/or humorous. My literary influences currently include Stuart Kaminsky, Max Schulman and Lee Goldberg, cartoonist Walt Kelly, Bill Mauldin and Don Rico, plus many writers and illustrators from the amazing pulp publications of the 1930’s and ‘40’s.

BIO:

I have worked as an illustrator in television animation, educational comic books, editorial cartooning, young reader books and quite a few other avenues as a designer and cartoonist. I have also been a daily newspaper editor and a county public information director and have earned many statewide journalism awards for my cartoons, columns and editorials. I'm a Vietnam veteran and am currently retired, other than my pulps and a few short story submissions. I currently write two pulp-style series (Hollywood Cowboy Detectives and The Man of the Mist) available on Kindle and paperback editions on Amazon: [amazon.com/author/darrylepurcell](https://www.amazon.com/author/darrylepurcell) I also had a Vietnam war murder mystery published in *Heater* magazine early in 2016 and an early version of the first Hollywood Cowboy Detectives, called 'Oaters' in *Mysterical-e* magazine.