



## RADIO SILENCE

### *Silencio de radio*

Anthony López-Get\* 

Soledad holds on to the handle by the window, preventing her body to float away. She holds tight, more than she needs in zero gravity, but the sight of planet Earth in flames justifies the grip, the need for an anchor. The International Space Station, placed in advance at a safe distance from possible debris, still grants her a privileged view of the event. This particular tiny glass in the Tranquility Node provides the best angle. All cameras and sensors record every second, for scientific purposes, of course. After several hours of mass destruction have passed in complete silence, Soledad utters her first post-Earth words.

“So that’s the end of it all. A big ball of fire.” She pauses to drink from a bottle of vodka and dries a few tears with her sleeve. “Who would’ve thought I would be the one and only surviving member of an entire species.? Not only that. . . the one and only specimen of an entire planet! The one and only earthling! That’s an improvement, better than all my awards and PhD’s! Wait a minute! I can’t be an earthling if there is no Earth, right?”

Soledad reflects on the issue for a moment, then she lets go off the handle to float free and allows some more booze to help with the thinking process.

“Anyway Sole, this is your moment of glory! Isn’t it? You are the greatest physicist alive, the most intelligent human being, the fastest, the strongest, the most beautiful, the sexiest, the funniest, the bravest...” A thought chokes her. “Well, that one is true. I am the bravest indeed. I was brave at least. I was brave even when there were other humans around. I was the only one who preferred endless solitude and confinement over extinction. I decided to remain here and record everything, for scientific and historical purposes of course. I was left behind by the entire human race to keep humanity’s knowledge. Someone had to be here to prepare the RAID from single hard-drives, to receive and store the information, to backup, broadcast, control, program, solder, solve...” she sobs, but manages to go on, “I single-handedly prepared the entire database, linked the remaining satellites, programmed the broadcasting loop, I...” this time she cannot help herself from crying, and her tears filled the room like floating crystal shards, each one shining with a reddish glow.

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\* Universidad de Costa Rica. San José, Costa Rica. Doctor en Estudios de la Sociedad y la Cultura (UCR). Profesor asociado de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa y actual coordinador de la Maestría en Literatura Inglesa (UCR).

Correo: [anthony.lopez@ucr.ac.cr](mailto:anthony.lopez@ucr.ac.cr). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9452-861X>

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“All the others ran to their deaths. That’s not brave, that’s stupid! From a scientific point of view, being able to witness the death of a planet from a close distance and being also the sole guardian and curator of human knowledge is an opportunity you get once in a lifetime,” she chuckled in a sad way. “But no! All of them just took their rubbish and flew away to their families and children, to die. They wasted their lives and brains for some antiquated, overrated, emotional load of shit...” She takes another sip from the bottle. “Well, fuck them! They were weak. I respected them as professionals. Miranda could have saved me two weeks of work on the satellite communication links, she was a genius with that crap, and Alex, a surgeon with the bloody robotic arm. I struggled with that piece of junk just to readjust a few modules to the Unity Node. And Nikolaev, my dear Nikolaev, he would’ve made me more of this vodka from those potatoes the Japanese were growing back there. But all of them are gone,” she lets out a long and painful sigh, “literally, forever, gone, turned to ashes. And I was left alone to witness how all they died, how everything just burnt down. It took just a few rocks to transform Earth into fire, and in a few decades from now into dirt.”

She pauses, deep in thought, until something lights her face up.

“Well, that sounds good actually, ‘Planet Dirt,’ that’s what it is, isn’t it? That’s what it actually was all the time. That’s what we all were. Dirt. I am a ‘dirtling,’ carrying dirt wherever I go. I am transmitting dirt to the deepest corners of the universe. . . What am I doing here? Is this even worth the sacrifice? I don’t know how to feel. This is completely new for anybody to know. Six psychologists, six! And not even one of them could have told me anything of use to prepare for this. They didn’t have a clue. We all have lost close ones, family, dogs, friends, and lovers, they’ve left you, they’ve betrayed you, or they’ve just died, but you always had someone to go to, or something, a job to do, a research to carry out, a physical to pass, a paper to write, a colleague to beat, professionally speaking of course,” she produces another sad giggle, “but how do you cope with mass extinction? "How do you cope with having nothing else to do besides ensuring that this tin can continues broadcasting 'humanity' to anyone out there who cares to listen, as long as your resources last, your muscles continue to shrink, and the tin can holds?"

She yells to the ball of fire through the window “What for? What do they care for humanity? What do they care for Van Gogh or Atwood or Hawking or Cortazar or Butler or Freud or the other guy? hmm, what’s his name? Lacan, yes, Lacan! Who gives a fuck about Lacan? Who gives a fuck about me?”

After a long and deep sigh, and many more reddish droplets, she mutters, “It just so happens, I’m also the stupidest, loneliest, and saddest of all human beings. . . Who’s up for a game of Solitaire? I guess that must be me. Soledad.”



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