

# The boy with a story

## **Abstract**

This is the story of some crazy guy that claims he comes from the future and he is here to help us solve one of the most pressing issues of our time: climate change.

Admittedly, most of his story is quite wacky and doesn't make much sense. But his outlook on climate change is worth thinking about.

That day was a big day for George! It was the first time he would be allowed to attend the meeting of the 5th Circle. He had been dreaming of this day since his dad had failed to return from The Mission. That had been September 3990 and he had been only ten years old. Now, fourteen years from then, he will be walking his father's steps as he volunteered for The Mission.

He made his way to the living room where his mother was staring at a drawing of what, many years ago, used to be called *the ocean*.

"Mum, still looking at that picture, you have to stop!"

"Can you believe that all this liquid was once covering most of the surface that lies above us? The human species used to be able to spin in it."

"You say swim, Mum, not spin."

"You will see it soon, my sun (Not that George's mother had ever seen the sun, but from the little history that she knew, she imagined it to be a perfectly round sphere with thin filaments sticking out. And admittedly, that was pretty much what George looked like. He had a very pronounced round-shaped head, which was rather oversized and, as can be safely said, comprised all of his body. His flimsy arms jotted out of his head/body, making him look like a character of a human child's drawing. There is much to be said on children's wisdom.), just like your dad must have."

As she said this, she turned her petal-shaped head towards George. Her eyes just two slits on the otherwise smooth surface. She continued, "Humans used to be able to assimilate these oceans back then."

"Well, technically they *drank* a substance that was called *water* of which oceans are mostly made of."

George's mother bowed her bald head which shone in the electrical light and made a grunting sound with her vocal cords. That was what in human terms would have been called a smile.

"I better go, I don't want to be late."

"Go, my son, but remember to come back."

If this had been a scene happening between humans, surely the mother would have cried, but we are in the year 4004 and all the "oceans" had acidified or evaporated by the great heat, and water was practically non-existent. Tears were a luxury that the inhabitants of "earth" had to do without<sup>1</sup>. Having said that, let us follow our hero while he stumbles through the living room, out of the door, and into his body-car. You have to understand that living under the earth has made moving rather difficult and the absence of real light renders the limbs very frail to the point that they seem more of a dangling ornament than any useful attribute. That is until the body-car was invented, so that one could zip along tunnels without too much energy expenditure. As George sat in his body-car and different types of earth painted the passing scenery, he started thinking about his dad and wondered if he would bump into him tomorrow, when the 5th Circle would send him to earth. He had never really understood how this time travel worked, he was an environmental biologist after all, but he did understand that if he didn't succeed in what his dad had failed, there would be no hope for their species to adapt to the current environment. Such thoughts occupied our hero's mind until he reached headquarters. These consisted of a huge white sphere of Nano-structured Thermoelectric Panels.<sup>2</sup> It had always reminded George of a particular relict of humanity

---

<sup>1</sup>If some of you are wondering what these creatures are made of, if not 70% water, that is a very good question. The answer is that in the year 2300, a synthetic replacement for water was produced by the famous scientist named Zender Walger based on nanotechnology. This substance has similar functional properties to water and can replace the latter in supporting basic life. All the details of how this works, however, are unknown to me, after all I am just a novelist.

<sup>2</sup>Again, if you are wondering what these are, I strongly suggest you pick up your third grade physics textbook. I don't mean to be rude but I really have to get on with the adventure of our hero, otherwise you might start to wonder the legitimacy of calling him such.

he was very fond of, which he first came across in a museum in the *extravagant recreational activity section*. It was called a *golf ball*.

What can I say, poetical imagery is scarce when one lives underground (and George is not particularly gifted either).

As he entered the meeting room, a very deep groaning sound could be heard. “Here we go again,” said the President as she fired up the machine to monitor the seismic movements of the earth’s core. “That is a strong one,” said the Vice President to the President. “We really got to get this mission on the way,” he continued, facing the Vice Vice President.

“Well, here is George, punctual as usual,” said the President. “As you can see, this time we have to make the Mission successful or that will be the end of us.”

“In what way?” asked George. Although he knew the answer, most readers do not, so he took it upon himself to inform, at the cost of looking dumb in the eyes of the President. And this is no trifling sacrifice, so I hope that our hero’s gesture is appreciated.

“Surely you know that the rate of change in the climate, which started centuries ago, has become exponential!” roared the President in disbelief. But then, remembering how much she liked monologues, she seized the opportunity to deliver one, and her anger subsided to give way to self-importance. She then continued in a calmer tone, “You see, our past generation and our own one were born in a world whose climate is too deranged for us to live comfortably. And the rate at which it is continuing to change will imply extinction of life, since no species could possibly adapt so quickly. Therefore, because of the decisions of humans a long time ago, we are forced to fight for survival in an environment which is hostile to us. And quite soon it will be hostile to any form of life whatsoever.”

Her monologue, rather short for her liking, ended solemnly, or so she thought, before the Vice President sighed and said, “That would be a sad ending to the evolution of monkeys.”

That was not a graceful ending of a monologue, and anger seized her again. “Stop being so melodramatic and get me the files so we can start the meeting,” retorted the President while thrusting her limb high to scratch her perfectly round hairless head. An action which she had to attempt several times before hitting the right itching spot. Succeeding in this not-so-trivial endeavour, she then motioned George to sit while she projected all the files on the three-dimensional screen in the centre of the table. An image of humans sitting around a table appeared. George could not help thinking how much the situation he was in resembled the one depicted in the files and said softly, mostly to himself, “I wonder if I am related to any of those.”

“So this was the UNFCCC<sup>3</sup> meeting of December 2014 in Lima, Peru,” said the President. “In this meeting, they are going to decide how to handle the problem of climate change. Our mission is to participate in this conference.”

“Am I supposed to go to that meeting?” asked George.

“That is correct,” said the Vice President. After having made a kind of coughing sound for self-importance, he continued, “It is believed that the humans living in 2014 are very narrow-minded people who cannot really imagine the future to any reasonable degree. This prevents them from seeing us, the generations of the future, as real entities with equal rights to theirs.”

“I don’t understand,” said George “Surely they know that there will be many generations after theirs? The same way that they know that there were generations before them.”

“Indeed, you would believe that any rational being would ascribe equal existence to the past as

---

<sup>3</sup>For those for whom history is not their favourite subject, the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) was an international environmental treaty negotiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The aim was to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to non-dangerous levels. But now we can all see how well that worked out, can’t we!

to the future,” said the President in an almost sorrowful voice while shaking her head, “But they don’t seem to do that. Although they know there will be future generations, they don’t seem to give these future generations the same ‘existing’ status as the present or past generations.”

“How very odd,” said our hero, almost incredulous.

“Odd indeed,” confirmed the President, “but this myopic vision has caused us a hell of a lot of trouble since in all their meetings, humans never took our rights into account!”

“I suppose they don’t know for certain that we exist,” tried to justify the Vice President.

“Well, but we do exist! Just in their future,” the President raised her voice. She was clearly on the verge of losing her patience.

“So I guess my mission is to go there and convince them that we do exist and that we should have the same rights as they have?”

“Precisely, George,” said the President, collecting herself.

“But how am I going to convince them that I am really from the future and I am not just making everything up?”

“Have you looked at yourself recently in a reflecting surface? You look nothing like a human!” said the Vice Vice President, who until now had remained absolutely silent.

All slits turned towards him. Mistakenly encouraged by this non-deserved attention, he then continued, “Look at that liquid pouring out of their heads! You have nothing of the sort. What on earth is it?”

“On Earth, that thing is called sweat. I honestly don’t know how you became Vice Vice President!<sup>4</sup> You should know better: if George makes it to the past he will be in the *state past*, hence he will look like all other humans!” lectured the Vice President.

“Sorry, Vice President,” interrupted the President, “but your history lesson has to wait. We have important matters to attend to. So, George, since your great look will fail to convince them that you are from the future, the alternative strategy we propose is the following: the meeting is in December 2014. We will send you back to December 2013. We will give you a list of important events that happened in between these two dates, so that by predicting them you can prove that you are from the future. We will also give you booklets explaining future technologies and results of experiments carried out at that time. All this should suffice, we hope.”

“And do you really believe that if I convince the humans that I come from the future, they will consider us, future dwellers, as having right equal to theirs?”

“Well, it is not guaranteed that they will, but it would be harder for them to justify why we don’t have equal rights. After all, we are sending a representative, just as all other countries, so why should the people of those countries have more rights than us, creatures living in the future? Why should they ‘exist’ more than we do?”

“Well, that is a hard one,” pondered George. “If you think about it rationally, we exist just as much as they do, just in the future. Barack Obama exists just as much as I do, only in the past. But somehow the present seems more real.”

“Nonsense,” interrupted the President, who was very easily annoyed by philosophical speculations of what she considered plain evident facts. “How do you know that the receptionist downstairs exists if you can’t see her at this very moment? You simply infer her existence from all the information you have gathered. Same for future people. If you have enough information to infer that there will be people in the future, then they exist with the same degree of existence as people in the present. So if you travel to the past and show them that people from the future do indeed exist in the future, then they should be considered as also existing in the present.”

---

<sup>4</sup>The reader must allow me to point out that even if thousands of years have passed, politics is almost always done in the same way, which is clearly not by merit or intellect.

“Maybe George is not aware of the Linsdar-Sandar-Drame theory?” ventured the Vice President. George shook his head in embarrassment.

“So well,” the Vice President cleared his vocal cords happy that now his interrupted lecture could be continued. “This theory was invented around the year 2900 by three physicists working on the problem of time which, back then, was considered a very important issue. Humanity at that time had no clue about what time really was and was coming up with bizarre ideas, such as: time had only one dimension, time ‘flowed’, it had a direction and so on. Finally, Linsdar-Sandar-Drame came along and explained that time was just like space, it had three dimensions, past, present, and future. All these exist simultaneously like all spatial dimensions do, but unlike with spatial dimensions, one cannot simply coexist in all three of them. It is, however, possible to travel between them, but it requires reaching enormous energies and the technology at the time was not advanced enough. Think of how some materials can change state from solid to liquid. You need to put in a lot of energy to achieve such a transition. That, in a way, is how time travel works: a change of beingness. Moreover, these time dimensions can influence each other through what is called branching. So imagine that you change your state of beingness to past. You make people aware of things, which for them are in the present. What happens is that their present beingness splits into a new past, present, and future. For us, all these branches are past, but for them they are past, present, and future.”

George narrowed his slits in bewilderment, so much so that you could hardly tell he had eyes at all. The Vice President’s explanation was lost on George, but he wanted to be sent to earth of 2013, so he accepted the argument and, shortly afterwards, started believing it. Such is the power of the mind: it cannot carry out actions it does not believe in, so it simply starts believing in them. And our hero was not immune to such tricks of the mind, and soon his conscience was again at peace. Once this step in awareness was undertaken, he continued, “And this theory has been proved?”

“Of course it has!” answered the Vice President, a bit surprised that such an established theory still needed defending. “Clearly, at first the Linsdar-Sandar-Drame theory was regarded as insane, but in the year 3050, a first experiment was carried out which confirmed the theory and, since then, it has not yet been disproved.”

“But in the year 2013, they didn’t know about this, right?”

“No they didn’t, unfortunately, and they still go on about the grandfather paradox.”

“What is that?”

“Well, it’s a paradox created by their own definition of time, namely that it is linear. So, a person from what they call future cannot travel back in time, unless he or she has already done so.”

George wished he had studied physics rather than environmental biology, because he was totally lost at this point. But again, his mind simply made him believe what he could not understand, and he gave a nod of assent. The Vice President seemed pleased with the unquestioning student.

The President who, so far, had remained silent but whose irritation was visibly increasing, could not contain herself any longer and burst out, “This is getting ridiculous, we are here to figure out how to make the past branch in the way we want, not to explain a millenium-old theory. Now can the present beings please stick to the topic?”

“Sorry, President,” apologised the Vice President.

“So, back to business. We believe that the humans of the year 2013-2014 are not sensible about the needs of future generations, since for them we don’t exist. To prove them wrong, we will send you, George, to the past, to make people aware that future human-like creatures exist and that their rights should be taken into consideration when implementing changes of a global nature,” steered the President, bringing everyone back on track.

“Do you have any idea, President, which member of the human community I should approach?”

asked George, feeling that his denomination as ‘hero’ was starting to make sense.

“That is a very good question. We have a couple of candidates.”

And as she said this, the screen flashed several images of different people with a voice description of each. “We will impregnate all this information in your memory, so don’t worry too much.”

“Okay, so I will try to convince these people that I am from the future. With their help, I may have a say at the UNFCCC meeting, so that our generation can be justly represented.”

“That is correct,” said the President

“And what rights should I push for exactly?”

“Well, that is obvious,” bubbled the President, resembling a kettle. “You will have to make them understand that the most important thing for us is the ability to be able to decide for ourselves what to do with our future. This can only be achieved if we have the means to do so. And these means can only be obtained if the habitat we are born in is a friendly one, which allows for our development. So you see, all we are asking for is that the humans do not deprive us of the right to decide our future for ourselves by forcing us into an environment which threatens our very existence and in which we cannot aspire for any improvement.”

“Do you mean that we want humans to allow for an evolution of the environment which would allow us to be able to evolve in the directions we please?” summed up George.

“That is exactly right. And we believe that all this can be done if the rate of change in the climate is slowed down. This will allow future species to adapt, so that, when it is our turn, we could master our environment and live comfortably in it, not hiding underground like we are doing now.”

Encouraged by his understanding, George attempted a follow-up question, “Are the people I will contact the same people that my dad was supposed to contact when he went on his mission?”

“No, George,” said the Vice President, shaking his head. “We sent your father to the year 1990. We wanted him to be there for the first UNFCCC meeting in 1992.”

“So, I guess he failed?” asked George in a sad voice.

“Well, not exactly, it is a little more complicated than that. Let me explain.”

And as she said this, the President uploaded another file to the three-dimensional projector. “So this is the meeting of 1992. That human there is actually your father.”

George looked in amazement. The person staring back at him from the screen looked nothing like the smooth round ball-shaped father figure he remembered from his childhood. If George had had a mouth, it would now have been wide open in astonishment, but facial expressions are not part of our hero’s or any other future creature’s communications tool-set. So his surprise was conveyed by a high-pitched sound coming from within his body.<sup>5</sup>

“Quite a transformation, right?” confirmed the President. “Something similar will happen to you, too, so be prepared!”

This was quite an uncomfortable thought for our hero, whose mind was already stretched to its fullest by the past hour of discussions. But, as most heroes, he was stoic in accepting his faith and no sound of complaint escaped from him.

“As you can see, your father was successful in contacting the humans and making them believe that he was from the future. His mistake was to show them what our present looks like. You have to understand that at that time humans were a very emotional race and maybe a tiny bit arrogant. What happened was that they got scared of the future and tried to avoid it at all costs. So instead of embracing change, they tried to prevent it.”

---

<sup>5</sup>Dear reader, your amazement is utterly justified: how can our protagonists talk if they don’t have a mouth? Since you are from the past, I allow you such ignorance. To settle your confusion, I will only just mention the telepathic vocal cords which are a possession of any being of the future that you will encounter in these pages.

At this point, the President looked around the table for nods of assent. Being satisfied, she continued, "Climate change was already an issue back then and had been for some time. However, the real nature of this issue was misunderstood. In fact, climate change is not something that needs to be stopped, but it is something that needs to be achieved gradually, to allow for humanity to adapt. Clearly, changes in the environment would represent changes in the human species, but that is only to be expected. Nonetheless, although rational beings, the humans of the year 1992 believed that they should remain humans and any change which would imply an evolution of humanity to a different evolved species had to be avoided at all costs."

A humming of dissent came from all the participants of the meeting. The President continued, "So what happened was that humans became scared and arrogant and started believing that what future people wanted was the preservation of humans as they were back then. In vain, your father tried to explain that all we wanted was to be allowed to decide for ourselves. We did not want to be steered or forced into a mode of existence imposed onto us by another generation's criteria. All we wanted was that the changes be implemented gradually, so that humanity could adapt and the branching would create a future in which humans would evolve to a different species which could completely adapt to the new environment. You have to understand, George, that climate change per se is not a bad thing. What is bad is the rate at which it is happening, which does not allow for adaptation. But the idea that climate change was simply another step in the evolution of life and, if allowed to happen gradually, would allow positive evolution of life, was simply dismissed as insane by the humans of 1992. Your poor father was accused of racism towards present time people, since he would happily see them wiped out and replaced by an evolved species. So in a twist of fate it was us, people of the future, which were not taking into consideration the rights of the 'present' people to remain exactly as they were."

"Did the Mission completely backfire?" asked George, who was now feeling that maybe, just maybe, he was not cut to be a hero after all.

"It completely backfired!" said the President gravely. "Humans decided that humanity as it was then should be preserved. Evolution of life was equated to stagnant human condition, and once again all rights for future generations to allow decisions on their own was taken away from us. To top it all, the existence of your father as a being which came from the future was completely removed from history."

"It seems to me that the humans of 1992 were very scared of change, so much so that they equated it with death," said George very thoughtfully.

"That is exactly it. I see you have a good grasp of human emotions!" said the Vice President appreciatively, while giving a meaningful look at the President.

"Poor father, what happened then?"

"Well," continued the President, "Humans decided that, instead of slowing down the rate of change of the environment to allow for adaptation, they would simply try to prevent any change. They used up all the resources in the process, but failed to achieve their goal. What they did achieve was the exhaustion of any natural resources, which caused a disastrous split of the present and the possibility of the evolution of humanity was severely jeopardised."

"Oh my! That is terrible," exclaimed George with real anguish and empathy that surprised the President, the Vice President and the Vice Vice President and would have surprised any other inhabitant of their underground world, if they had happened to be present. In fact, I should inform the reader that empathy was not such a well-developed feature of the future people. Intellect and anger were clearly highly developed, but not empathy. George, and any hero worth that name, was one of the few specimens in which this strange emotion had not gone extinct.

"Yes, terrible," replied the President in a rather insufferable way, since she found these excesses

of selfless emotions quite off-putting. And then she added assertively, “Continuing, the branching happened and the future simply brought an increase in the rate of climate change preventing adaptation. Your father was then locked in the past, since no technology then or in their future could make him come back.”

“So I might be able to find him, now that I go to the past?” asked a hopeful George.

“Possibly,” replied the President. “What is most important is that you tell the humans that you are looking for him.”

“I don’t understand,” asked a confused hero.

“Vice President, will you please give a more complete explanation of the *story theory* to George. I am really not good at explaining such human emotions,” said the President, almost annoyed that humans had many more emotions than the overpowering sense of anger and annoyance that she almost always felt.

“Certainly, President. George, we have studied the human race a great deal and we have come to the conclusion that for humans to get interested in something, that something should have an emotional story behind it. If humans are presented with dry rational facts, no matter how accurate, they will take no notice. On the other hand, if they are presented with a moving emotional story, even if unrealistic, they will move mountains. So we want you to tell them the story of your father and how you miss him and want him back home. They will like that, since they can resonate with father-and-son emotions and you will get them on your side. A bit like the ridiculous film that was popular back in the past: *Saving Private Ryan*. Even if thousands of people were dying, Ryan had the right to be saved because he had a story. The reasons why humans have a disposition to act only for emotional stories are unknown to us, but the facts clearly speak for themselves. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I think I do,” said our hero, a title which again seemed more and more fitting.

“So, tell them your story and they will feel sorry for you and help you as a future person. They will not be concerned with future people in general, I think that would be asking far too much abstraction from humans, but they will help you. That is enough, since by helping you they will help every one of us.”

Skepticism is not befitting for a hero, and George was a simple fellow, so it took no time before he came to believe that his story would change the world. To take him away from his dreams of grandeur was the raspy voice of the President, “So it seems that since all is set, all questions are answered and all explanations given<sup>6</sup>, we can proceed to take George to Professor Trip for preparation to departure.”

They all awkwardly stood up on their stick thin legs. This process was more a balancing act than anything. While the President and Vice President went to the command room, the Vice Vice President and George set off, each in their body-car, to professor Trip’s office.

It was unclear, at this point, what kind of emotions our hero felt since none could be inferred from his non-existing facial expressions. All that can be said is that his usual wobbliness was slightly less noticeable and he had about him an air of focused determination, which was very rare indeed for our hero. Most readers might be puzzled as to why George never asked why, out of the many volunteers, he had been chosen. But questions of this sort could not enter a hero’s mind since that would contradict the definition of him being the hero. So, my dear Readers, the answer is simple: George was chosen because he is our hero.

Back to our story.

---

<sup>6</sup>You have to understand, dear Reader, that the President was quite a practical minded creature and leaps of intellect were frivolous to her.



They reached Professor Trip's laboratory with no delay and George was happily greeted by an over-sized round being whose legs and arms had been completely absorbed by the main part of the body. "It helps the rolling motion," Professor Trip used to say if anyone commented on his round appearance. But our hero, with bigger issues to think about, did not comment and no explanation was given.

After a few sounds had been exchanged between the Vice Vice President and professor Trip, the former left and the latter rolled up to George and invited him to sit in the uploading machine. Disappointing as it is, I must admit that at this point our hero was scared, but in his defence I should add that not a sound betraying such fear was uttered. In fact, no sound at all was uttered, which made professor Trip wish he had hands to scratch his round head in puzzlement.

Once the relevant upload was done, Professor Trip said, "Okay, George, now you are all set to travel. Just remember all that was said in the meeting. All the other information is in your head." George nodded in assent. "Keep your head on your shoulders once you get some," added Professor Trip.

After this last advice, our hero and his story were sent to the earth in 2013. Unfortunately, I am no hero and cannot follow George in his mission. All I can do now is to look out for some crazy guy claiming to come from the future wanting to *not* preserve human condition by finding his dad. Quite a hard bite to swallow, but so are all heroic stories—otherwise, who would read them?

I know that most of you are curious to know how this epic tale ends, but for that we will all have to wait until December 2014. Now we are in the present and time travel is still not possible.