

The year 1961, as we all know, brought with it quite a few important events, some misfortunate and some auspicious.

In the former category there were: the South American Narcotics War, which started on January 15th and ended on February 23rd; the *almost* complete collapse of the formerly successful Van Norden Automobile Corporation (due mainly to competition from the Atlanta-based Vici Motor Corporation), during late April; Hurricane Aelita, which hit the Florida and Georgia, on during the third week of May; and finally, in June, the mass exodus of workers from the Southern states of the E.S.A. (Eastern States of America), a country that consisted of all of the states of what used to be the U.S.A. that were west of the Mississippi River.

As for the latter category (and, of course, people (depending on their race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) might disagree about whether or not the following events are truly “auspicious”): the famed scientist Martin Lawrence claimed to have communicated with an extraterrestrial species from Io; *The Suggested Moral Code of the Human Individual*, a book written by the pro-partition Eastern American author Alyssa Rosenberry, was published on February 11th; the completion of major infrastructure projects in South America and North Africa during the first few months of the year; and, obviously, the moon landing, which occurred on the 17th of April when the lander *Harrier*, from the rocket *Callisto III*, touched down in a crater located in the Ocean of Storms.

Now, these are all events that occurred during the first half of 1961. Many other things did happen in the other half; however, those happenings are irrelevant because it is only amidst all of the events of the *first* half of the year that we find our protagonists in this adventure of theirs.

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Rio de Janeiro – a city that, with the completion of the Tran-South American Railroad in the early February of 1961, grew in population and in importance. Its port was one of the busiest in the world. It had everything every other large city in the world had: skyscrapers, bridges, a train station, a red-light district, an airport, etc. Just like every other city, there was crime and vice; not everything that happened in Rio was something

you'd expect to happen in a city that was watched by a statue of Christ. And it was the city where Ulysses William Walker was headed on the 17th of June.

“So, Diane, what did you think about Caracas?” Dale Wilson, Ulysses' friend, asked his wife.

“Well, what's there to think about it?” she responded.

“How was the general atmosphere of it, dear?”

“Oh that's just about as vague a question as the last. Um...well, I guess it was alright.”

She always was a woman of few words, Ulysses thought. He was parsing the pages of the bestseller *The Suggested Moral Code of the Human Individual*. Because he was in a rather boring part of it, he looked at the page number and closed it. He looked at his newly-adopted daughter, June, who was eight years old. She was sleeping, probably because she had been awake all night. He then looked out of the window top see the masts of the steel catenaries, which were on both sides of the tracks and suspended the wires that fed the locomotive electricity. There were two tracks, side by side. It was after breakfast, 9:30 A.M., and he and June had joined his friends in their compartment for company. They were about halfway to Rio de Janeiro. He flipped open his book again.

“What about the railroad?” Dale didn't give her a chance to answer, “I still can't get over the fact that this railroad between Caracas and Rio, with its locomotives that run at an average speed of 109 miles per hour, was ever even built. 109 miles per hour, can you believe it? And these trains even have telephones on them. It's a triumph of our species. And notice, as if you couldn't already, how it passes through this rainforest and over all these rivers and their tributaries. The work of man clashes with the creations of God once more,” he paused, noticing that his wife and friend didn't share his enthusiasm.

The E.S.A had a laissez-faire system of capitalism. Due to that, monopolies quickly formed and many people had lost their jobs. Engineers and construction workers had left to work in other countries, like Venezuela, Brazil, and Morocco. Dale Wilson, who had been the President of the Van Norden Automobile Company, saw the company that he had inherited from his father almost completely fall. No one in the E.S.A. or Europe was buying VNs anymore. The infrastructure projects made the people of South America and North Africa led to a rise in the standard of living in those places, however,

and many people in those places were able to buy automobiles. The cars that they decided to buy were VNs, because they were perceived to be more stylish. Dale had been depressed for a while, because workers had to be let go and the shareholders were disappointed, however, he decided to remain President and go to live and work in Rio, where there was already a plant. He had asked Ulysses to remain his Vice President. Ulysses, who had always wanted to see Brazil and knew how to speak Portuguese very well, had said that he would.

Ulysses took a pack of Etna brand cigarettes out of a pocket that was inside his jacket, opened it, took out a cigarette, and gave it to Dale.

“Might I have one too, please?” asked Diane.

“But you’ve never had one, dear” said Dale to his wife, and then to Ulysses, “No don’t give her one. It’ll shrivel up her lungs in an instant, that’s for sure.

“Well, let’s see,” Ulysses said indifferently as he handed a cigarette to Diane. After she took it, he put one into his mouth as well and took out a light from the opposite pocket. He held out the orange flame so that his friends could light their Etnas. Diane drew in a breath but started coughing halfway.

“See, what did I tell you?” Dale said. He patted his wife on the back as she continued to cough. Although she tried to muffle her coughs with the back of her hand but they were still loud enough to wake up June.

“Hello June, how are you doing,” asked Ulysses.

“Alright,” she responded.

“I’m sorry for waking you up darling,” Diane told her, “Why don’t you come over here June.” She held out her arms and June stepped over to sit on her lap. Diane straightened June’s hair and laid her head back against her breast.

Ulysses went back again to reading and Dale asked him why he was reading it in the first place.

“Well, you see, when Nausicaä asked for a divorce she gave me the *Moral Code*, telling me that her justification for wanting to divorce me was right in here. Never got around to reading it until now, though.”

“So did you find out why?” inquired Dale.

“Yeah, the Marriage chapter was the second. Basically, Rosenberry said that if your spouse didn’t satisfy your sexual and intellectual needs, you have the moral right to get a divorce.”

“Oh, I see...hmm,” said Dale, trying to formulate his own opinion on the matter.

Ulysses already had his, “It was without warning; she never told me...anything.” He took in some smoke and slowly blew it out. The divorce had happened only five days before the Flight 921 was scheduled to leave New Argyle, Florida. Out of impulse, Ulysses had decided to take June on the day of the embarkation. He’d seen her wandering vagrantly outside of the airport with worn clothes and a concave stomach. He had been meaning to cash in the ticket that had been mean for Nausicaä but changed his mind when he saw June.

Seeing that Ulysses didn’t want to talk about his recent divorce, Diana asked Dale, “How much more time shall it take for the *Constelação* to reach Rio?”

He was looking out of the window, observing the valley that the *Constelação* was passing over and then looked at his watch, “Well, since we’re scheduled to arrive tomorrow, at 2 o’clock A.M., about 16 hours.”

The train came to a slow halt, all of a sudden.

“This is a wonderful place to stop,” said Diane, sarcastically. “Oh dear, I’m scared of heights.”

“Then don’t look down, simple as that,” said Dale, somewhat amusedly, “or we could just close these curtains.” So he closed them.

“Anyway,” remarked Ulysses, “I wonder why we stopped. Hmm, I’ll go see the conductor.” And with that he slid the compartment door open and walked out into the side corridor.

When he got to the conductor, after going through two other cars, a few other passengers were already questioning about the delay. He told them that the overhead lines had been broken and that it would take a few hours to fix the problem. This was because a service train had to come with some replacement line and the service trains were slow.

“Well, Bill, what happened?” asked Dale, when Ulysses had returned. Ulysses explained and Diane started complaining about how much of a hindrance it all was.

“Well, dear,” said Dale, “it appears that we won’t get to Rio before 2 o’clock A.M.”

After ten minutes, Ulysses finished the book.

“Can I see that?” Diane asked. Ulysses handed it to her and said that she probably wouldn’t like it anyway. “Oh how bad can it be?” she said. She started to read the introduction and told Dale, “Interesting, listen to this Dale. Rosenberry says, ‘How dare He? How dare God (from whatever religion you might chose) hand us down the morals by which society should judge us. From now on, we must realize that there is only one God that we must follow – and that is Logic. These following chapters shall tell you, the reader, how to live by the morals that are given to us by Logic.’”

“So that’s how the people of the E.S.A. live now, eh, by the rules of logic? And why does that word start with a capital letter anyway?”

“Well, I didn’t think that it was too provocative,” said Ulysses, “to tell you the truth, I’m agnostic and leaning to atheism. There must be more, though, to life than logic. Well, that’s just what—”

“Wait, Bill, do you hear that?” asked Dale.

“Hear what?”

Dale opened the curtains and the window. He and Ulysses saw a woman, who appeared to be Brazilian, with her head out of the window and yelling something in Portuguese to someone who was underneath the train and the tracks (that someone was suspended by a grappling hook that had been attached to the open window. He appeared in about two seconds and saw Dale immediately. The man took out a pistol and shot at him. He missed but the bullet hit the window and cracked it. Diane screamed.

“We have to get out of here,” said Ulysses, “I’ve got a feeling there’s more of them than two.”

“Two of whom?” asked Diane.

“You stay here,” said Ulysses. He quickly opened the window again. The man who had been suspended on the rope was gone so Ulysses carefully climbed out of the window. He managed to get onto the roof, being cautious so that he wouldn’t touch the overhead lines.

Meanwhile, three people dressed in black and wearing masks entered the compartment. One of them was the woman. They all held pistols except for the tallest man, who was holding a machine gun.

“Where is the other one?” asked the woman.

“He jumped out,” answered Dale.

“I’m not an idiot, Mr. Wilson, where is he?”

“He’s on the roof,” said Dale.

“Oh, I see,” the woman took out a walkie-talkie, “Rick, are you done rigging the explosives? Alright, then kill him, he’s on the roof.” She then turned it off and, addressing Dale, said, “Mr. Wilson, we’re taking you, your wife, and your daughter hostage.”

On the roof, Ulysses was trying to get to the last car, to see the conductor. He then realized that the Caucasian man hadn’t gone back inside because of the rope had been stretched underneath the train and wasn’t hanging down. He was obviously on the other side of the train. He observed this just in time – the man had his hands on the roof of the train and was coming up. Ulysses took his machine pistol out of his jacket pocket and fired at him. He missed and the man had raised his gun to take aim. Ulysses fired again and he hit the man’s hand. The man dropped the gun into the river, which was at least 200 feet below. Carefully placing his feet on the window ledge, Ulysses dropped down into the compartment.

Meanwhile, in the adjoining compartment, the Brazilian lady was giving out orders on her walkie-talkie, “Seven, have you taken care of the conductor? Yes, then throw him into the river.” Then she asked Dale, “Do you know who I am?”

“No, I don’t quite recognize you.”

“You were someone important in the Narcotics War,” said Diane, “I don’t remember your name, though.”

“Good, you don’t know me. Well, I intend to take the millions that you have put into the Bank of Rio de Janeiro.”

“And what if I don’t let you?” asked Dale.

“Oh, we’ll blow up this entire train.”

“Alright, what do you need? I assume my account number and all that.” he asked.

“That won’t be necessary. You’re going to make your withdrawal for us. As soon as our helicopter gets here, we’ll take the three of you...Eight, are you coming?”

Ulysses pulled on the rope and succeeded in making the man lose his grip on the side of the train. He then threw the grappling hook out of the window and watched as the man fell into the river. He then slowly slid open the compartment door and fired at the three people who were standing in front of the adjacent compartment.

“What just happened?” yelled someone. It was Dale. “You took down three, or I presume four, terrorists by yourself, you know that?” he said as he ran out of the compartment to greet his friend, “Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Ulysses.

“The woman did say something about a helicopter, however, and she did ask one of her accomplices, probably the one who was hanging on the rope, if he was done rigging explosives, which were meant to destroy the train.”

“I don’t think that they could go off unless a button’s pressed or something,” replied Ulysses. “Look for a remote.”

Diane was in the corridor, looking at the bodies, and she found a remote on the woman.

“Is this it, you think,” she asked.

“Probably,” said Dale. “Now, Diane, you must try to sound like the Brazilian woman. Turn on the walkie-talkie and tell ‘Eight’ not to come.”

She did just that.

“Who’s eight?” asked Ulysses.

“The helicopter pilot,” answered Dale. “And there’s still the matter of the conductor. ‘Seven’ ‘took care of him.’”

“That could mean anything. I’ll see about him,” said Ulysses. And with the machine pistol in his hand, he went over to the end of the corridor and tried to open the door, but it was locked. He climbed out of the window again and walked on the roof to the last car. When he entered, Seven was looking in the other direction. He knocked him out with the handle of the pistol and untied the conductor, who thanked him.

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So with all that over, the people on the service train came and fixed the wires. It turned out that an accomplice of the five terrorists had broken them. Their identities were

not known and the conductor decided that they should, of course, inform the police at the next station. The engineer and all of the passengers commended Ulysses. Then the train rolled on towards Rio once more. To liven things up and to calm everyone down, the conductor decided to play some music. Over the speaker came an instrumental version of *Aquarela do Brasil*, the 1939 song by Ary Barroso.

“Brazil, meu Brasil Brasileiro...” sang Dale.

“Meu mulato inzoneiro,” sang Diane, Ulysses, and June. They had all listened to a guitarist play and sing the song in the train station at Manaus where the *Constelação* had made a stop. They had memorized only those two lines but hummed the rest.