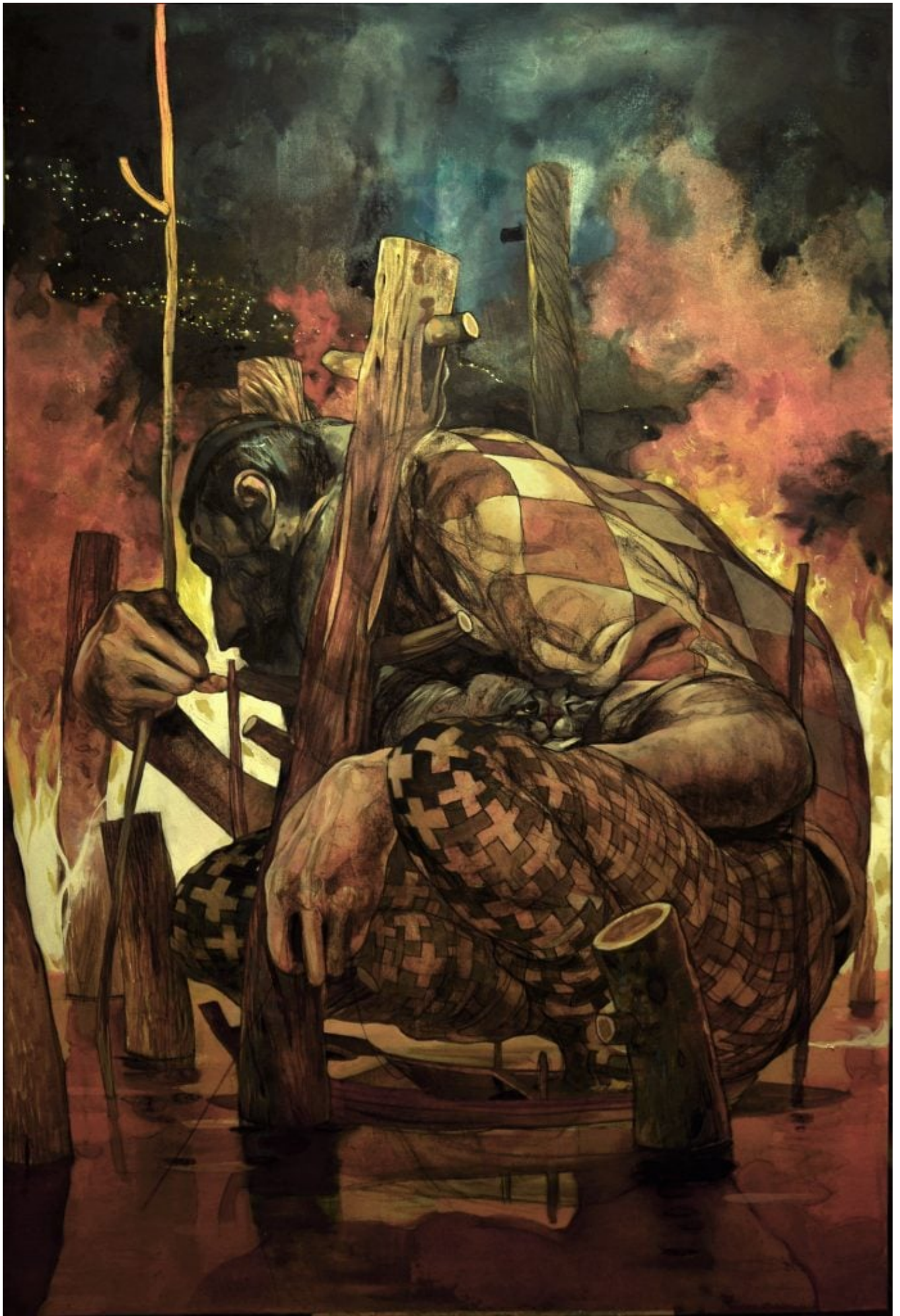


# 8 January 2055

by [Gracjan Kraszewski](#) (April 2023)



*Cretan, Stamatis Laskos, 2018*

The answer to whether slogans like “never again,” or if images of post A-bomb Hiroshima or Nagasaki, or the grainy video of the Tsar Bomba detonation over Novaya Zemlya, were enough, is “no.” Because people, although they knew, really had forgotten and, as the events escalated, so did the passions and so did whatever else was necessary for the affirmative.

And then the order was given and carried out.

They originally wanted to call the event “Krakatoa” because the yield exceeded the 200 megaton TNT (MT) volcanic eruption of SCE 1883 volcanic eruption<sup>[1]</sup> (by comparison the Tsar Bomba’s yield, to that point the most powerful man made explosion in human history, was 50 MT, both of which had nothing, nothing on the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake yield of 450 MT<sup>[2]</sup> which not only was nearly two and half times more powerful than Krakatoa but, for a more visceral imagining, was the near exact equivalent of nine Tsar Bombas being detonated simultaneously). But because the fireball was visible—by naked eye—as far away as 1,300 miles, it soon was being called “Bright Light”; at first almost informally and, by international consensus, both in official reporting and word of mouth. And then it just stuck, the name, and it became impossible to call the event anything else.

Hundreds of thousands were killed instantly. If it hadn’t been dropped on such a remote area but, for example, the metro areas of NYC, DC, Shanghai or Jakarta, the immediate casualties (instant death, not accounting for those succumbing in the days or weeks following to the effects of fallout, especially Acute Radiation Syndrome) would have been in the tens of millions, perhaps approaching one-hundred million people. The blast radius was about 100 miles and the ensuing

shocks and tears and reverberations nearly ripped it off and dumped it into the Gulf; meaning the southeastern part of the state and into parts of the foreign, next door neighbor. The capital of the state, while some seven hundred plus miles south of the epicenter of where the bomb hit, saw its streets covered in five inches of ash. The Great National Park can hardly be said to exist anymore, let alone trying to more precisely calculate the effects of being so close, and the small towns so close to the epicenter: Two Rivers, Salcha, Moose Creek, Big Delta and Delta Junction—even the quaintly named North Pole—do not ... what is meant is they do not, they *do* not, they *be* not, no longer. They no longer exist. There is nothing left.

The offending party claimed justification for their heinous act in diplomatic double-speak: the recipients of the Bomb had violated some article of some treaty, the fine print portions printed in smaller font on the back (folded) corners of the book jacket; they had gone too far in perusing economic sanctions in international forums; there had been too much backchanneling and certainly too much overstepping into sovereign jurisdictions—too much anti-Westphalia A and B violations, as in the 1648 agreement stipulated A) territorial sovereignty and B) no external agents in domestic affairs—as such and, above all, well, the offending party weren't actually trying to hurt civilians. They miscalculated, they said. The target was never supposed to be the city where the Bomb landed. There was some kind of military base nearby; this was purely a military action.

After recovering from the shock of what had just occurred, the citizens of the attacked nation demanded Hammurabian justice. And this nation had quite the nuclear arsenal themselves. It was only the unprecedented (and seamlessly coordinated) actions of the international community that prevented a man-made Apocalypse. Even the Russians—the off and on but usually off, or kind of off, well, coolly detached and highly

suspicious professional skeptics well versed in you, the “other,” having either next to no idea or just no idea, period, what they are *really* ‘thinking’—came to the aid of the attacked nation and vigorously and without qualification (it seemed a great-great-great hyperbolically *ad infinitum* grandfather of the current Russian president had been one of the early settlers to the attacked land [here meaning the state within the larger Nation] and had lived and prospered there whilst it was a Russian possession pre SCE-1867—Аляска.

Only this immediate and airtight show of solidarity prevented the attacked nation from responding in kind. The offending nation’s leaders were put on trial for crimes against humanity (literally within days after an invading coalition of one-hundred nations, all marching under the attacked nation’s flag for “today we are all {x},” that kind of spirit, and under the leadership of the attacked nation’s military personnel, had completely overrun the country, taken the capital city, and quelled any and all resistance [although to be fair there was hardly any as the citizens of the offending party were just as horrified of their batshit crazy leadership—for what to call anyone who would take that step?—and were happy to see them go, truly and without irony welcoming the invading multi-nation force as liberators]) and, in a fair although incredibly expedited trial, sentenced more than five hundred members of the leadership to death, carried out the sentences, all of them within a week, and in something like seventy-five steps (much too laborious to detail here) turned over full control of the offending nation to the offended nation, the former became for all intents and purposes a colony of the latter overnight, and it seemed that maybe for the first time (excluding the true liberations of the First and Second World Wars for these do not fall under the colonialism umbrella) in the offended/Bomb-recipient nation’s long history of colonialism, both of the hard and soft power variants—and let’s says this: that between the Coca-Cola and Hollywood and fashion and phonetic expressions bordering on the asinine

there had been boatloads, treasure troves of soft power flowing freely from spickets as if 44 oz. soft drinks for years seemingly on end—the people of the liberated nation were really the people of a liberated not “liberated” nation, and truly grateful for their deliverance.

The End had narrowly been avoided; again. Never again, they said, again.

A snapshot of the events leading up to 7:56.43 PM UTC (local time 11:56.43 AM) on January 8 many years ago from the very epicenter of the Bright Light blast:

Downtown, in a popular coffeeshop frequented by students (which the below were—two budding chemists and a business major) told from the perspective of (for anonymity’s sake, more so out of respect) three young women identified as A, X, and Y

## **7:17 PM UTC/11:17 AM local**

“Yes,” X says. “The vanilla latte is mine.”

“...”

“Yes, thank you.”

“And you had?” the barista asks A.

“A triple shot espresso, large, with sugar free caramel and skim milk.” A bites her lip. “Uh—two shots of the honeycomb drizzle, a squirt of—”

“You said skim milk?”

“Yes.”

“My apologies. I used two percent. Let me remake that for you.”

“C’mon, A,” Y says, laughing. “(man’s name, presumably boyfriend) will still wanna be with you ... I mean, you’re not *that* fat.”

X laughs. A rolls her eyes. “No, that’ll be okay. Two percent is fine.”

“Are you sure?” the barista asks. “It’s really not a problem. It’ll just take a second—”

“No, it’s fine. Thank you.”

## **7:22 PM UTC/11:22 AM local**

The three girls sit down at a table in the back. Y tries to convince her friends to give up coffee—for the hundredth time, it would seem—as she sips her Honey & Chamomile with two scoops of sugar. “How doesn’t that put you to sleep?”

A asks, “If we’re getting a pick-me up aren’t you doing the opposite, doesn’t the chamomile knock you out?”

“It clears my mind,” Y says. “You should try it sometime.”

“The tea or clearing my mind?” A asks.

Y laughs. “Both?”

“Do you guys want to go to the basketball game tonight?” X asks. She is wearing a well-worn, bleach faded white Nanooks sweatshirt, a stark contrast to her two ([nearly] always) impeccably dressed friends. Behold different approaches: A likes to scour thrift shops in the hope of finding needles amongst haystacks, diamonds in the rough, and nothing gives her such pleasure as putting together a fabulous outfit that, the sum of it, costs nothing more than a crisp or quite ragged

twenty-dollar bill. Y, on the other hand, matches a fabulous price tag to her fabulous outfits. She comes from money, from California, and last year for her birthday her father flew her first class to San Francisco for a weekend shopping trip. Two years ago, she spent \$14,700 on a handbag. It was her "Christmas and birthday present" rolled into one. If there's one thing the friends agree on it's that a woman should not wear make-up, ever. It doesn't matter if you're a 5 or a 7 or even a 10 point 3; be that natural number. That's true beauty.

"Can I," A says. "Can I tell you, tell you something?"

"Basketball or not?"

"No," Y says. "One game per year is one too much for me."

"C'mon," X protests, "what else are we going to do?"

"I don't want to go watch basketball," Y says, sipping her tea. "That's all I'm saying."

A makes a start, as if to say something, before looking down and away. Y and X start discussing a recent biology test, or a test they're about to take. A checks out of the conversation, takes a swig of coffee and quickly puts it down. *Should I even be having this?* It doesn't even taste good. *But could it ... affect anything? Is that even a thing, a worry I should be worrying about?* It doesn't help that it's dark outside. That surely doesn't help anything. The midnight sun is nice, the summers really are better here than anywhere else, but the dark, now, it's just not welcome because things are serious enough on their own.

A continues looking around as her friends keep chatting. It seems they're arguing now. Two old men play chess in the corner. One of them smokes a pipe. It seems out of place, pretentious, the pipe, not the chess. They, *us girls*, did come at a good time. The line is getting long. A used to work as a barista herself. It can be tiring. She feels tired. A man in



very tight pink jeans walks over to a television and huffily turns off a sports-talk show. His circle of friends begin to applaud. The manager walks over to the man and they talk for a few moments. The pink-jeaned man goes back to his table visibly upset while the manager turns the television, and the talking heads, back on. A baby's cry gets louder and louder from one corner. This blows his mother's attempt at discretion. She was trying to breast-feed him (or her? You've got a real coin flip, 50-50 to get this one right; blind-guessing, that is) under the cover of a scarf. A smiles. A joke lands as one table erupts in laughter. A's friends keep chatting and then she realizes she has to go to the bathroom ... now!

**7:52 PM UTC/11:52 AM local**

"Guys," A says, sitting back down. "Guys, can I, I need to tell you something—"

X and Y stop talking.

"What?" Y asks.

A begins to cry. She puts her head down and cries into her sleeve as X rubs a hand across her back. "A, what's the matter?" (7:54/11:54).

A keeps crying. She looks up and smiles as she sobs, bawls really. It's like when there is a pouring rainstorm but then sun is out too, it's really coming down but you have to squint too and it's weird.

"A," Y says, "you're freaking us out. What's going on?"

A snuffles and wipes her nose into her sleeve. She gets a hold of herself. She exhales, then again, deeply. She brushes her hair off her face, away from her red and puffy eyes.

“(Man’s name, presumably boyfriend/fiancé?/husband soon to be?) and I found out yesterday,” A says, before beginning to cry again.

X gasps, literally throwing both hands up to her mouth.

“I’m going to be a mom,” A says. “I’m going to become a mom! I’m preg—”

**7:56.43 PM UTC/11:56.43 AM local**

...

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[\[1\]](#) Which caused a volcanic winter for five years following after some twenty million tons of sulfur and ash were propelled upwards into the atmosphere from a exit velocity exceeding 675 mph and measuring 310 dB (170 dB over the 140 threshold of pain, meaning that ear protection is required here, the 310 being far above, for comparisons sake, a Jet airplane at takeoff-165, a space shuttle launch-215, and the atomic bombs during WWII-248, not to mention more than 100db over the noise level where fatality can occur from the sound wave shock alone:202), meaning it could be heard from 3,100 miles away (which is basically the distance between Miami, FL and Cold Lake, Alberta, which should really make one pause and just sit in dumbfoundedness that something that made a sound in the Caribbean could travel to be heard in a place not far from the Arctic circle and, if the resident of Cold Lake would be able to hear this, what would it sound like for people along the way; in Chattanooga, TN, in Mattoon, IL, even in Regina, SK?) and could break concrete, just the sound of it, from three hundred miles away. If there is a silver lining to all this destruction, it was probably the impossibly beautiful sunsets created in the wake of the explosion as captured in the work of the British painter William Ashcroft. Une question supplementaire:

*La renommée d'Ashcroft découle de la capacité de capturer les détails de l'atmosphère – couleurs vives, minuscules différenciations–d'une manière impossible avant la photographie, et tout cela comme résultat direct d'un volcan mais surtout de ses cendres. Le mot est en son nom à pleurer à haute voix! Et donc la question, était-ce le destin, son destin?*

[2] Mark Moleksy, *This Gulf of Fire: The Great Lisbon Earthquake, or Apocalypse in the Age of Science and Reason* (New York: Vintage, 2015\*), 70.

\*That year a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* book prize. This passage, alone, even taken isolated and standing naked alone, alone removed from a splendid book start to finish, should have merited him first prize: "...on July 9, 1958, a mega-tsunami, caused by an earthquake-induced landslide near Lituya Bay, Alaska reached an incredible height of 1,706 feet (520 meters)." (p.149).

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Gracjan Kraszewski is the author of two books, the novel *The Holdout* and the Civil War history *Catholic Confederates*. His third book, and second novel, *Thermonuclear Mirth*, is forthcoming and due out this summer, 2023, with Arouca Press. Gracjan holds a PhD in history. Selected fiction, essays, historical articles and reviews have appeared in *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *New English Review*, *Riddle Fence*, *Nashwaak Review*, *The Catholic Historical Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Eclectica Magazine*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *The Journal of Southern Religion*, *The Journal of Southern History*, *Black Bear Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Scriblerus*, and *Idaho Magazine*.

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