

The Secret Files of Donald J. Trump

Vol. 1: The Tijuana Tango

A satirical dystopia

by

Francis le Lapin

A Black Coat Press Book

Foreword

“Because he is a comic-book character!”

That was Francis le Lapin’s answer when I asked him why he had chosen to make the 45th President of the United States into the facsimile, avatar hero of his novel, which is primarily an exercise in alternative history, a genre that, in France, is often called “*uchronia*.”

The word was coined by French philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815-1903), who published a book entitled *Uchronie, Utopie dans l’histoire* [*Uchronia: Utopia in History*] in 1857. “*Uchronia*” is, therefore, a 19th century neologism based on the model of the word “Utopia,” itself created in 1516 by Thomas Moore to serve as the title for his famous eponymous book, *Utopia*, with “chronos” (time) instead of “topos” (place), hence meaning “non-time,” a time that does not exist.

Uchronia works on a simple, even trivial principle: it starts with the question “What if...?” and applies it to the past. With it, it is possible to remake the world, to rewrite history. What if Napoleon hadn’t lost at Waterloo? What if Hitler had joined the Vienna School of Fine Arts? What if General de Gaulle had been assassinated? What would the results have been? This speculative play with reality can, of course, be only fictional, since real history cannot be modified.

The first published *uchronia* is *Napoléon et la conquête du monde, 1812-1832, Histoire de la monarchie universelle*, initially published anonymously in 1836. A second edition was published in 1841, bearing the title *Napoléon Apocryphe* and the signature Louis Geoffroy, and a third appeared in 1851, after the election of Louis-Napoleon—the future Emperor Napoleon III—as president of the Third French Republic. It was “rediscovered” in 1896, and has been regularly reprinted ever since.¹

Geoffroy determined a precise point of divergence (Napoleon’s decision to go on to Saint Petersburg instead of staying in Moscow) before rewriting history according to it (in it Napoleon conquers the world). He even jokingly inserts two references to our own history, when a fictional pamphlet, which actually retells history, as it really happened, is banned, and when Napoleon feels compelled, for no apparent reason, to destroy the island of Saint Helena.

What is the point of creating such chimera? Those who write alternative histories usually pursue a specific agenda. Military personnel use it to investigate the causes of a defeat and learn tactical lessons. Historians question the way events are connected. Writers like Philip K. Dick, the author of the Hugo award-winning *Man in the High Castle*, or Stephen King with *22/11/63*, use it to criticize the time in which they live, or alert us to a perceived danger by proposing a contemporary alternative, be it a utopian or a dystopian society.

When *Uchronia* is freed from the constraints of historical plausibility, its playful dimension allows it to open up the field of possibilities. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen*, Norman Spinrad’s *The Iron Dream* or Michael Moorcock’s *Gloriana*, to name but three genre classics, are more fantastic because they moved away from the need for historical plausibility. These “*uchronauts*” fed on history to better betray it, but above all, to offer it a much larger and more eccentric playing field. Their works borrow from time travel, adventure stories, detective stories, fantasy, super-heroes, etc.

In *The Secret Files of Donald J. Trump*, Francis le Lapin borrows a page from Louis Geoffroy, but instead of Napoleon I, chooses the defeat—turned into a victory—of his nephew, Emperor Napoleon III, at the battle of Sedan against the Germans in September 1870. As le Lapin explains himself in his brief introduction, what if... Napoleon III, instead of being a spectacular failure, had proved to be an overwhelming success?

¹ Published in 2016 by Black Coat Press as *The Apocryphal Napoléon*, in a translation by Brian Stableford (ISBN 978-1-61227-579-6).

Which brings us back to Donald Trump.

The book is obviously a satire, but because it takes place on an entirely fictional world, and furthermore, in that world's past—1968—it has little relevance to whatever political challenges the real Donald Trump, and indeed the United States of America, face today.

“Because he is a comic-book character!” said le Lapin.

Since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 as 40th President of the United States, the figure of the President, which was always elevated and held in awe throughout the world because of the tremendous power of the United States, has, for better or worse, become the topic of caricatural portrayals, as if that election had opened some mysterious floodgate in the collective unconscious.

Even though real-life comedian Coluche toyed with the notion of running for the French presidency in 1980, I know of no French work of fiction that deals with what if he had, and had won. On the other hand, Frank Miller portrayed a senile Reagan in his classic *The Dark Knight Returns*, Alan Moore had a President Robert Redford elected in *Watchmen*, and at one point, Superman's foe, Lex Luthor, was president in the DC Comics universe.

Such comic-bookish portrayals are not always negative: Harrison Ford in the movie *Air Force One* and Bill Pullman in *Independence Day* play presidents who are not unlike Francis le Lapin's hero (who, let us remember, is not yet president and, on his world, may never be) and owe more to James Bond than they do to Martin Sheen's Jed Bartlet. And let's not even consider *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* which, by comparison, makes le Lapin's uchronic novel look quasi-historical!

“Francis le Lapin” is the nom-de-plume of a renowned Belgian writer born in Namur in 1947, who was once the editor-in-chief of the popular children's magazine *Le Fureteur* (1959-69), and also the author of several French comics and YA novels.

Feeling somewhat neglected today, he was sitting rather forlornly behind his table at the 2016 Sèvres sci-fi & fantasy festival when I first met him. He was signing a few of his books when I asked him if he had any unpublished manuscripts in a drawer that our French sister company, Rivière Blanche, might publish.

As it turned out, he didn't, but, one thing leading to another, he offered to write an entirely new novel—this book—his first written directly in English (with editing by Randy).

I hope you will enjoy it as much as I did, and celebrate the return of one of my favorite authors from my childhood.

Jean-Marc Lofficier

Introduction

The world depicted in this novel diverged from ours when Emperor Napoleon III of France, instead of being a spectacular failure, proved to be an overwhelming success.

As a result, France did not lose Mexico in the 1860s and won the Battle of Sedan against Germany in 1870.

It remained a constitutional imperial monarchy and its political influence spread to include Germany and Austria to the East, Italy to the South, and Belgium to the North. England, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark and the Baltics remained independent kingdoms.

On this world, Russia did not fall to the Bolshevik Revolution. Instead, it remained a Monarchy, and eventually became France's greatest enemy, leading to a single seven-year Great War starting in 1932 between the two competing super-powers, the "Western Alliance," which also included the United States, and the "Eastern Union," comprised of Russia, China, Korea and Japan. South America and Africa remained mostly uninvolved.

The Great War was fought in the trenches of Poland, the "North African theater" (Egypt) and the "Pacific theater." It was eventually won by the Western Alliance in 1939 when France built the first A-bomb, the power of which it demonstrated in the French Sahara.

After the Great War, France and England fought to keep their colonies, which led to a series of localized conflicts known as the Colonial Wars. Mexico, however, gained its independence and its own Empire expanded to include Central America, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. Nevertheless, it remained tightly allied with France.

On this world, the United States are the equivalent of Brazil and Canada in ours—important, but a second-tier power. (Alaska is still Russian.) There is no state of Israel, but a proxy guerilla war has been fought in Lebanon by the great powers since the mid-1950s. And Japan retreated into a somewhat hostile, isolationist mode.

When our story begins—in 1968—the conquest of space is being handled by a French/British/American team based in Reggane, French Sahara, and a Russian/Chinese team based in Kazakhstan.

-- F.I.L.

CHAPTER I

At 8:12 p.m. on April 22, 1968, a warmly illuminated luxury train set off in silence, followed by the admiring glances of the people who, from other platforms, watched its departure.

The *Silver Arrow Express* bound for Mexico City via San Diego, Tijuana, Mexicali and Durango, left Los Angeles' Union Station with the powerful grace of a rocket. It crossed the suburbs of Orange County at eighty mph, and then, still accelerating, rushed into the night towards the American-Mexican border.

Just under two hours later, it stopped at the Chula Vista border point, where the Mexican imperial police and customs agents boarded it for the usual checks.

Comfortably seated in his window seat, Pavel Zakuski handed over his Russian passport without even looking at the official who, stamp in hand, was checking the passengers. He heard the slapping sound of the stamp on paper, took the passport back, and stored it in his jacket's inside pocket, then returned to reading his copy of the *Los Angeles Daily Examiner*.

The ritual question of the Mexican customs agent in his white and gold uniform asking him if he had anything to declare forced him to look up. He replied with a negative sign of his head. Because he was Russian, and obviously well-off, the officer took his word for it. Nevertheless, noticing a pocket-sized transistor radio on the table in front of Zakuski, the officer pointed at it and asked:

"Purchased in the United States?"

Zakuski's face lost its distant expression. The shadow of a smile appeared on his face as he replied:

"Why, yes. The proof of that is that it no longer works."

With anyone else, the customs agent would have laughed, but not with a Russian. While independent from France since the end of the Colonial War, the relationship between the Mexican and Russian Empires were still tense.

"Really?" the customs agent wondered. "May I?"

Zakuski gave an approving nod. The customs agent took the transistor radio and pressed the on-switch. Placing the speaker against his ear, he could only hear a slight hum. With his thumb, he turned the knob looking for any of the local stations, but received no signal.

"Maybe it's because the signals do not penetrate these new metallic cars?" said the officer, puzzled.

He opened the back of the radio.

"A brand new device like that should be working," he added.

"Yes—in theory," agreed Zakuski. "It is also possible that the battery is dead, having been stored too long."

The customs agent examined the inside of the radio, then closed it, and returned it to its owner.

"It is possible," he admitted. "It only takes a small thing. Good evening, *Señor*."

He moved on to the next passenger, and Zakuski went back to reading the *Daily Examiner*, freed from a sense of foreboding.

These days, the formalities of entry into the Mexican Empire were reduced to a minimum. No one expressed concern about the transistor radio, the free circulation of which was now tolerated in Mexico, like that of standard cameras.

Fifteen minutes later, the *Silver Arrow* entered the station in Tijuana. Zakuski took his tweed overcoat from the rack where he had hung it, put it on, and shoved the radio in its pocket. Carrying a single leather suitcase, he got off the train and mingled with the other passengers walking towards the exit.

Strolling towards the center of town, he walked by the Cathedral de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, the bell tower of which was outlined in black against the halo cast by hundreds of city lights. There, he hailed a cab.

“Calle del General Forey,” he told the driver. “I can’t tell you the number, but it’s just outside the city limit. I’ll guide you.”

The cab took a wide boulevard that described a quarter of a circle then, turning right, traveled down a long avenue lined with modern high-rise buildings.

At the next crossroad, it turned into a maze of smaller streets. After a quarter of an hour, it arrived at what looked like an industrial zone, where factories were spaced out in seemingly random order and residential houses were rare.

After another ten minutes, Zakuski ordered the driver to stop at an intersection. He paid for the ride with a stack of Mexican Francs, leaving a handsome tip, then stepped out of the cab.

Before the driver had completed its round turn, Zakuski had already disappeared from the area illuminated by the streetlights and vanished into the surrounding darkness.

It would have been hard to find a better place to conduct secret business, especially at this time of night.

While strolling in a deserted street along the darkness, not being able to see more than ten paces ahead, Zakuski was already missing the warm comfort of the train ride, although the temperature was, in fact, rather mild for the season.

He finally reached the agreed-upon meeting point: a shed with a corrugated metal roof, open to the wind, in which a bunch of barrels had been stored in pyramidal form. At the precise moment when the Russian was preparing to hide behind one of them, the headlights of a car coming from the other end of the road struck him. The powerful beam then moved, sweeping the industrial wasteland before again shining straight at the hangar, indicating the car was parking.

Zakuski’s silhouette, fleetingly lit, disappeared behind the pile of metal drums. He had not tried to conceal himself, guessing that the car belonged to the man he was there to meet.

The vehicle’s lights went out. Darkness returned to the shed.

Zakuski took off his overcoat, folded it and put it on top of his suitcase. He heard a car door slam, and prepared to meet Requesón.

The driver stepped closer. When he was less than five feet away, Zakuski stared in shock, his nerves shattered, because the man was not Requesón!

The expressionless face of the newcomer was completely indecipherable. With lightning speed, he pulled a gun from his pocket and used it to strike a glancing blow to Zakuski’s left temple.

Mouth open, eyes tightly shut, the Russian crumpled into a ball as he collapsed to the ground. He had had enough time to be afraid, but not to understand what had happened to him.

CHAPTER II

Five days later, Donald J. Trump pulled out of his underground garage in Brooklyn and drove his black imported De Dion-Bouton Papillon towards Brighton Beach.

He parked on Coney Island Avenue, as usual, and walked down to the *Little Odessa* restaurant where he usually met his Russian handler, Boris Fedorovitch Stroganoff of the Okhrana, the nickname of the Department for Protecting the Public Security and Order of the Russian Empire.

When he entered the back room where the two usually met, Trump immediately saw that the older man was in a foul mood.

Stroganoff was in his sixties, overweight, and nearly bald. His always grumpy face was highlighted by a thick, ill-kempt, grey mustache. His horn-rimmed glasses were permanently askew, and he liked to chew on the end of an old, dirty, ivory cigarette-holder, that currently held an unlit cigarette.

On the table before him were enough dishes to qualify as a small banquet.

Trump hung his coat on a peg. Upon sitting down across from the Russian, he noticed with delight that the restaurant had finally replaced their rickety old chairs.

He lodged his two hundred and two pound body onto the new chrome tubed seat, thinking that *Little Odessa* must be doing well.

“You’re late,” said Stroganoff gruffly, making a gesture inviting his agent to partake in the bounty. “When I call you, it is *always* urgent, you should know that.”

Trump helped himself to copious servings of several dishes, ignoring the ominous warnings of a growing pot belly. As a matter of fact, he had received the call only one hour and thirty-five minutes ago exactly.

“Excuse me if I had to swallow what I had in my mouth before coming here,” he hissed in a tone venomous enough to prove that any command from Stroganoff left him cold.

“Don’t be insolent,” enjoined the Russian. “You know how much you owe us. Without us, you’d be in a debtor’s prison, disowned by your own father.”

This time, there was no repartee.

Trump had begun working for the Russians two years earlier, after one of his real estate ventures had turned sour. Scrambling for money, he had been only too happy to see the Russians invest in his failed casino project and keep it afloat. More than anything else, he feared the opprobrium that he would have received from his father, Fred C. Trump, had he been forced to confess his failure.

Since then, he had taken a liking to helping the Russians; it titillated his ego and made him—at least in his own eyes—feel like an “international man of mystery.” The more prosaic truth was that, far from being a “mystery,” his sideline business was well known to the authorities. However, they didn’t really care as long as his activities were not directed against the United States.

Fred C. Trump, who didn’t have a very high opinion of his son, had been pleasantly surprised to see new money coming in, and Donald, in exchange for tidbits of intelligence about his extracurricular activities, had been able to keep Uncle Sam off their backs; so everyone was happy.

Stroganoff opened and closed six folders that were lying next to him on the bench, no longer remembering which one was the one dealing with the matter at hand. Then, apparently outraged by this new manifestation of the law of universal vexation, he resolved to forget the documents he had been seeking and began in a more conciliatory tone:

“No hard feelings, Donald, eh?” he asked.

“None at all. I’m a big man. Do you need a light?” said Trump, pulling out a gold-plated lighter.

Stroganoff threw him a sharp look, searching for some hidden meaning, but realized that it was only his unlit cigarette that had prompted Trump to make the offer.

“No, thank you,” he grumbled while feeling his pockets, without succeeding in reaching his own lighter.

Sighing, he allowed Trump to relight his cigarette and drew mightily on it, creating a huge cloud of smoke before finally addressing the matter at hand, albeit in his usual convoluted way:

“It is rare when people in our business receive gifts,” he growled, leaning against the back of his seat, his hands flat on the table. “But when that happens, I always wonder about the intentions of the donor...”

Trump also smoked—although he’d thought about quitting—and lit a *Gitane* pulled from a silver-plated case he kept in the left pocket of his jacket.

“Someone sent you a box of chocolates?” he asked sarcastically, while swallowing a blini.

“You’re not entirely wrong,” replied the Russian, “in the sense that this also weighs heavily on my stomach. Guess who the sender is?”

“Lady Godiva?”

“No. The French Consulate in Los Angeles.”

Trump raised a curious eyebrow.

“The French? Really?” he asked.

“They had a small package delivered to our own Consulate, with an accompanying note that said, in effect, ‘We think this belongs to you. Best regards.’ The package contained a small transistor radio of the type you can buy anywhere. It presented only one peculiarity: it didn’t work.”

A wisp of smoke escaped from Trump’s lips, whose features now reflected his full attention.

“Diplomats can sometimes be clever too, so the L.A. Consulate fobbed the radio off on us, perhaps just to avoid blame just in case it turned out to be something important,” continued Stroganoff with a shade of sarcasm. “You do know that we have a rather sophisticated lab right here?”

“It’s common knowledge,” said Trump. “Even the FBI knows it, I think. So, what did you discover inside that transistor radio?”

Gloomily, the Russian replied while Trump was wolfing down the food:

“Something that should not have been there. Wait, I’ll show you...”

Stroganoff again dived into his pile of brown folders until he found the right one. It contained a report and a couple of photographs showing a tiny oval object, about eight by five millimeters, in the shape of a small tower glued to a square, with three wires as thin as strands of hairs coming out of it.

“What is it?” Trump asked, after looking at the photos.

“Our scientists call it a rhodion transistor; it’s some kind of new, advanced transistor, with a performance vastly superior to those using germanium crystals, especially in the higher frequencies, or so I’m told. It’s a new Russian invention...”

“Is it a military secret?”

“Well, no... It’s being licensed for a variety of industrial applications, including a new type of radar.”

“So?” Trump said. “Where’s the problem?”

“This is precisely what I asked myself,” replied Stroganoff. “The French are known for their Machiavellian minds. What is their purpose in sending us this device?”

“To have a little fun at your expense?” volunteered Trump. “A way of saying, ‘we had it, we broke it, so sorry’?”

Stroganoff made a negative hand gesture.

“No, that would be contrary to all the rules of our profession. You don’t notify your opponent of a successfully conducted operation, even if, as would be the case here, it was a waste of time. I’m more inclined to see it as some kind of warning, like, ‘Beware, someone is stealing your technology, but know that we are not involved.’ This seems to me more consistent with their current desire for *détente*.”

Trump thought about this for two seconds, took another mouthful of beef blinchiki, then objected:

“Unless we—the Americans—stole it. The French know it, and by giving it back to us, they hope to trigger an investigation that would ultimately result in creating a quarrel with the U.S. After all, it wouldn’t be the first time the FBI or the CIA messed up.”

Stroganoff did not reject that possibility out of hand.

“That would be diabolical,” he admitted, “but not impossible. So, now you see why I’d like to know where we stand. Since the French passed this ball to us, we’re going to run with it, even at the risk of playing the cards they dealt us,” he concluded, mixing his metaphors.

Trump pulled one last time on his *Gitane* before crushing it in the ashtray. Now he knew why Stroganoff had summoned him.

“You want me to go and try to get some information from the French Consulate in Los Angeles?”

“Yes. You know the French and their psychology. Plus, your family has some real estate investments in California. Tell them we’re touched by their gesture, we deeply appreciate their cooperation, etc., etc., but ask them how they came to be in possession of the device, and who stole it in the first place.”

“Sounds good,” replied Trump. “But I’m rather skeptical. If the French didn’t want us to untangle this by ourselves, they would have included more information with the shipment.”

The Russian spymaster displayed his crafty smile.

“Not necessarily, because, in that case, they would never have learned if we’d bit or not. Since they surely have some objective in mind, they must be waiting for our reaction. And the best way for them to find out was to provide us with too little information.”

“If you’re right, they should receive me with open arms,” said Trump, getting up. “Do you have a name for me to talk to?”

Stroganoff took out another folder and looked inside

“Yes. Ask for the Military Attaché... Colonel Roquefort... Here’s a letter of introduction that designates you as a consultant to our Russian-American Trade Delegation. They won’t be fooled, of course, but we must maintain appearances.”

Trump took the sheet of paper, folded it in four, and pocketed it.

“When should I go?”

“The sooner, the better.”

“What tone should I adopt with them?”

Stroganoff pushed his glasses back higher on his nose.

“Be reserved, but forceful enough to make them believe we care about this. Between the two of us, I don’t really... The discovery of the rhodion transistor was published in scientific journals, with its principles and its design. We even released photos. However, this should not be taken as an open invitation to let everyone and their neighbor copy it. That little gadget is too rich in opportunities to let it be duplicated before we have even started its production in mass quantities.”

While putting on his overcoat, Trump said:

“In essence, the thief—whoever he is—has stolen something that will soon be on the open market?”

“Correct. And this can be interpreted in two ways: either he misunderstood its intrinsic value...” Stroganoff paused to better articulate his thoughts. “...Or he is very anxious to use it for an application that he wants to be the first to develop.”

“Something you guys haven’t thought of?”

“Yes. One thing is certain, however. This involves both the Americans and the Mexicans, who may or may not be a convenient proxy for the French. We don’t know yet. But the fact that, in order to cross the border undetected, they hid the rhodion inside a disabled transistor radio speaks volumes. No pun intended.”

Trump pursed his lips and said:

“It stinks of a private network, don’t you think?”

“You may well be right. The CIA, if they’re involved, would have microfilmed the designs, not stolen a prototype to be reverse engineered later. Nevertheless, I want to clarify who did it—and why.”

Trump left without paying. He never did. That’s one of the things he liked best about being a Russian asset.

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