

CREATIVE NATIONALISM

Garth Spencer

(A previous version of this article was published in *BCSFAzine* 347, April 2002.)

There are quite a number of micronations, mostly but not entirely online. (“Micronations” sounds better than “invented countries”, and anyway “micronations” is a term in common use already.)

NOTA BENE: Let’s just clear up a point of confusion about the word “nation”, shall we? English speakers use the words “nation”, “country” (or “land”) and “government” almost interchangeably; but speakers of French and other languages are likely to mean “people,” even “race”, when they say “nation”. This connotation has a bearing on some of the less positive attempts to start a new country.

1: Fictional Nations as Game Settings

If you do a Web search, you are liable to find a number of imaginary countries invented for computer games, and fantasy-role-playing games. Those most closely related to Real Life include “The Embraced: Masquerade” vampire role-playing settings, or those for cyberpunk and cybermagic games. Some of which include versions of present-day or future Seattle, Portland or Vancouver which are not quite like our own; those most distant from Real Life include the Tékumel/Empire of the Petal Throne heroic fantasy world.

2: Micronations

The focus here, however, is on the scores of micronations exist which lay claim to some territory or other – or (in recent years) only to a constituency, which in that case consists of “cybercitizens”. Such micronations offer citizenships, currency, passports and stamps of their own design, for nominal fees; but they’re not advocating sedition or secession or anything. Arcadia, for instance, is a “country” claiming most of the states and provinces in the Pacific Northwest (although it doesn’t declare independence from Canada or the United States). Other examples are Outer Baldonia, an island off Canada’s east coast, over which an American millionaire used to claim sovereignty, and the Kingdom of Loges des Corbeaux, between B.C. and Alberta.

In the case of Loges des Corbeaux, the original Dominion surveyors made a number of mistakes in surveying the provincial borders which remained on the map, partly because of the difficult terrain and partly because of the low priority Ottawa gave the border disputes. A city clerk in Fernie, B.C. discovered by the early 1970s that about 5.5 square miles was assigned to the wrong province; he declared The Kingdom of Loges des Corbeaux; he invented a story about a prospector named “Wisukitsak” claiming the mineral-rich territory, and getting elected King by the miners and trappers he invited in.

It is an open question whether the famous Emperor Norton was proposing a bug nation. (He was Joshua Norton, the 19th -century street person in San Francisco, who declared himself “by Grace of God and the National Will Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico”.) Perhaps the main difference between Emperor Norton and most micronations is that the Emperor represented only himself, albeit he became a celebrity and most San Franciscans humoured his delusion.

3. Idealist Groups, Secessionist Groups and Intentional

Communities

Based on the foregoing, you might think that micronations are usually light-hearted, harmless games that small groups of people play for fun. But it appears that some people do make serious attempts to start real countries, as sovereign as the USA, as Canada, or as Lichtenstein and Monaco. These micronations have a wide variety of motivations and constituencies; they range all the way from Ayn Rand's Objectivism, libertarianism, or some utopian or religious idealism ... even to neo-fascist, racist, survivalist militias and "Christian Identity" groups.

The Republic of Talossa

As R. Ben Madison described it, Talossa is an independent, sovereign nation in North America, which seceded peacefully from the United States in 1979. Ben declared his bedroom to be a new nation when he was thirteen and alienated from the mundane society around him. Unlike other projects a thirteen-year-old may start, Ben's creation caught on with an expanding number of friends, despite some occasions when Ben (now styled King Robert I) lost interest himself. Talossa now claims at least the east side of the city of Milwaukee, plus an island off of France, and a chunk of Antarctica, respectively comprising seven provinces (named after various dictators) and the territory of "Pengopäts". Talossa's website stresses that Talossa is not a computer game, nor an FRP-game fictional world. Since the U.S. federal government has never disputed Talossa's territorial claims, it can be argued that Talossa is not an imaginary but a real country.

The stated philosophy of Talossa ("Derivatism") is that:

"The Kingdom of Talossa is a community of persons having fun by doing things which are reasonably similar to what other ('real') countries do, whether for reasons of tourist nostalgia, out of a lust for power, in pursuit of parody, or – yes – as nation-building."

Other philosophies that have held sway include World Singular Secession, the idea that everyone in the world ought to secede and declare their own independent country, and Spiritual Plasmatism, which is hard to define.

Today, Talossa has somewhere between forty and eighty members in Milwaukee, and around the world ("Cybercits"). The parliament (*el Ziu*) operates as a constitutional monarchy, and as an unusually participatory democracy: anyone can assume any political posture, even at variance to the one they hold outside Talossa, and in fact Talossans are quite free to form their own political parties, even if they are the only member. (One is strongly encouraged, however, to wait until he finishes the citizenship process and understands how the system already works. The reasons for this go back to some personality conflicts in early Talossan history.) Existing political parties include the Progressive Conservatives (sounds Canadian, doesn't it?), the Communists, and the newly-formed "Rebal Alliance" and "Talossan Imperial New Order Party".

Several online Talossan newspapers were founded, but most of the online activity now occurs on "Wittenberg", a message board (named after the town where Luther posted his 95 Theses).

The monarch and his friends even went to the extent of creating their own language (*glheb*) for Talossa, basically the kind of Romance language that might have evolved in Northern Africa. This segues into one of Talossa's cultural distinctions, an "inexplicable and inextricable connection with the Berbers". This was elaborated in 1984 and 1985 by "The Berber Project", Ben's "ancient history" of North African Berbers sailing to North America and in fact building the Indian mounds in Wisconsin and the Mississippi drainage basin; the Berber Project, like the unfinished saga of The Brothers Asbad, were posted on the Talossa website. Talossan documents are available at purely nominal cost from *La*

Cudëscheria (the online book-store). Other offerings include *The Lexicon of Talossan English*, the *Scurznia Gramatica*, the *Corpus Scriptionum Talossanarum*, and *Invasion of the Androids*. Most of the offerings are written by Ben Madison or John Jahn.

Microhistory, “Bug Nations” and Little Wars

Judging from Talossa’s history (*Ar Pāts*), it seems that Talossans invested as much *sturm und drang* in their micronation as science fiction fans did in fandom, from the late 1930s up to the present. (Harry Warner remarked that if you go from reading the history of World War II to reading Sam Moskowitz’ *The Immortal Storm*, the fanhistory doesn’t come as an anticlimax.) Some of the conflicts were between personalities. Some were between their philosophies. Some of the battles ... well, King Robert I tells me: “Technically a ‘Bug Nation’ is a micronation that is obsessed with Talossa – one that attacks Talossa, comments on Talossan affairs, or actively seeks to get either ‘recognition’ from, or declare ‘war’ on, Talossa. It’s a term Talossans invented.” (March 29, 2002) Talossa’s consensus now is against recognizing other micronations. It all reads a bit like fanhistory. Perhaps that’s normal small-group dynamics.

I’m still learning to grasp the ambience of *Talossanisme*, and maybe the way Talossans express things is a send-up of contemporary political language. One of the things I’m trying to assimilate about Talossa is the apparent interest in 20th-century dictators.

J. Eiffler responded:

The King and several of the citizens in this country have post graduate degrees in history, and more than a few of us have a great interest in it as well. Combine that with a spirited interest in politics ... The things that make the great 20th Century dictators of such interest to us isn’t necessarily about what they preached, but how they preached it. Captured on film and audio tape, most of these men are more easily accessible to us so they get more attention. We can actually see how they used their charisma to move millions of supporters into believing their very perverted philosophies and strategies.

If you still don’t follow, find some stock footage of Mussolini giving any speech from his balcony and tell us that you are not intrigued by his mannerisms alone.:-) Now do the same thing with footage of a Nazi rally featuring Hitler barking, pounding, and spitting all over the podium and the people around him. Recognize the passion they had for what they believed was the truth and how they presented it. [Now] Think about how bland most of the leaders of the current day are in comparison.

JEiffler on: 03/27/2002

The Talossan FAQ sheet says their major issues include: their relations with other micronations; the composition of their supreme court, given the factions competing for seats; exploring the mystical Berber heritage; what to do about inactive citizens (now that sounds familiar); who should be the “national entertainer” – Gloria Estefan? (or anyone?); and whether Talossan and English should both continue to be official languages, or whether to recognize “Talossan English”. (People keep peppering their English with expressions like “Amish” for non-cybercitizens, “Azul” for “hello”, “Cestoûr” for non-Talossans in Wisconsin, and “Zooks!” (*Zux!*) as a general exclamation. To apply for Talossan citizenship, go to the Citizenship Information page.

How to Start Your Own Country

This small-press book, by well-known fan and anarchist Erwin Strauss, lists about 100 new-country projects (I counted), and he concentrated mostly on projects in action since 1960. No wonder there was an International Micropatrolological Society. It is interesting to notice what Erwin includes in his list, such as “mouse-that-roared” nations that never quite attained a state of existence, or the Society for Creative Anachronism. (Granted that this medievalist group designates regional branches as shires and baronies and so on, and draws maps dividing up the known world among them, still I wonder if Erwin is stretching a point.)

Erwin discusses a number of motivations people display for new countries, such as founding a new kind of society (or returning to some “traditional” values. He also discusses five approaches people use in trying to establish new countries:

- traditional sovereignty - claiming some turf and holding it against all comers;
- ship under flag of convenience, just outside anyone’s territorial waters;
- litigation, for example “Prince Roy” Bates’ tactic of claiming an abandoned offshore anti-aircraft platform, dubbing it Sealand, and battling in court with the government of the United Kingdom for operating a pirate radio station and refusing to pay Inland Revenue taxes;
- “vonu”, out of sight, out of mind living: i.e., paying no taxes, accepting no government services, educating your own children, ignoring draft registration ... and depending solely upon yourself. Parts of British Columbia, Oregon, Dakota, and the Pacific are favoured for this “mountain man” lifestyle;
- declaring a “model country”, i.e., unilaterally declaring your home to be an independent nation, and proceeding from there. Alphistia, The Kingdom of Talossa and some other places fit this description. Many such exercises send notices of their existence, and requests for recognition, to the United States government; the Office of the Geographer of the United States (at the State Department, in Washington) files these notices, but no action is taken on them.

Erwin’s last edition was produced in 1984, so there is some question how current its information is. It seems curious to me, but Strauss’ book (last edited in 1984) lists a whole lot of politically-motivated, even fascist and racist micronations, such as the United Kingdom of Arya.

New Lease on Life: Data Havens

One of the last updates to the story of micronations reprised the story of Sealand, the North Sea platform. Apparently a former MIT student, Ryan Lackey, approached “Prince Roy” about the idea of hosting a data haven at Sealand. “HavenCo Ltd.” was born in 1999. At last report, havenco.com was an outlaw data storage business. (Christopher Shulgan, “Offshore Computing”, *Shift* V10.1 Mar/Apr 2002) This should remind you of the online data haven/ Internet bank that motivates much of the novel *Cryptonomicon*.

Sad But True

The next thing that can happen is that some people abroad don’t know your newly-declared country is any different from Canada or France, and they want to immigrate. In the middle of March 2002, one of BCSFA’s outlying members, John Bartley, brought to my attention a story about Pakistanis trying to emigrate to a micronation. Lars Vilks set up “Ladonia” in 1996 as a protest against Swedish authorities who removed two large works of art, or installations, in southern Sweden. About 6,000 people had

registered as Ladonian citizens when a flood Pakistanis inquired about citizenship, wanting to know where Ladonia was and where to locate their embassy in Pakistan.

King Robert I of Talossa commented: “This has happened with Talossa. Over the last two years there was a flood, behind the scenes, of immigration applications from Nigeria.” (March 29, 2002)

Lists of Other Created Countries

Somewhat more up-to-date lists of micronations than Erwin Strauss’ were posted online, on the “Rittergeist” website and many other websites. But these are not all-inclusive, and the Rittergeist page itself says it only lists micronations with websites. (I have starred the micronations which also appeared in How to Start Your Own Country.)

These include:

Aeldaria, Empire of;
Aerican Empire;
Alphistia;
Alterra, Kingdom of;
Anaceron, Commonwealth of;
Ansconia, Republic of;
Ark, Federation;
Arteñya, Communist Nation of;
Asphynxia, Dominion of;
Aveshira, Kingdom of;
Bahoudii, Kingdom of;
Baja Arizona, Republic of;
Baldonios, Republic of Greater (?);
Barnstovia, Republic of;
Bluffington, Hindu Republic of;
Blum, Republic of;
Brindabella, Commonwealth of;
Cabal, Federal Republic of;
Cherusken, Kingdom of;
Choconia;
Communicatia, Peoples’ Republic of;
Conch Republic *;
Confederated Online States;
Confederated Territories, The;
Corvinia, Sovereign Principality of;
Cyberia, Virtual Commonwealth of;
Cyberia, People’s Democratic Republic of the United Provinces of East;
Elgaland and Vargaland, Kingdoms of;
EnenKio Atoll;
Falkenberg, Kingdom of;
Flanders, Republic of;
Flat 24, Republic of;
Freedonia, Kingdom of;
Freedonia, Principality of;
Freelonias, Sultanate of;
Freistaat KLE;
Frioul, Free Republic of;
Grogardias, Grand Duchy of;

Haren, Grand Duchy of;
Havenport, City-State of;
Howland and Baker Islands, Republic of;
Hutt River Province, Principality of *;
Identitem de Lati, Empire of;
Island, Genial State of The;
Homeland;
Jamptland;
Kadin, Kingdom of;
Kaliope, Civilized State of;
Kisone, Republic of;
L'Anse-Saint-Jean, Municipality of;
Ladonia;
Lafartia, Glorious Empire of;
Landreth, Kingdom of;
Laputa, Free Republic of;
Lautenia;
Lectoria;
Liverpool, People's Democractic Republic of;
'Llome, Republic of;
Lobster Nation, The;
Lomar, Republic of;
Lothlorrien;
Ludonia,
Kingdom of;
Malveale, Sovereign Republic of;
Mapulto, Sovereign Republic of;
Marajo;
Maya Republic;
Melchizedek, Dominion of;
Merovingia, Kingdom of;
Minbari Federation;
Monastico, Serene Principality of;
Morovia, Kingdom of;
Motolia, Republic of;
Mowameddo Regime;
NetCity, Republic of;
Neufünfland, United Anarchic Monarchies of;
New Worcester Kingdom;
Nova Roma;
Oceana *;
Orange, Principality of;
Oscania, People's Confederation of;
Ottawak, Dominion of;
Patria, Inner Realm of;
Penguinea;
People's Socialist Republics, Union of;
Port Colice, Commonwealth of;
Portinópolis;
Porto Claro, Republic of;
Porto Claro, Kingdom of;

Ratelon, Democratic Union of;
Refugee Republic;
Reisenguthland-Ellermark, Kingdom of;
Reunion, Holy Empire of;
Riesenguthland-Ellermark, Kingdom of;
Roadkills-R-Us, Republic of;
Saint-Paul's Island Kingdom;
Santa Clara, Republic of;
Scotland;
Sealand, Principality of *;
Seborga, Principality of;
Sedang, Kingdom of *;
Somtovia-St. Papinian, United Zoe Katholike Patriarchate of;
Stoner Homeland;
Syntagmia, Kingdom of;
Telusia, Barony of;
Terra Novum, Republic of;
Textor;
United Protectorate of Earth;
United Space Federation;
Utopia, United Provinces of;
Valsgrafenstein, People's Republic of;
Vanesia, Sovereign Order of;
Vivaldia, Republic of;
Washitaw de Dugdahmoundyah, Empire of;
Web Island;
Zaire, Kingdom of;
Zugesbuch, Principality of;
Zzanduria.

I make that 116 micronations. (I counted.)

Conclusions

From Erwin Strauss' viewpoint, micronations express a recurring wish for personal independence, even for sovereignty up to and including anarchism; but most such micronations have failed. Maybe the founders couldn't pay some high legal start-up costs, or they couldn't interest enough people, or couldn't fight off a larger country's takeover, or the founders couldn't even build the islands or platforms they needed.

From my viewpoint, the serious attempts to start new countries look a lot like the attempts to start intentional communities – which predate the mid-20th-century commune movement, and go back at least as far as the European settlement of this continent.

Because I'm absolutely unprepared to make such an attempt, I'd like to propose that we split off some Western states and provinces, and form a new nation in the Pacific Northwest. I favour the snail as the national bird, Chinook Jargon as the national language, and for a national anthem, I suggest Mark Knopfler's theme from *Local Hero*, as performed on the bagpipe. Also I propose that we go back to driving on the left, just like the Rhinoceros Party suggested. I propose that we call the new nation Snass Illahie (which means "rain country" in Chinook).

You are probably aware of the similar recurring idea of “Ecotopia” or “Cascadia”; you may know at least that Northwest people often find more in common with each other than with the other regions, or with the federal governments in Ottawa and Washington. You may also be aware of the resentments and frustrations that Western Canadians nurse against high costs, low service, and lack of response to their needs, shown by both the government bureaucracies and the private corporations centralized in Ontario.

Now, I confess, I don’t know any conditions under which the U.S. Army and National Guard would permit states to secede today; although I have an idea that the Canadian Armed Forces are organized by regional regiments, and some might join their provinces’ cause. You tell me if I’m full of it.

I also propose that we institute an elective monarchy, on the Polish model practised before World War II. Or we could construct the world’s first libertarian socialism. But what I’d really like to do is to set up an anarchosyndicalist thing, as attempted in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War. I mean, we’ve had every other kind of country – monarchies, dictatorships, democracies, fascist states, communist states – so isn’t it about time we had an anarchist country somewhere? (Well, no, I’m not convinced it would work – but hey, it would be different, wouldn’t it?) Why am I proposing sedition, secession and revolution? Well, it was a boring Sunday, and it was raining outside, and there was nothing good on TV ...

References (people, publications, and websites)

La Cudëscheria (Talossan on-line bookstore – link from www.talossa.com)

Jahn, John. *Invasion of the Androids*. Milwaukee, Wi.: Talossan National News, Inc. 1997?

Madison, R.B. *Ar Pāts* (online - link from www.talossa.com)

———. The Berber Project (online - link from www.talossa.com)

——— (ed.) *Corpus Scriptionum Talossanarum*. 1997

———. *La Scurznia Gramatica del Glhep Talossán (Secund Edizium)*. Milwaukee, WI. 1996.

———. *El Treisoûr del Glhep Talossán* (1997). Milwaukee, WI. 1997.

Micronations webring

Rittergeist rittergeist@earthlink.net

Shulgan, Christopher. “Offshore Computing”, *Shift* V10.1 Mar/Apr 2002.

Strauss, Erwin S. *How to Start Your Own Country*. Port Townsend, Wash.: Breakout Publications, 1999.

Wittenberg - Talossan message board