

Henry Ford was said to be a man of great stature. A motor company bearing his same name, the respect of nearly every single American from coast to coast, and enough money to purchase the entire globe three times over. The United States practically worshiped his every step, falling over themselves and skinning their knees as they hit the great American pavement, desperate to catch even a cents' worth of the vast wealth that lined his pockets.

They burst out laughing at that image, the fire flickering and fluttering as their cackles and shouts bubbled in the air. The men raised and shook their cupped hands, hooting and hollering for the great Ford's mercy as the women doubled over in a fit of giggles.

"Please, please, Mr. Ford," they begged, their voices shrill and exaggerated, "Just a penny, sir! Just a penny!"

Their poor attempts at imitating an American accent only made the small group laugh harder, each person repeating the next person's nonsense until the words they were speaking were hardly of any language at all. Round and round it went, their spirits joined to one another as the campfire continued to roar under their breaths.

The dense forestation framed their little haven with vibrant emeralds and jades, the thick leaves and bushes rustling in the warm winds. They were only a few minutes away from the town, and yet were far enough off the property that no rules would be broken.

Contrary to the lush forest that surrounded them, their new home was so carefully planned the arrangement of each building alone felt suffocating. A dry, gravel road split the town down its center, with dull houses of beiges and grays flanking it for nearly the entirety of its full length. Even the various amenities lacked any joy in their construction, the stifflingly calculated exteriors of the pools, playgrounds, and dance hall ringing hollow with disinterest and tedium from the very ground up.

The only reason citizens had to leave their homes at all was to avoid the regular inspections that so rudely interrupted their everyday lives, the so-called “superiors” of the area barging in to check for practically any sign of living. Even alcohol had been completely outlawed, and from what the locals were able to discern from the broken Portugese of the few foreigners who could speak it, it was a decision inspired by a move towards prohibition back in the states.

It was becoming increasingly obvious the longer this whole experiment of a civilization continued that letting a businessman dictate the moral compass of a small country’s worth of people was a lot cause from the very start. They weren’t here to live, they were here to *work*, and while a paycheck of five dollars an hour had initially seemed worth it, each cent’s worth of a second was quickly beginning to prove otherwise.

It only took another half an hour at most for a manager to finally find them, stumbling into the small clearing with an indignant huff and a wrinkling scowl. No one amongst themselves could confidently understand what he was saying, but it was more than clear by his sneering expression and furrowed brows that it was time for the night to come to a close.

The group rose to their feet as one man went to put out the fire, a cloud of mumbling and murmuring filling the air as the impatient American tapped his foot against the ground, bulging arms crossed and slobbering maw shouting jumbled, incomprehensible orders just to fill the time. As everyone began to file out of the forest one by one, a woman at the end of the line stopped and turned to look at the ash left behind.

As the remaining smoke rose and began to fizzle out of the air, she released a quiet sigh into the evening breeze. In the tranquility of it all, she’d never regretted moving more than she did in this moment. Sure, she was well-taken care of— she had a roof over her head, a steady job

as a nurse at one of the local hospitals, and enough food to be shared amongst herself and her family— but whatever utopia Henry Ford had first envisioned was soon coming to an end. The people were restless, there was no money being made, and the managers' decision to discontinue the diner-style food service in favor of a more efficient cafeteria seemed like it was going to be the town's final straw. She'd even heard rumors that the famed inventor himself was beginning to visibly lose hope in his efforts, and although she'd never seen the man in person, she couldn't imagine how anyone could feel any other way.

After all the years of wasted blood, sweat and tears they'd spent keeping this wretched dream afloat, it was almost poetic that the graveyard full of people who had died before the town had even been finished would likely outlast them all. She passed the area every morning on her walk to work, and with each coming day a growing, nagging feeling of dread began to grow legs of its own as it trailed after her. She wondered if it was perhaps the spirits of the dead fighting to warn her of the inevitable end to this tragic tale, or if such a thing would be considered too outlandish for the fathers of the American dream she was currently living in. She wondered if even Ford thought this was a life worth living.

Two weeks later, like clockwork, Fordlandia was set aflame.

The woman was pulled from the bedside of a patient and rushed to the window, a jolt of panic lighting up her spine as her eyes took in the scene unfolding below.

They'd been hearing the angry shouts of the working men for a while now, but had chalked it up to just another work day's dispute. What they didn't expect to be met with was a plume of smoke rising in the distance as the citizens of Fordlandia, American and Brazilian alike, began beating and tearing down anything and everything within their reach. The nurses

gasped as a line of telephone poles groaned before slamming into the ground with a thundering *smash*, electricity connecting with the grass to create a burst of flame.

As the fire began to take hold, the nurses began frantically hoisting the resting patients from their beds as others turned and fled towards the exit. The woman, stunned into stiffness as her body began to tremble, was thrown back into reality as she realized where the smog was coming from. Before she could even register what she was doing, she was sprinting down the stairs and out of the building, her feet carrying her quicker than her brain could process where they were even going.

Dodging the throes of people around her, she got as far as she could down the rocky pathway before being shoved to the dirt. As her head hit the rubble, the world spun around her as the frenzied mob of citizens blurred into a mosaic of color, sound, and motion.

Before she could push herself up, her head throbbed as the cry of one of the Americans rose above the crowd and pierced through her. Squinting against the sun, she shifted her gaze to where the rest of the inhabitants were turned. Just as her vision had refocused, a high-pitched screech rattled through the earth, shuddering up the length of her fingertips as she lifted her head to look towards the commotion.

She watched as the tank of the water tower wavered against the gentle blue of the afternoon sky, expensive steel bearing the name of their great American society glinting against the light as if it were a beacon. Before anyone could even make a move to get away, Fordlandia was careening towards the floor with a deafening roar.

Water burst from the insides of the hulking beast and washed over the people below, knocking the enraged workers to the ground as their voices were drowned out by the rush of wasted water. Soil turned to mud as the warm sunlight turned scalding, and as the woman

coughed up the moisture in her lungs in a mix of blood and spit, she saw a figure standing in the distance.

Years later, she'd maintain with a hush that she couldn't be sure, but she swore that she saw the great American Henry Ford cry that day.

I had a hard time figuring out who I wanted to write about for this project, as I wanted to focus on the antics of just one crazy person instead of jumping from historical figure to figure. As someone who has little interest in science, I was originally dreading the task of having to find someone I could bring myself to care enough about to write about for four pages. Initially I was considering looking into Leonardo Da Vinci, as I figured discussing the taboo nature of his sexuality could make for an interesting premise, but it just didn't feel right. The people Labatut chose to shine the biggest spotlight on in his novel were not just interesting people, they were completely morally bankrupt. Comparing the plight of a man seeking to be accepted in an era where he would've sooner been labeled a devil worshiper to the actions of a man like Shroedinger seemed misguided at best and offensive at worst, but I also didn't have many other ideas I felt confident in.

Eventually, I was struck with a memory of a video I'd watched a few months ago, and my problem was solved instantaneously. It'd come from the channel "Wendigoon," and was a 30 minute retelling of the failed story of Henry Ford's own "Fordlandia." Yes, this is a real story, you can look it up if you like. Essentially, Ford was frustrated by the monopoly Britain had on the rubber industry, as he was adamant about being able to produce every resource that went into the construction of his company's automobiles. Apparently, after a conversation with the president at the time, Teddy Roosevelt, he was given the idea to move to the country where rubber trees originated, Brazil (I'd like to quickly note, though, that this anecdote conflicts with some of my other sources). Although Ford could have simply established a factory in the Southern hemisphere, he was reaching the end of both his career and his life and had become obsessed with the idea of legacy. As such, it seems that Ford was determined to prove that the

principles that had brought him his success could be recreated anywhere, by anyone, and so he set out to create an actual, good old-fashioned American utopia.

This is where some of the rules and regulations mentioned in the story come from, as he did in fact outlaw things like alcohol, even though it was perfectly legal for the rest of Brazil. He also insisted that everyone eat an all-vegetarian diet, participate in recreational square-dancing in the dance hall, and work a typical 9am-5pm job despite the debilitating heat and sunlight of the South American climate. It was a complete nightmare from the very start, and even the acquisition of the supplies needed to start the project was a mess, as the closest waterway, Tapajós, had dried up for the season and made it impossible to easily receive resources shipped down from America. That's why they were forced to build a graveyard before the town had even been finished, as many had perished both in the clearing of the jungle shrubbery and the construction of all the homes, buildings, and establishments.

It was unfathomably bizarre, too, because as many Americans would later testify, it was basically like walking out of pure jungle into a regular Midwestern neighborhood. Ford was eerily dead set on establishing American values in this foreign country, which included placing American flags in each of the identical homes. There are so many other anecdotes I could blab on about, like the fact that those homes were so unfit for the conditions that jaguars stealing babies during the night became a common problem, an area just beyond Fordlandia dubbed "the Island of Innocence" was established and filled with bars and brothels, and that the first manager of the whole civilization was an unqualified ship captain who Ford just took a particular liking to, but I wanted to focus on a specific scene of the town's demise. The water tower was essentially a symbol of the town's grandeur and strength, and although I have no idea whether it was actually toppled over, I figured it'd be the best way to symbolize Fordlandia's demise. I

hope this story was at least somewhat enjoyable to read through, and if you're interested, I'd encourage you to watch the original video that inspired it! It's got a relatively short runtime, and it will explain the entire situation better than I could ever even begin to.