

"The Babi Makers" is a science-fiction novel that takes place on a planet where the most important industry is the making of babies. In this excerpt, Atreus, a teacher, explains to his students the history of the planet.

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When a life-grade babi has reached fifteen chronals, it leaves the resident cubicle it had called home and is shipped to the nearest center to begin the first scholastic rounds. This means that many of them came to Atreus, as manager of a first scholastic rounds, to be taught and guided along the rocky road of their lives. On the very first centichronal of those first scholastic rounds, he would give a little talk to his new students to make sure they all possessed a common foundation of understanding of their world. What he told them was information that should have been taught to them by either their tutors or the people raising them, but often was not. He thought it important that all his students understood the beginnings of their world:

"One doesn't need to be a student of the history of Nové, our land, to appreciate the devastation caused by The Fall," he said as his presentation began. "It was so overwhelming, and its affects so long lasting, as to be with us -- in part -- still, to this centichronal. Because of the vast destruction caused by The Fall, very little of our pre-history has come down to us.

"Before The Fall, machines held the knowledge of all the people of all the lands and dated back many, many chronals. This was *their* history, but so very little of it survived the period of darkness. At one time, there were many people in Nové -- many more than now -- and they shared the land with other species of animals, a concept I find a little difficult to understand. On Nové now there is just one species of animal and that is we -- me, you and others like us. To my knowledge, there is nothing else.

"I also understand from what's left of the old records that once there were many kinds of animals that grew *in the ground*, if you can believe that. They were firmly in the ground and did not move around as we do. We have something like that today, but they mostly live beyond the safe boundaries of Nové -- outside, where the ground is still not safe to tread, and nothing that grows in it is safe to consume, although I have no idea why one would want to. Occasionally, water falls from the sky and wets these ground animals and they seem to grow even more; but eventually they all wither and die from the intense heat of the lightball. It seems that, before The Fall, people would take these animals from the ground -- or parts of them -- and eat them, which seems absolutely grisly to me. How anyone could eat anything not from a foodarama is beyond my ability to understand. How could you trust it would be safe? I hear tell there are secret places where ground animals are being raised today.

"But, it is apparently all done in secret as I've never seen such a place. Were it not for the fact I myself have tasted some of these ground animals, I would doubt their very existence."

That last sentence never failed to generate a little excitement in his students. After all, the odds are very good that they never tasted any real ground animals, and probably knew no one who had.

"One can't doubt the existence of The Fall; no, there's plenty of evidence for it. One time, many chronals ago, a large object came from the sky and hit the land where all the people and other animals lived. It was some kind of object from the space near the lightball, but we don't know what's out there other than the lightball, so I can't tell you what it was. It was large, though. It hit the ground with such a force that land matter was thrown high into the air -- so high it must have reached the lightball and made it go out for there was darkness over the land for so many chronals. This caused sadness and despair and made many of the creatures die. Many of the animals perished because they had no ground animals to eat. Big animals died, and then smaller ones, then smaller ones, then the animals in the ground died. It was a bleak time."