



ART BY PRISONERS THE WRITTEN EDITION

SELECTED WRITING FROM PEOPLE IN SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN PRISONS - 2020

Presented by The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre and the Department
for Correctional Services, as part of SALA.

Warning:

Please note that some of the writing in this collection contains language that is graphic and
could be offensive to some readers.



University of
South Australia



Government of South Australia
Department for Correctional Services

Believing in Goodness

My strong belief is Goodness as Evilness insists
We all keep spinnin through space and its Abyss
Jesus tattooed on my arm, a constant reminder he exists
I do believe in what created all of this
If there is a Heaven, I wanna fell an Angels kiss
If there is a God up there standing in the mist?
Then I'm a firm believer in his eternal bliss
Christianity says the Bibles here to teach
Some may read, but never find the answers that they seek
Some use church to cover up their life of sin
There in body, but the soul needs to be forgiven before their spirit enters-in

As the globe continues to spin
Humans continue to pollute, manipulating mother natures grin
We continue to consume and think we are controlling things
Truthfully, all of us are just, puppets on a string!

(even though, Believing in Goodness wont fix everything, Believing in Goodness is my Religion coz everyone sins!)

I believe in Goodness, hoping good things will prevail
Even though I am writing this, serving time in jail
Sitting in my cell, writing another verse
I truly believe, goodness breaks any evil curse
Although writing this seems hopeless, life can always get mercy less and worse
I pen these words straight from my heart nothing pre-rehearse
The first few years I was put upon this earth
I learnt right from wrong at kindergarten, when I had the option to steal a purse
Mum needed money which made me cross the line
I found out that day, goodness and evilness can intertwine
Believing in Goodness deprives evil from shining
Sometimes in life our decisions can be blinding
When, where at our weekest, that's when evil tries to slide in
We need to confide in Goodness coz evil is caniving!

(even though, Believing in Goodness wont fix everything, Believing in Goodness is my Religion coz everyone sins!)

I put myself in the bin
I could never put the blame on him!
The Bible is a guide to live by, admiring one man only, the Lord if our king
Father, son, Holy Spirit, God is all three things
He knows when we speak the truth
He knows when we are lying
He knows the places where we run

And every secret that we're hiding
Admitting our sins leads to forgiving, its our only way in
We must, embrace Gods grace, prove our faith is undenyng
No need to fear death, coz that's when eternal life in heaven begins.

(even though, Believing in Goodness wont fix everything, Believing in Goodness is my Religion coz everyone sins!)

Male, 39

Covid-19

Like the Flu yet twice as contagious
Compared with influenza, more dangerous
Wondering are we ever gonna contain this?
Seems like overnight Corona became world famous

Australian shoppers can't keep their composure
Trying to get toilet paper before business fore closure
Stay 1.5 metres away from each other, prevent your exposure
Once your home, don't even think about leaving your enclosure

De-composure, smelling odour all the way down the street
Not enough refrigeration in America, body's stuck in the heat
Australia, you know shits hectic when their closing the beach
Cops on the beat, looking to fine people who breach
Not allowed to drive, fuel's become cheap
There's no part of the world the pandemic aint reached!
Starting from China where exotic bats, cats and animals meet
All together at the market, history's bound to repeat
Hospitals packed beyond capacity, too many people to treat
Undertakers pack'n em rack'n em stack'n em ran off their feet
There's a race to find a vaccine, scientists all compete

The real heroes are the ones on the Frontline
Not just doctors and nurses, also the dedicated Saints donating their time
Grinding away all day until there's pain in their spine
Everyone confined to one place, for now they're closed the Airline
It's these days of decline that tests the kindness of Mankind
It's gonna take a collective effort to put the pandemic behind
So lets unwind this virus, erase the C.O.V.I.D and slash the 1.9

Male, 39

Fire Truck

Once upon a time
There was a beautiful
Little fire truck
She tried to put
The flame out
But the flame burned strong
She poured a thousand
Tears over it
But still it burned strong
She yelled and screamed
At it, and told it to go away
But still it burned strong
She held her breath
To starve it of oxygen
But still it burned strong
She told everyone she hated it
And would never love again
But still it burned strong
She blamed it for all her problems
But still it burned strong
Her anger made the flame smaller
But never out
She then remembered the times
The flame kept her warm and happy
And the light showed her the way in dark time
And that some sparks last forever
And a flame can keep many warm and happy
And that a flame like this
Is worth saving
Smart little fire truck

Floating

Lightning and thunder
Floating alone on a
Wild ocean one day
Calm blue skies the next
No planning ahead
Take one day at a time
Always looking for land
Flashes of hope between the wave
Passing ships every day
No one sees me
No one hears me
Alone in a crowded room
Nights are floating in space
Bouncing between stars
Can reach out and touch the moon
As it watches over me
Just me and an ocean of thoughts
Am I looking for me
Surviving on yesterday
And hopes of tomorrow
No time for today
Just floating on a thought
I know one day it will
All be worth it
When me and land
Meet again
And my feet are
On solid ground again

I hold most dear

On my path
Pencil riddles, fiddle with these syllables
Break em down and fit em all in a paragraph
Rappers with no skill, think their pretty cool till I put em on their ass!
Lives get ruined when ya get em puffin on the glass
New school, headmaster of the class
Snappin a rapper quick fast with the lyrical spells I cast
Fillin a 50 cal with consonants and vowels then blast!
Runnin designers rhymes, most rappers never last
Not worth shit like kmarts version of Everlast
Its my passion, smachin flash rymes, so bright I write with a welders mask!
To me these rymes appear crystal clear
Tempo can burst from first to fifth gear
I enjoy rap more than a pisshead sips beer
My simple format is to draw up raw raps that are sincere
In the bin, thinking once I'm outta here I gotta steer clear of friends still on the gear
Find pleasure in other ways and not submit to pressure from my peers
This is my career
Wishin I had access to a mic in hear!

-Chorus-

I hope one day my mum can wipe her tears
wish I could take a peep into a crystal ball to see which way my life will steer
Losing material things and millions, I'll never fear
knowing the ones I love are well and safe is the priority
I hold most dear!

I immerse myself in versus of a tertiary degree level
General public view me as a criminal, terrible
Just a feral
Never taught how to act sensible
Not capable to ever be a gentleman
Forever dammed
Deemed to have an involvement with contraband
A thug that knows drugs like the back of his hand
Not good at much except runnin-rymes on demand
Rymes-expand
My minds always free, only my body's stuck in the can
Thriving on rhyming and eating toast with strawberry jam
Everyday I add to my novel's and rymes as my knowledge expands
When I'm released I've got big plans
As long as I'm free, I'd be happy living in a caravan

-Chorus-

I hope one day my mum can wipe her tears

wish I could take a peep into a crystal ball to see which way my life will steer

Losing material things and millions, I'll never fear

knowing the ones I love are well and safe is the priority

I hold most dear!

Male, 39

I Kiss

I kiss you at night the same
Because I care to show
I kiss you through a picture frame
But you will never know

I kiss you in love, pain and laughter
Because I care for you so
And I will kiss you tomorrow and thereafter
But you will never know

Male, 59

If Prison Walls Could Sing

Verse 1

If prison walls could sing there'd be a thousand bars of music, Symphonies of silence and minuets of tears, If prison phones could ring a thousand lonely hearts would answer, Waves of love would wash away these walls that hold me here.

Verse 2

If prison walls could sing they'd sing a song of hope and freedom, Melodies of tenderness, a chorus of regret, The roof would sing beneath the wind that carried scents of perfume, Carry me away from here and help me to forget.

Chorus

Nights are long and I belong in another time and place, Echoes of remembrance, a tender soft embrace, My heart longs to sing my songs and leave this place behind, Leave this emptiness and ease my troubled mind.

Verse 3

If prison walls could sing they'd sing a lullaby of madness, Tales of love and sadness, poems full of pain, They would sing a song of how I came home through the darkness, Came home to my loved ones, to the place I shall remain.

Chorus

Male, 56

Lonely

I try to keep busy
Cant stand still
Only busy keeps you away
I read – I write
I know you are waiting
At my door
Between bursts of bus
I slowly start the
What if's, if only and maybe's
Slowly opening the door
Slowly letting you in
We should be friends
BY NOW
We spend so much time together
Living between worlds
We take our time deciding
As we waste the night away
You coming and going
Between bursts of busy
Soon another night is gone
As I slowly fall to sleep
I tell you I'm busy tomorrow night
Lonely smiles
AND says
Goodnight my friend

Our Attitude and Character

Sometimes we do things we don't mean to do, or we say things we don't mean to say.
We hurt the ones we love and not realising it at the time.

We have decisions & choices to make, whether it's the wrong or right ones.

We sit with a thought that plays over and over in our heads, and it stops us doing the things that we need to be doing.

The important things in life, for example, being a mentor for your sake and for your families too.
Your thinking leads you to your reaction.

You become from what your becoming, from how you can or can not control your mind.
We write our own epitaphs every day.

They are carved out by the way we go about our daily lives and how we relate and respond to the needs of those around us.

We can find it helpful, if we choose to.

That is, when someone tests our patience or ask something of us that is a burden, to keep that question in mind: How do I want to be remembered?

We are all tested from time to time.

Each of us must deal with tragedies, failures, set backs and hardship.

Sometimes it seems like these character tests keep hitting one after another, day after day, piling on the stress, slamming us to the ground.

Just remember that how we respond to the toughest challenges is the true measure of who we are.
To be comfortable with yourself, you have to remain true to your principles.

It's easy to claim them, but how you act upon them is the real measure of your character.
No matter what you say, it's what you do that counts.

After all, how many boxers say they have been the best jab in the business, only to be knocked out by the best hook in the business?

The content of your character affects how you see the world and how you respond to it.

Sometimes others bring their own biases and filters to their judgements of you.

You can't be responsible for their interpretations, but you are responsible for your actions, especially during those times when your character is measured and tested.

We can rise above our circumstance, but we can never rise above our character.

Can you choose to give even when there's little chance of getting anything in return?

You choose how you respond to those tests, and those choices are sure signs of your character.

If your life isn't on the right track, first look within, because happiness can only come from there.

If you aren't fulfilled and fully engaged, chances are that the person responsible is the one in the mirror.

We all have the ability to act rather than react, the power to choose a response that puts us in control instead of allowing our emotions to control us.

God gives us the power to choose our attitudes in order to keep us healthy and growing.

Too often, though, we let our emotions dictate our attitudes and actions instead of using the power to take control.

Our feelings catch us by surprise because we are distracted by the daily scramble at work and at home.

The next thing we know, those feelings are in the driver's seat and we're headed for a crash.

That's when we have to take back the wheel by adjusting our attitudes, tempering our emotions, taking responsibility for our actions.

Most people realise the importance of commitment in reaching their goals.

Fewer people give thought to the fact that dedication and dependability are also critical factors in their relationships.

To maintain the trust and respect of your co-workers, neighbours, friends and loved one, you must show commitment to playing a positive role in their lives.

You must also be consistent in how you play that role, how you engage with them.

How you treat them, and how you make yourself available to them, as well as how well you keep your promise to them.

What-ever you achieve in life – accomplishment, material possessions, wealth, prestige – all of it means very little when you are gone.

It is what you've done for others that determines your legacy.

Your contributions to the greater good will define you.

How many lives will you have touched?

How many will say that your departure is their loss and the world's as well?

Proverbs 11:25 says 'A generous person will prosper, whomever refreshes others will be refreshed'.

Male, 44

The Greatest Day Of My Life

I want to tell you a little story about the greatest day of my life. The day is the 23rd of September 2018, the day of the SANFL Grand Final. But before I talk about the actual day, some background information would be beneficial. You see, I'm an enormous fan of the North Adelaide Roosters. I have been since birth. I rarely ever miss a game if I can help it. My winter calendar is usually centred around Roosters games, and more often than not, my mood for the week following games is generally dictated by how the Roosters went on the weekend.

In 2017, North finished bottom of the SANFL. We stunk up the joint only winning four games. But during that season I was in prison, so it didn't bother me too much. Frankly, I was glad we didn't win the flag whilst I was locked up!! That would've been a bit heartbreaking for me. I got out of prison late in 2017 and was really excited for what 2018 would bring me.

During that off-season North recruited really well, and the club improved from the inside as well. So, at the very least, 2018 was going to see us play better footy. Round one rolled around on Good Friday at Elizabeth against Central District and we got thrashed. It was a pathetic performance which was reminiscent of the previous few seasons, and to top it off, one of the beloved members of the support staff collapsed and died in the changerooms after the game. The 2018 SANFL season could not have started any worse.

Or so we thought, because the next week North absolutely throttled and demolished West Adelaide by well over 20 goals in one of the more staggering performances I can ever remember. That was followed by wins over Sturt, Norwood and the Eagles, meaning we'd beaten each of the previous four premiers, and if we'd beaten Central in Round one we would've beaten every premier since the turn of the millennia. At times we played beautiful football, at times we played some downright brutal football, and we won many different games in different styles. We had matured, and the kids were playing well.

At the conclusion of the minor round North finished 5th, we'd managed to scrape into the finals. North were slated to play South Adelaide in the Elimination Final. We hadn't beaten them all year and they'd had our measure for a few years now. But we beat them well, and suddenly of the other three remaining clubs - Norwood, Sturt and the Eagles - we'd beaten them all during the season and weren't scared of them.

In the 1st Semi Final we beat Sturt easily (a bit too easily for a final). Next thing I know, I'm able to see North in a Preliminary Final against the Eagles. For the first two and a half quarters we were absolutely dreadful and getting soundly beaten. North turned the game on its head and came from the clouds to win a truly remarkable game of football. The 5,000 in attendance sounded like 20,000 it was so loud and exciting. But that wasn't the end of the drama because the Eagles lodged a protest after the game because North had 19 players on the ground for the first three minutes of the 4th quarter, so we didn't find out until midweek that North were in the Grand Final.

Umpires in the free kick count which was worrying; admittedly I had a feeling that it was the SANFL's way of punishing us for the 19th man saga from the Prelim Final. Norwood kept coming and kept pushing, but North took every punch and countered without taking a

backward step. The half time margin was five points, as it was at quarter time, in a high scoring and thrilling 1st half.

The third quarter, much the same as the 1st half, was thrilling. The game was so fast moving, with hardly a stoppage. It was incredibly nerve wracking as the game was so tight. When North looked like extending a lead, Norwood would hit back. We were playing out of our minds, but to Norwood's credit, they just kept coming. Callum Wilkie kicked a great running goal after taking multiple bounces from centre wing, which was absolutely thrilling. But at three quarter time, like it was at quarter and half time, was only five points. It was game on. The premiership there for the taking. 30 good minutes of football away from an impossible dream.

The Roosters were absolutely ferocious to start the fourth quarter. Several brilliant tackles unfortunately and quite predictably went unrewarded by the umpires. Clearly whatever Coach Josh Carr said at three quarter time had worked because we hunted in packs and were unrelenting. And soon enough we kicked out to a four-goal lead, which in a close game, felt like a match winning lead. But Norwood, in particular Mitch Grigg who kicked six goals for the game, just wouldn't give up and got the game back to a two-goal margin.

The game clock hit about 28 minutes. We were so close to pulling off the unthinkable. But in an incredible passage of play, our courageous captain Max Thring (who was playing on an injured calf) tapped the ball out to Sam Mcinerney who kicked a great goal to seal the deal. We were going to win the premiership. We could relax for the last few minutes of the game and truly enjoy the moment. North hadn't won a premiership since 1991, before I was even born, the longest premiership drought in the history of the club. It was only the third Grand Final we'd made in my lifetime, on the other two occasions we weren't even in the game, comprehensively beaten both times.

SIREN!! We had won. It was pandemonium. I leapt off my seat with both fists raised with an absolutely enormous, guttural, and emotion filled scream. I'm an inwardly emotional person, so it takes a lot for me to show levels of extreme emotion, especially around my Dad. But the North Adelaide Football Club means the absolute world to me. I've sat through years and years of mind-numbing disappointment and losing, I've seen North Adelaide make some really easy things look incredibly difficult. I always told my Dad that North has a habit of doing things the hard way. Winning the premiership was fifth place is just a beautiful highlight of that. So, I'd say that my emotional reaction to winning the premiership was something completely justified.

The whole experience was so overwhelming. I was so happy and proud. The emotions of winning a premiership made all the years of losing absolutely worth it. Everything that day seemed to go our way - Harvey's mongrel punt goal to start the game, multiple goals kicked from the boundary line, an incredible snap goal from Alex Barns on his wrong foot, and even two Norwood players knocking themselves out. The whole day was incredible. Those four weeks of football were so magical. I've never seen anything like it. The mighty Roosters.

Male, 25

The Night Jessie Got Lost

December the 12th 2030, was a dark cold windy night. Over the radio there was a forecast broadcasted saying a chance of rain developing later that night.

Jessie and his brother Daniel both nagged their mum (Sarah) and dad (George) to go camping over the summer school holidays. Their mother agreed to go camping over the holidays was a good idea as they hardly go camping and the summer holidays are the best time as they all will have enough time to relax and unwind with less worries.

Sarah told " Daniel to grab the tents out of the shed and check them for holes and then put them in the car". Daniel asked "why?" Sarah replied saying "because they were going to Kentucky Blue Grass Caravan and Camping grounds."

By the time that both Daniel and Jessie had set up the tents, there mum had already commenced the camp fire. They all sat around the camp fire and Daniel started to tell camp fire stories. Jessie got bored of them and wandered off 30km from the camp site. While they were at the camp site they thought nothing about it that Jessie would wonder off from the camp site and end up lost. There was a forest Sarah, Daniel and George all were shouting out to jessie. Under the moon light Daniel didn't see a wombat hole and stepped in it and broke his ankle.

Sarah looked around the camp fire and she couldn't see Jessie anywhere and she freaked out. Sarah asked, " Daniel to go and check in the tents". When Daniel got to the tents he found Jessie's torch was still on his sleeping bag. Then Daniel turned around and ran back to their mum and "told her that Jessie wasn't there". When Sarah heard that she panicked and started a search party.

Sarah kept walking and shouting out for jessie this went on for over an hour and a half. After Sarah was shouting for all that time, while she was searching for Jessie she started to lose her voice. When Sarah reached a cave, she thought that this was the last place that jessie would be but to her surprise she was wrong.

Jessie was sitting on top of the cliff that the cave was carved in and Jessie heard the echo of his mother's voice from the cave, then Jessie ran back to her by this time it had started to rain heavy When they found Jessie they all breathed a sigh of relief and enjoyed the rest of their holiday and camping trip at Kentucky Blue Grass.

Jessie never again wandered off from a camp site. They all took shelter in the cave that night. The next day Jessie got into trouble from Daniel and his parents, Jessie was made to carry Daniel back to the camp site.

Male, 28

Scraps

I bought my dog off a man who'd had too much to drink and lacked the finances to drink more. He was a scrawny brindle hound that seemed content to lay at his master's feet, occasionally looking up at him or around at the bar patrons. The man talked to himself while he drank. It was a constant muttering such as a drunk will sometimes indulge in; most of it meaningless but with an occasional name thrown out loud and clear. He was not happy with his situation, of that, we were all certain. He had been standing at the bar when I entered and although he already looked nine sheets to the wind, he knocked back drink after drink until finally, reaching into his pocket, he came up empty. When this happened he lashed out at the thing closest to him. He aimed a kick at that dog and when the savvy animal frustrated him by scurrying away, he reached for his sidearm.

Now I don't claim to hold a perfect record regarding an even temper but some things I draw the line at. Shooting dogs is one of those. So I took a quick step, reached out and placed my hand over the butt of his gun, preventing its withdrawal. He swivelled his bloodshot eyes around and focused on mine. When he opened his mouth to protest my intervention, the sour-mash whisky fumes almost made me reel.

"What do you think you're doing?" he slurred his words and his eyes followed my arm down to where my hand rested. "Do you want to be shot?"

"No sir, I do not," I said calmly, "neither do I want you to shoot your dog. I know it's not my business, but I like dogs and cannot abide unnecessary cruelty being done toward them." He looked owlishly back at my face and his eyes took on a calculating air.

"I tell you what I'll do; I'll sell him to you," he said, watching carefully for my reaction, "A bottle of whisky and he's yours. If not, I'll take him outside and shoot him."

A bottle of whisky would cost me two dollars which was fine, for I'd just been paid off for a four month trail drive and had money to burn. I didn't know what I was going to do with a dog but I knew for damn sure that I couldn't leave him with his idiot owner. Besides, the way I figured it, at two dollars, that scrawny brindle hound was only costing me around five cents a pound or at most as high as eight cents, which anyways seemed like a bargain.

"Done," I said. "Barkeep set him up with a bottle." I reached into my pocket and pulled out a two dollar coin, slapping it on the bar. "Are we square," I asked the drunk, nodding at the pistol I still controlled.

"Sure," he smiled, "we're square. Good luck with the dog, his name's Scraps 'cause he eats every damn scrap you put in front of him." He turned back to the bar and watched the barkeep pull the cork out of the fresh bottle. I doubt he even knew when I took my hand away from his gun and edged carefully away. I never took my eyes off him as I crossed to where the brindle stood, I'm cautious that way. He might remember me at any moment, though from the way he was lighting into that fresh bottle, he'd be lucky to remember his own name, come morning.

"Hey Scraps," I said as I approached the dog. He looked up as he heard his name and began to slow-wag his tail from side to side. He let me pat him on the head and the tail began to speed up. "Good boy, good Scraps," I rubbed him along his flanks and felt the ribs cleanly through the thin fur. He might eat every scrap thrown for him but I didn't think he'd been thrown too many in recent times. "Are you hungry boy; would you like something to eat?" Now I don't expect dogs speak the same language as humans

but that dog surely knew what I was asking. He put his paws up onto my denims and looked me straight in the eye. One more glance at the drunk told me that I'd nothing to fear on that score, the bottle was his sole focus. So I took that dog out of the saloon and walked him around the back of Ma Baker's eatery. Penelope 'Ma' Baker had been cooking for the folks in Kansas City, Kansas, for five years. Her food was so good that nothing remained on her plates when her customers were finished, so I couldn't expect much in the way of scraps. But Ma liked me and she liked even more the fact that I'd saved old Scraps from certain death. She fixed me a plate of beef and bacon with gravy and potatoes and a hunk of fresh baked bread and fixed another, only slightly smaller dish for Scraps. She only charged me for the one meal, so I was lucky. Luckier still was the way she watched over the two of us while we ate; Ma was a mighty purty woman. Scraps finished well before me and gratefully took the piece of bread I'd been saving to sop up the gravy. I gave a look at Ma when I was done and she gestured for me to put the plate down on the ground, where Scraps proceeded to save the dishwasher some labour.

"Will you come tonight, Bill?" Ma asked me and me, a fool with nowhere to go and nothing much of any kind to do, give the only sensible reply.

"I surely will, Penelope." She blushed at being called by her birth name, or maybe she blushed at something else. I could feel a little heat rising around my own neck and ears and fled her kitchen like a coward or a wise man; I'm still not sure which.

I've said already that I don't think dogs speak our language, so therefore they shouldn't necessarily ken such foolish human notions like ownership. Yet when I left the eatery Scraps was right by my side. In fact, as the course of that day wore on, he never so much as looked like scampering off to his previous owner. I'd have thought that dogs were more loyal than that; although, when I call to mind the callous disregard for his life that he'd been shown at the end of his last relationship, it figured. If Scraps knew nothing else about me than the quality of that first meal I'd provided, it was a good enough start for him.

In the afternoon I stopped off at Jim Peck's barber shop for my second hot shave of the day, figuring my chances of getting up close and personal with Ma were running at better than even money. Scraps followed me inside and lay down where he could keep an eye on me.

"Is that your dog, Bill? I swear you didn't have one with you this morning, or was I too hung over to remember?"

Jim Peck was joshing, of course. He would never turn up to work hung over; at least, not while his wife had anything to say about it. I knew for a fact that he was teetotal and that the only alcohol he kept was for sterilizing his equipment between cuts and shaves.

"No Jim, you are still as sane as you ever were," my words were deliberately shaped to cut both ways, like his, for we were long-acquainted with one another from our army days.

"Then I'm guessing you've got a story to share?"

"Sure," I said, "Though if you don't mind, I'll wait until you've finished with the razor to tell it."

"I thought I already shaved you close once today. Can it be that you've managed to fix yourself a date?" The rising colour in my face was enough to tell him that he'd hit the mark. He laughed and set to work

putting a shine on my face with sharp razor and hot towels. Then, figuring that I'd need every advantage possible, he splashed Bay Rum liberally onto my cheeks, bringing a yelp of pain.

"Dad-blame it that stings," I remonstrated. "Are you trying to kill me?"

"I'm just trying to make you into a lady-killer, Bill. Now tell me about the newest member of your family." Scraps had been lying patiently on the floor but now, as if sensing that he was the topic of conversation, he sat up and paid attention.

As I retold the story for my friend, leaving out none of the details, his face took on a solemn look. When I was finished he started shaking his head. From your description of him, that must have been Ned. I thought I'd seen that hound before. He was going to kill the dog, you say, and he let you stop him? He must have been awful drunk."

"He was that," I agreed. "Let's hope that he doesn't want his dog back when he gets sober," Jim said seriously, 'because in case you didn't know it, Ned shoots Indians for the railroad and anything else that wanders in front of his gun. He's killed four men in gunfights that I know of and has avoided the noose every time because witnesses swore that the other men drew first—he's that good. I really hope he wasn't too attached to that dog!"

His words gave me plenty to think about. If I'd known half of what he told me I wonder if I'd have acted any differently. Then the thought of letting it happen, of letting the unknown man gun down a dog in cold blood; well, I figured I'd probably jump the same way.

"He'll probably be fine. It looked to me like he'd finished with it."

"Let's hope you're right. You never can tell with those moody types."

"Anyways, I'm not going to worry about that now—I've got a date!"

"Do I guess it rightly that this date is with 'Ma' Baker?" Jim laughed as my colour once more told him that he'd hit the mark. "I told Ginny that she would snare you the next time you came to town, but she argued for Molly; I guess you've made up your mind—or she's made it up for you."

I didn't know what to say. I'd spent time with both Penny and Molly, the schoolteacher, when I'd come to town after my last drive. It had been the harvest season and the town was lit up with lanterns and bunting for the harvest ball. Although I'd danced with both, for both were mighty easy on the eye and soft in the arms, I did much prefer Ma Baker. The thought of being fed by her would be enough to settle any man, yet her charms ran much deeper than her culinary abilities.

"I think I'll take it one step at a time, if that's all right with you and Ginny. Come along Scraps." I dropped a coin on the counter and retreated with the sound of Jim Peck's laughter ringing in my ears.

I hadn't given much thought to what dog ownership would entail. The boarding-house where I was staying was a stately Queen Anne-style house set on a tree-lined street over to the east of town. The proprietors were Ted and April, also good friends. Ted shunted trains as a young man and eventually took on duties as a telegraph-key operator for the railways. He earned good wages and invested wisely. The war did not affect him as much as it did many others for he was required to stay in his job for the war effort. Not for him the vagaries of poor rations and flying lead, dumb commanders and ill-equipped expeditions that were the lot of the majority; he sat contentedly in his office and remotely did his part towards victory for the Blue Army.

He met April at one of the railway picnics and the two fell head over heels for one another. After the war was over, he took his savings, cashed in a few of the annuities and invested in this sprawling home. It was originally built for a doctor and his family; with stables and a barn, a separate woodworking shed, rooms for the doctor's practice as well as formal rooms for dining and entertaining and rooms for the doctor, his wife and their seven children.

The doctor was called into service at the battlefields in the latter days of the war and sadly, never returned. The doctor's wife put the house up for sale and moved back east to her family. It was ideal for Ted and April, who had long talked about the possibilities of running an upmarket boarding house. Ted retained his position with the railways while April and her younger sister, January (there was another sister, May, though she was married and lived in Topeka), looked after the guests.

When I walked in the front gate, the family pet, Tiffany the poodle, ran at us, barking for all she was worth. To his credit, Scraps stood his ground as the much smaller dog ran circles around him first one way and then the other, never letting up her barrage of noise. April and January hurried down the front steps and April latched onto Tiffany's collar. Only then did the noise stop, though the continuing growls resembled an angry beehive.

"I'm sorry Miss April, Miss January. I didn't mean to cause any problems but, as you see, I've managed to pick myself up a dog. I really don't know how it's all going to work, as yet. I just hope that you can find it in your hearts to let me stay on."

"Don't you worry yourself, Bill, I'm sure that it will all work out fine. I can see already that he is a well-mannered dog, not a fighter. He certainly could do with a decent feed though—why don't you bring him around to the kitchen door and we'll set him up with a bowl of scraps." That was April all over, kindness to the core. She was good to her word, too. The ceramic bowl that she placed at the foot of the kitchen steps was as full of goodness as Ma Baker's had been. Scraps, true to his name, made short work of it and licked the bowl clean to boot.

"He should be right sleeping on the floor of your room," she added. "You've got the sleep-out on the ground floor anyway so it won't take much if you have to let him out in the middle of the night."

"Thank you kindly, Miss April. I sure do appreciate it."

I forgot to leave Scraps in the room when I went to meet Ma Baker that evening. Fact of the matter is that all my thoughts were busy with what might happen on my date and by the time that I gave it thought, old Scraps was walking along proud beside me. I thought briefly about turning around and locking him in my room but that would have made me late for my date; and Ma Baker was too special to keep waiting. So we continued on to the eatery, where Ma had a room upstairs. She smiled when she opened the door to not one, but two suitors, and that smile made me like her a little more.

"I see you've brought a chaperone with you. I like that," she joked.

Now I wasn't used to social repartee and merely twisted my hat between my hands, not knowing what to say. Scraps never paused though; he went right up to her and licked her hand like he remembered her beautiful cooking (and who could say but that he did not?). Ma giggled and leant down to give him a rub. Now I was really regretting bringing him along, for he was stealing my affection. The truth of the matter was that it was probably a good thing that I had brought him, for he helped to ease my feelings of awkwardness. Then, to my shame, I actually used him as a conversation bridge.

“He’s really living up to his name of Scraps,” I said as she petted him. “Why, you should have seen the bowl he polished off back at boarding house.”

“Really?” she enquired politely. “I didn’t think he’d have had room for more after what he ate here.” And just like that, we were talking. I suggested we take a stroll in the night air, maybe stopping at the new Café over on Main Street, to which she agreed. We set off like a regular family with Scraps walking first on her side, then on mine, then darting between; like he was a child happy to be out with his parents. Somewhere along the way her hand found its way into mine and I have to say that it felt mighty grand, walking through the streets of a civilized town with a pretty girl by my side. We might have walked that way forever without me taking exception, but that was not to be.

We were in sight of the Café and I was just starting to feel the loss that I knew would come when I had to let go of her warm hand. That’s how unawares of my surroundings I was; which was why his hail, when it came, took me so completely by surprise.

“That’s my dog, you varmint!” The voice came from ahead of us, just near the entrance to the Café.

I’d stopped thinking about Ned when I left the barbershop. Jim’s words had reached me—I just never gave them much credit. You see, there are men whose actions put them so far outside our orbit that our minds can scarce latch on to them. Ned, as he’d been described to me, was one such man. When Jim told me that he shot Indians for the railroad it didn’t even surprise me, for he had been prepared to shoot a dog. Now I’m not saying that the two should be compared, but compare them I did. I gave each of them, the dog and the Indians, the same level of respect that I would accord to Ma Baker. I couldn’t stand by and watch harm come to any of them and could not understand any man who would. Now that same man was interrupting my date—so I plumb began hating on him. “I believe you sold him to me this morning for the price of a bottle of whisky” I said, turning slightly to put myself between him and Ma.

“That’s as never mind,” he said. “He’s my dog and I’m taking him back right now.”

His hand was hovering over his gun and this time I could see that there would be nobody taking a quick step to stop him drawing it. He was deadly hung-over, not drunk; and from the moment his loud words had rung out people had started scattering out of the potential line of fire. We stood alone.

Now Jim’s words really came home to roost—especially his description of the man’s lightning speed. I didn’t figure myself as any kind of gunfighter but I carried a gun and knew which end the bullets came out of. Owning a gun, in my experience, made every one of us an interested party in how fast we could get it out of the leather. Just in case it should ever be needed, mind. Out on the trail we practised clearing leather and shooting at targets every day. I was faster than some of those that I trailed cows with and slower than a few others. Until today, the situation of me drawing it for real had never quite managed to come up. I was reflecting on this, and on the fact that I couldn’t afford for bullets to fly in my direction lest Penelope should be hit, when the matter was taken entirely out of my hands.

Scraps had stopped still in his tracks when he heard the voice of his tormentor. Now, like I said, I don’t believe for a minute that dogs can speak human, so there’s no way that he should have known what was going on between us; but he did. All of a sudden, he sprung off and made a beeline for Ned, barking and snarling as he did so. Ned pulled his gun and tried to enact his earlier intention but that dog was mighty fast. Not only that, but he started jinking from side to side just as Ned tried to hit him. It must have been a close-run thing, those first couple of shots, but he never did hit that dog.

Across the noise of Ned's shots another gun suddenly rang out. It was mine. I can't recall the moment I drew it, nor can I recall the intention, yet suddenly it was in my hand and smoke was curling from the barrel. Ned looked surprised as he died, a third eye mushrooming in the middle of his forehead where eyes were not meant to grow. He sat down heavily on the footpath then slumped to one side and moved no more.

Scraps slowed his approach and tentatively sniffed at the corpse. Then he gave what I can only describe as a happy 'Woof'. Then he turned away and trotted back to my side and sat down.

"You killed him," Ma said softly.

"He was trying to kill my dog," I answered. She tightened her grip on my hand and her other hand squeezed my arm.

"I'm glad," she said, "he had it coming." In those words were a world of comment and approval, emotions that I felt only boded well for our future together.

I slid that pistol back into its holster and reached down and patted my dog's head. "Good boy, good Scraps." His tale started thumping back and forth across the dusty street and he pressed his wiry body against my leg. I guess he really was mine. Anyway, who was going to argue?

"Do you want me to take you home?" I asked, mindful of the upset that this must have caused to my lady friend.

"Not just yet," Ma answered, holding my arm a little tighter, "though maybe we could go to a different café?"

"Your wish is my command."

We turned away in lockstep with Scraps dancing circles around us. We were too happy in each other's company to consider the dead man back on the sidewalk but that's the way it is with young lovers. Our universe is defined by the heavenly body closest to hand and its gravitational pull is enough to hold us from rambling any further. I had me a girl and I had me a dog—I guess I was as contented as I'd ever been and it sure felt good.

Male, 56

Emerald Dream

How I wish I could cross the ridge and speak to the trees themselves. They hum a tune every night, which lulls all the diurnal animals to sleep, and wakes the nocturnal animals to rule the dark. How I wish I had someone to talk to.

The animals I can speak with, but neither of us can understand the other. Even now, as I sit on the branch, a male squirrel begins storing food for the cold days ahead. I sing to him as he goes about his day, but he doesn't understand a word I say.

The animals are unaware of the encroaching danger. I want them to cross the ridge. The few branches that cross the ridge allow animals to ferry themselves between the safe land and back, but I may not cross. The trees do not welcome me yet.

I am rejected by the fairies that live there. Being as large as a human, but with all the traits of a fairy is incredibly off-putting to them. Even the Dryads shun me. I have no friends to support me, no friends to talk to, no friends to laugh with.

How I was born a half-fairy half-human is confusing to me. I don't remember my parents, but I can hide my fairy-like features from the human eye and walk amongst them, but they're so dirty, so destructive I feel like I'm suffocating around them.

And they're so vulgar. They thrive on their alcohols, their drugs, their weapons, their machines and their processed foods. They cut down our trees and run them through gigantic saws to build smoke spewing buildings.

They're violent, solving most of their confrontations with violence, and wrongdoers are thrown into cramped, filthy cells and left there to rot. They hang from the walls caged in gibbets, put in stocks near caged starving dogs clawing viciously at their wooden cages.

I've warned the fairies time and time again that something must be done about these humans, but they insist that nature will keep everything in balance, yet every day more and more of our forests are destroyed.

Today they hunted as well, taking the vulnerable away from the forest. The young of deer, the parents of helpless baby rabbits, and the children of the great apes. They use their hide to keep warm, and feast like monsters on their roasted flesh.

I visit the human settlement every now and then, trying to find out what else they have done, in a bid to convince the woodland Hutter that something needs to be done. Every day becomes more and more dangerous for me to visit.

The humans start to wonder where I disappear to. They are dirty, rotten creatures with no sense of personal hygiene, health or fitness. They are confounded by my elegant appearance, my clean flesh, my white teeth and my smell of flowers.

I fear next time I visit I may not return to the forest. I may be tossed into a cell and dissected by their 'top scientists'. Some seem to welcome my presence, but most resent me, hating my pure

appearance, my untainted form.

I am visiting again today. I saw a man that had refused to obey his superior and was lashed forty times and hung in a gibbet for 20 weeks. I know he's still alive. I saw him working some days ago, but he was clearly struggling with what he was being ordered to do.

He's a young man, far younger than me. Humans only live a maximum of 60 years, no doubt their short lifespan is due to breathing in smoke, constant injury, unhealthy food and habits. Me, I've been alive for more than 500 years.

The forest used to be much larger than it is now. I saw the first arrival of the humans, in a big, smoke-breathing metal ship. It brought thousands of them, and their machines. They had quickly demolished the forest and built their destructive buildings.

In only 30 years, they had consumed over 40% of the forest, which used to span the whole continent. Now there's millions of them, and more and more arrive every day, either by ship, by plane, or by birth.

"It's the weird one again!" Yelled Shirmitt, the gatekeeper. He was calling for approval to open the gate. The humans are becoming more distrustful of me with every visit. I want this one to be my last.

I heard an audible yell, and Shirmitt started opening the gate, turning an ugly wooden wheel to pull the gate open. Shirmitt himself is ugly, like all humans. He has a huge nose that hangs over his mouth, is dirty all over with dirty overalls covered in wood shavings and is missing most of his teeth.

As the huge gate creaked open, I saw a familiar disturbing sight. The huge pile of cut lumber on the left, some of it already rotting, having been at the bottom of the pile for probably days, maybe weeks, possibly years.

A huge pile of trees thrown into the middle of the settlement, their branches stripped. One of the trees were being carried to one of the four heavy saws, two on each of my flanks. I noticed something new this time around.

A second gate had been constructed, seemingly barring my access to the rest of the town. As I walked through the settlement to the gate, I caught unwelcome looks from all around. They were snarling, growling, unhappy at my being here.

I reached the gate, and the gatekeeper, who was unfamiliar looked down at me. "What?" He snarled, in an ugly tone. "May you open the gate please? I'd like to get some provisions." I asked. Kindness doesn't usually work here but acting aggressively around much larger people wouldn't go well either.

"You want provisions?" He said, twisting his face into an even more unwelcome look, one of the growths on his face popping after being crushed by the fat folds. "Go to the Rest In. You're not welcome in here no more!"

He presented his middle finger, clearly not having taken a liking to me. I was hoping to catch that man. He seemed different from the rest of the humans. Maybe he would be able to convince the fairies of what's to come.

I made my way to the rest in, dodging unsavoury characters, who were practically reaching out to tear off my skin with their vicious looks. As I entered the Rest In, I saw the man that I had been looking for. He was getting a verbal bashing from his superior.

I kept my distance while this happened. The man was grabbed by the hair. "I want to hear you say it properly!" The superior yelled. "Sorry Mr Popedas, I will give me full and honest self to this work, with no pay for the rest of the month." The superior recited.

"I won't say it if it's not true." The man said. Popedas was much bigger than this young man, both in height and width. Popedas threw the man to the ground. "Then don't. say it and live it! Show up for work in an hour, or I'll have you stripped, lashed and hung from the Gallows as the dogs tear at your legs!"

Popedas kicked the man and headed for the door, which I was standing beside. I tried to appear completely uninterested in what had happened, but Popedas was on to me. "Keep your Wiccan hands away from him girl," He said. "or I'll have you fed to the saw."

The man I was interested to was shorter than just about any human I'd seen before. He's S'S, and very small in body. He's dirty, but he's not unhealthy like every other human. I've seen him before picking berries and eating them on the spot.

As he picked himself up, he saw me and made his way over to me. "You're not a human." He said, taking in my clearly unfathomable appearance amongst all this grime. "No, I'm not." I said. "Neither are you." I guessed.

"Are you like me?" He asked. "What are you?" "We should get a room. I have one in town." "They won't let me past. I'm hardly allowed in here anymore." "Damn. Then the forest. I'm dead in an hour. The forest is a better shot."

As we exited the Rest In, Popedas was waiting for us, his disease-ridden arms folded across his chest. "What did I tell you girl?" He said sternly. "Keep your Wiccan hands off my workers. Now you've gone and consigned yourself to the saw."

Popedas reached for my arms, but the man struck him in the head. Now that I'm in clear view of him, I can see he has practically no nose, just two holes in his head, and he's even fatter than I thought he was, probably about 290 Kg in fat alone.

Popedas fell down, a surprising sight given the size difference. "RUN!" My companion yelled. "INSUBORDINATION!" Popedas yelled. "Grab them both!" He yelled as we were getting further and further away. "Whoever catches them gets first pick of their roasted innards!"

The surrounding humans chased after us, but their bloated forms made them slow. Shirmitt began dosing the gate, but we cleared it before it was closed enough. "Open the gate Shirmitt!" Popedas yelled.

By the time the gate was open, the man and I had practically disappeared from their sight.

Male, 21

Prologue: North Sea, winter, 1797

His Majesty's Ship, Dolphin, plunged through the northern seas as if she was born to them. The chill arctic winds sent shivers through the crew as they raced among the tops to trim the sails and give everything that their captain demanded. White-capped waves dashed against her good English oak sides and gulls wheeled and turned about them on every side. In the distance, tall thunderheads threatened to break, and every man aboard had a weather eye peeled for possible danger.

No man aboard had more experience with danger than did the captain, Michael Turner. He stood firmly braced on feet that had weathered every ocean and sea through the past four decades and more. Gone now was the frightened cabin boy who had sailed up the St. Lawrence river on board the Mercury, those many years ago. Time had taught him much and there was little in the way of tempest that his eyes had not seen. In fact he had wisdom enough to realise that the same passage of time that had granted him experience had also dulled certain of his natural advantages. Eyes that could once pick out small birds in the far distance now struggled to read last year's notes in his log book, and, of late, his joints had started protesting a life given over to martial practices. So he deferred to the young, those tasks where youth held the advantage. He glanced up to the top-mast crows-nest, as he did so often these days, to where keen young eyes kept watch for him.

High, high in the air, swaying from side to side like a great pendulum with every dip and plunge of the ship through the waves, his lookout scanned the horizons. The young man's hair was tied behind his neck with a ribbon to prevent the wind from swirling it around his face. He occupied the crow's nest with grace, a part of it, balancing easily against the great movement of the ship's roll whilst still keeping both hands free for the spyglass that he held to his eye.

Michael Turner could see that the boy--no, not boy, but man; he would have to get used to the fact that his heir was no longer a boy--was diligently searching the distance for any threat. Mitchell Thomas was becoming everything that his captain had dreamed of. Mitch was still young, barely coming up on fifteen years of age, yet he had just returned from the Admiralty where he had successfully sat his examination for Lieutenant. His rank on board the Dolphin was now official although, if the truth be told, the men had long held him in the highest possible regard. Still, since the Dolphin was now one of His Majesty's ships and not a private merchant trader, it was fitting that the boy should have the correct standing in law. Mitch could now advance up the fleet ranks like any other worthy candidate. He could share in prize monies and have his deeds and exploits published in the Gazette.

Although Michael Turner had considered the outcome of the examination to be a mere formality, the time that Mitch had spent away from the ship, while strangers grilled him on his seamanship, was one of the most stress-laden of his life. He worried for the boy whom he had taken under his wing for Mitch had come to fill the place of his long-lost son. When they examined Mitchell Thomas they were really examining how well Michael Turner had trained him. He need not have worried. Mitchell Thomas, newly minted Lieutenant of His Majesty's Navy, arrived back at his ship carrying the most glowing letter of recommendation that Michael Turner had ever seen. In fact, it was the very first letter of its kind that he had heard of. Even now he could see the letter's contents as clearly as if it was open in front of him:

Captain Michael Turner, HMS Dolphin,

It is beyond contestation that the young man you sent to us—whom we understand you have wisely named as heir—is the finest candidate for officer that this tribunal has ever seen. He surely stands head and shoulders above men whose names we would write here, if we were not worried that they would find out and make his future difficult for the slight to their pride. He is a credit to you, sir, and to the other men who have attended to his complete education.

It was a pleasure to have before us a young man who knows the meaning of respect and who has, we say this without fear of contradiction, applied himself so rigorously to his education that he is beyond fault. We could not catch him out and, rest assured, we had at it with vigour. That this exceptional seaman comes from the background that he does only impresses us all the more. It is unusual, to say the least, that such excellence should have appeared before us in such unassuming guise. The boy does not possess any of those characteristics that are too familiar to us, a fact for which we are heartily thankful. He has no sense of entitlement, none of the cruelty of rank and wealth, and, most importantly, he is devoid of dissembling.

He was so frank and guileless with us that we entertained not the slightest doubts as to his honesty. That said; we must congratulate you on certain engagements of which, until this interview, we had been unaware your ship had taken part. His own considerable figuring in those actions has led us to the inescapable conclusion that, had he been properly indentured and ranked as he is now, he would already have climbed high above many who are both older and have wealthier patrons. We only hope that, now that he is rated, he will continue on as he has begun; that our England shall be the lucky recipient of his undoubted abilities.

*God speed and fare him well; God bless King George; and God bless HMS Dolphin and all who sail in her. We know that we shall hear more of her exploits in these troubled times.
Their Right Honourable, Lords of the Admiralty.*

Michael Turner felt again the warm blush to his cheeks that he had experienced upon first reading this rare recommendation. His confidence and love of the boy had been fully expressed when he had drafted the document of his will, but seeing his opinion confirmed by three highly respected officers of His Majesty's navy filled him with inestimable pride.

He was snatched out of his reverie by two things. First, lightning sheeted across the distant storm clouds followed by a mighty clap of thunder. Then, as he watched the roiling clouds come to life with yet more lightning, the subject of his musings called out in an excited voice, 'Sail-oh, Captain; dead ahead and low against the storm clouds.'

Michael Turner reached for his glass and swiftly made for the forward deck so that he could spy the sail for himself. He was not surprised that Mitch had called out the position where another would have hailed the deck and awaited the captain's question. Mitch knew the value of timely, precise information. He knew that any captain who possessed enough of these precious commodities was more likely to successfully engage his foes, or avoid them. Discretion was sometimes the better part of valour, which was something only wise captains learned. The sea floor was littered with the bones of the young and foolhardy.

There was the sail; exactly where the lad promised it would be. All Michael Turner could see from the deck of the ship were the top-gallants and royals, whereas he knew the lookout, from a hundred feet higher, would have the clearer view. He could tell little about the potential foe from the little he could see of her.

‘What say you, Mister Thomas?’ He called up into the sky. He waited with bated breath for the reply, as did every other sailor aboard the Dolphin. The next few hours were about to get very busy, one way or another.

‘French, by the look of her, two decks of guns, perhaps a bit longer than us Captain Turner,’ the reply was concise, only what was necessary and no more. He did not call to his captain that the foreign vessel had the weather gauge of them any more than he would have called out that the sun was shining or the water was wet—some things are obvious to all who sail the seas.

The captain had an important decision to make, to fight or to run. Until today, he had mostly made the right decision on that self-same question. He made this one in an instant.

‘Hold your heading helmsman. Clear the decks for battle if it please you, Mister Hobbs; and break out the arms.’

The men gave a cheer as they leapt to their tasks for the Dolphin was a fighting ship and the crew lived for the thrill of action. In a very short time the bulkheads were struck between decks, the caissons were loaded with the rolled up hammocks and placed against the railings, cannon were primed and readied, surplus materials were stowed away and the crew were issued with their arms.

In the time that it took the Dolphin to prepare for battle the foreign ship bore swiftly down on them with the wind and the storm at their back. Michael Turner called his last instructions to Josiah Hobbs, his first officer, and the topmen trimmed sail as they came about on a tack that would put them momentarily at a disadvantage. Yet their captain had a keen eye for battle and weighed each shift of the wind and waves with the years of his experience.

The enemy rushed down on them. Lightning flashed and struck the surface of the sea followed by a long roll of thunder. Both ships ran out their guns and prepared for the first salvos of the battle. The two men-of-war simultaneously fired their bow chasers as the skies opened up with a deluge of icy rain. In the dim visibility of a North Sea storm, battle was joined.

*

Pierre Comte, Captain of the Artemis, fairly bristled with excitement. His lookout had spied the English ship clawing up into the wind moments before the Englishmen had spotted them. His own decision was an easy one to make. They easily matched the English ship for size and armaments; they held the weather gauge of her and, most importantly, they were Frenchmen. In his mind these considerations added up to one thing and one thing only—success. That he was carrying important personages on board only added to his enthusiasm. A wiser captain would have weighed the importance of his passengers against all other possibilities and might, only might, have made a different decision. Yet Pierre Comte was all too aware of the whispers going around the fleet that he was captain only because of his family connections, that he was too young for such a command, too inexperienced.

Well, he would show them. His ship was named for the huntress of Greek mythology and he would free her to hunt!

His men were slower than the English in getting ready for the battle but the captain of the Artemis was not overly concerned. He held that Gallic disdain of other races that was a familiar trait of French commanders everywhere. He noted the clean lines of the enemy ship and exulted that it would soon be his prize. He did not take note, as they approached, of how good a sailor the English captain was or that the enemy ship held a higher line into the wind than his own sailors could have managed if given the task. In this, the criticisms of his detractors held true—he was sadly lacking in experience.

Nevertheless, the captain of the Artemis was not lacking in enthusiasm. He sent his ship tearing into the engagement without pause or concern. Thinking to take the ship as a prize he ordered his bow-chaser gun crew to load with grape-shot. He would sweep his enemy off the decks, lay his beloved ship alongside and have his men take control. In giving his enemy no credit he had already sold his ship and her crew into debt. All that remained now was to see how crushing the payment of that debt would prove to be.

Male, 56

Terran Empire

TIME LINE

THE CATAclySM

2057

They say that it began over resources. But no one truly knows. By the year 2057, 80% of the Earth was devastated. Who did not die in the nuclear war, the harsh nuclear winter claimed. What was left of humanity was hiding in fallout shelters beneath the earth.

2075

The nuclear winter has subsided. Humanity rises from the shelter of bunkers only to start fighting once again. Not over resources, political ideology or domination, but dehydrated army rations, water and cans of dog food. Hostility and violence plague humanity.

THE RISE OF THE MILITARY COLLECTIVE

2080

Like the fiery phoenixes rising from the ashes of hopelessness, the Military Collective brings order from chaos. bringing old systems back online such as mining, manufacturing and navigation. Searching the wastelands for technology from a time before the Cataclysm. They rediscover countless technologies.

One thing grants the Military Collective with an advantage. Which was named, The Emergence Technology. This utilises the central nervous system with implants providing the user with the ability to data transfer between man and machine. All humanity is merged at the age of Ascension. A period when a young person goes through mental discipline and combines their consciousness with the Collective, The Body Politic.

A new religion is born and humanity is transformed forever more. No one individual or group of individuals is above the common good of the collective. Everyone has a right to be heard and Everyone contributes. The Military Collective use this Emergence technology with deadly supremacy. It's only a matter of time before the Military Collective unifies all humanity.

Human enhancement program begins primarily concerned with intelligence, muscle mass and prolonging life as well as population growth.

2083

Plasma repeating rifles and Gauss rifles are manufactured en mass. The initial use of Armoured Robotic Infantry Divisions, (Ironsplitters). With one pilot and weighting in at only 5 tons and 4 meters in height these small but fastmoving infantry are lethal on the battlefield. It is anticipated that with time and more research 1 00ton titans will be conceived.

2090

The first Military Collective fusion reactor becomes operational. The boffins name the device "The Hot-tub".

The initial use of artificial intelligence (AI) combined with robotics for the battlefield, (Battle Drones). Resulted in questionable success and was better suited to surveillance and defence sentinel roles. The Body Politic accepts that this technology would be better used in research, mining, manufacturing, construction and medical applications. Freeing up more personnel to assist bringing this conflict to a conclusion.

2094

The formation of the first Heavy Armoured Robotic Infantry Division becomes operational, (Steel-Legion). Unlike their lesser cousins a pilot and a gunner are needed. Weighting in at 1 00tons and towering 30 meters in height and with numerous weapon variants. A small number of these giant robotic machines are superior to anything that enters the battlefield, but are problematic to maintain operational on the field for extended periods of time.

THE GREAT RECLAMATION

2112

The Military Collective completely unifies the Planet. A new age of humanity begins. The Collective turns away from a military government and organises its resources to reclaim the wastelands. Considerable gains are achieved with assistance of AI and the discovery of Seed Banks. In addition, with the aid of Genetically Engineered Bacteria, Micro robotics as well as Atmospheric Processors, much is accomplished. Only a fraction of the Flora has been returned. And most of the Fauna has been lost for ever. Biodiversity was consumed in the Cataclysm. Food production is increased so population growth can be maintained. Scientific development blossoms in this new age. Humanity strives for the attainment of scientific knowledge. In all forms, the Arts start flourishing once again.

2117

The first Orbital platforms are positioned around the planet, to monitor environmental transformation and are designed for scientific research for the age of Reclamation. Humanity once again steps out of its biosphere.

2120

A large section of The Collective makes an overwhelming argument for a Moon observatory station and scientific laboratory. This is completed within two years. Human life span is extended with the assistance of genetic engineering to an average of 200 years.

2130

Mars colony is established. AI (The Guardian) is employed in planet engineering. Terraforming begins as much has been learned from the achievements on Earth, but the population of Mars will have to live under Environmentally Regulated Biospheres, (Domes). First Tachyon Communication Array comes on line, faster than light Communications. Tachyon Beams are also used in sensor arrays.

2152

The formation of Anti-gravity fields makes gravity plating practical, this unlocks the entire Solar system to humanity. The Body Politic arranges resources for mining, manufacturing and the processing of fuel to move off world.

The creation of a military space force, Nova legion composed of four subdivisions.

J.. Planetary Defence (Sentinel-Legion)

J.. Planetary Assault (Planet-Splitters)

J.. Interstellar Command (Star-Defence)

J.. Military Intelligence (Shadow-Dancers)

2155

The initial use of heavy lift vehicles. These large spherical cargo vessels are capable of lifting 1000 tons of cargo to orbit, by means of anti-gravity drives. Transferring from the Troposphere to the Ionosphere 400km, within 8 hours, exceptionally more energy efficient than conventional means. With time and more research these planetary lift cargo vessels will be capable of lifting 10,000 tons from the surface of a planet.

In the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter Mining commences (the Kirkwood Gaps). The mining and processing station constructed, (Kirkwood Station).

2160

The largest off world research station constructed orbiting, Jupiter (Jupiter station). New enhanced AI brought about by new manufacturing techniques. The Collective demands that AI be removed from military defence roles and not to be able to contaminate the collective consciousness of humanity. The Shadow-Dancers request that they be excluded from the new decree, as AI is an essential tool in processing data and surveillance. The Collective grants the request with strict conditions No weapons, No connection to The Body Politic.

2161

The establishment of a mining and orbital processing station, on one of Saturn's moon (Titan). Utilizing liquid methane as a fuel and as a resource for manufacturing. This intensifies the expansion into the far reaches of the Solar system.

2163

The largest off, world military research station and military testing field is established on one of Jupiter's moons, (Calisto military station). Initial Fusion Pulse Hyper Drive has completed testing. This will transform travel within the system from Ion thrusters with the speed of 15 km/s to 50,000 km/s. And confidently with time and more research it will reach the speed of 150,000 .km/s, making travel to other systems viable. More research into accelerational forces at increase speed is required. Vector Recoil Generator project begins.

2170

The first prototype Matter Anti-matter annihilation reactor comes online. The device produces a stream of plasma which is a more efficient energy source that will power systems, a vast improvement over fusion reactor's. The initial use of the Prototype Vector Recoil Generator, with this human being will be able to use Pulse Hyper Drives unscathed by gravitational and accelerational forces at height velocity.

A NEW AGE COMMENCES, STAR DANCES

2175

In this new age Earth's environment, atmosphere and biosphere has been largely rehabilitated to the best of man scientific ability. Humanity's position in the Terran system is all-encompassing. The Body Politic look to the stars for exploration. Many scientific research programs are approved, one of these is The Star Dancer project, the formation of a stable Traversable Wormhole, by means of examining quantum fluctuations in gravitational fields it is, anticipated that Wormholes will be generated, so humanity will be able to attempt to jump to other Star systems in a matter of days.

Construction of a mining, processing and manufacturing station just inside of the Kuiper belt commence.

Pulse Hyper Drive achieve speeds of 150,000 km/s. With this, a search for new worlds in other systems begins.

2180

The first stable Traversable Wormhole is formed at Jupiter station; wormholes can now be formed between two jump gates, named the Fahlin's Bridge after the scientist who created it. The Star-Runner Project begins named after the first of three colony vessels to be assembled, BPS Star-Runner, BPS Planet-finder BPS Spirit. Each vessel will comprise of 10,000 colonists, mining and manufacturing for the construction of the colony and Jump Gate in the systems that they will be directed to.

2185

The construction of a deep space observation station 2.5 Astronomical Unit (AU) outside of the Terran system, (Star Gazer station).

2186

With great splendour and ceremony, the colony vessel Star-Runner is launched. All of The Body Politic celebrates the spectacle.

Most of the colonists will sleep in cryogenic pods for the voyage to Gliese 581 system 20 light years from Earth, at a speed of 150,000 km/s the time of arrival 40 years in the year 2226.

2187

The colony vessel Planet-Finder is launched, making its route to Gliese 876 system, 15 light years from Earth. Time of arrival 30 years in the year 2217.

2189

The colony vessel BPS Spirit is Launched, making its route to Epsilon Eridani, 10.5 light years from Earth. Time of arrival 21 years in the year 2210.

2193

Construction of the First Carrier Battle group takes place at the Orbital shipyards at Calisto for Interstellar command. Many in the Body Politic contest this action declaring that it's a waste of resources, for who are we combatting? But the price of freedom is eternal vigilance and so the first Carrier class vessel is named B P S Vigilance. With a company of 3000, 200 mechanized marines, 300 SF-7 Starlance fighters and 100 SB-2 Marauder bombers and with 25 OD-2 Skyraider dropships. With a small number of escort vessels this makes the first carrier battlegroup. The carrier is launched with great pomp and ceremony.

2201

The corvette BPS Phalanx was on deep space survey assignment, 5 AU outside of the Terran system, was lost with all hands 35 souls. The search for the vessel lasted 12 months to no avail.

2210

The colony vessel Spirit commences construction of a colony and jump-gate in Epsilon Eridani system. Within 7 months the gate is complete and additional colonists with supplies and several survey vessels are directed to the Epsilon Eridani system.

In the habitable zone there are four planets; three are gas giants and one is terrestrial. Epsilon Eridani C, with 1.8 the mass of Earth and magnetic sphere and moon, makes an ideal planet for a colony. It is estimated that terraforming will take around 100 Earth years.

2212

Star Gazer station picks up a deep space transmission from somewhere in the Crab Nebula 2 kiloparsecs from Earth. It takes 3 months to decipher the distress signal from a warship which was under attack from an unknown force. The boffms estimate that the signal is over 500 Earth years old. This sparks Great debate in The Body Politic, we are not alone. The Collective hopes for peace but will be prepared for war. Interstellar Command increases its fleet three-fold.

2217

The colony vessel Planet-Finder commences construction of a colony and jump-gate in Gliese 876. Once the jump-gate is complete additional colonists, supplies and vessels was directed to the system.

Gliese 876E its 2.1 the mass of Earth. Orbiting its star in the habitable zone and a terrestrial planet with a magnetic sphere. With time and Terraforming it is hoped that it will give rise to a living world.

2220

Forward Military base and research station establish in the Alpha Centauri system. Mining, manufacturing and shipyards, jump-gate also constructed in the system.

2226

The colony vessel Star-Runner commences construction of a colony and jump-gate in Gliese 581 system. Once the jump-gate is complete additional **colonists**, supplies and vessels was directed to the system.

In the habitable zone orbiting a small Class 3 Gas giant is a moon with $\frac{3}{4}$ the mass of Earth. With small oceans of brackish water and indigenous Flora and micro Fauna, Favourable atmosphere with magnetic sphere. This will make for a thriving colony. The colonist named the planet New Eden.

2228

On a deep-space survey assignment in the Gliese 581 system. The corvette BP S Pallas discover what look like a large abandon vessel of unknown origins. The vessel was towed to the orbital station at New Eden. On closer inspection of the vessel it was identified as a colony vessel of a race that call themselves the Caridin. All the colonise had perished in cryogenic sleep from unknown causes. The vessel was taken to Jupiter station in the Terran system for further investigation.

It is anticipated that examination of the advanced technology will further improved Terran vessel design.

2229

A failed attempt to communicate with the Caridin. Not much is known about these 10-foot height bloodshot brown humanoids with large dark blue eyes that are the Caridin. But what Shadow-Dancers believe is that they inhabit nine systems. And we presumed their home

world is in the Gamma prime system. The Caridin star charts are very detailed, we assumed that the Caridin have enter the Terran system on several occasions in the last 200 years. And the Caridin have been space fairing for more than 300 years.

2232

Several new technologies emerge from the examination of the alien vessel; The use of shield emitters to form a protective energy barrier, Disruptor weapons which improved energy focus on targets, enhanced targeting systems and improved hull design. However, one device will change the means in which humanity colonizes the galaxy. Sub-Space gate generator, this opens a gateway into and out of a layer of subspace in-between space itself, with this technology a vessel can move great distances with a minor amount of energy, making travel to distant star systems in a matter of months not years. Sub-space prediction navigational system still need additional research. Now with this new technology, a massive investment is required in new designs for vessels to strengthen the Nova Legion's Fleet and is urgently demanded by The Body Politic.

THE GREAT EXPANSION

2233

All colony class vessels have been recalled and refitted or rebuilt with Sub-space jump gate generators. This will reveal more of the galaxy to The Body Politic. The construction of the first carrier class superdreadnoughts, which is a combination of battleship and spacecraft carrier. This type of vessel has a multi-hull configuration, with the engines and bridge systems within the beam of the centerline, and with three-gun decks on each of the two outer hulls, which also contains four flight decks for strike craft. These formidable warships are able to independently assault a planet. With a company of 10,000 and with 400 mechanized marines, 600 SF-8 Starlance fighters and 300 SB-3 Marauder bombers, 100 PF-1 Viper fighters, 50 OD-3 Skyraider dropships this 350'000-ton goliath of a vessel will be the first of four-vessels designed with a mixture of Terran and alien technology. Armed with Terran Plasma cannons, Gauss cannons, Anti-Spacecraft Plasma Vulcan cannons, Hyper-velocity torpedos. And with the addition of alien Disruptor cannons, Shield emitters and new targeting systems. Plus, Sub-space gate generators with navigational systems These four vessels are designated B P S Invincible, B P S Victory, B P S Vigilance, B P S Repulse.

2234

Sub-space communications array comes on line by means of Tachyon beams, a considerable advancement to standard Tachyon communications array.

2240

On a routine patrol in the Tau Ceti system, the escort carrier B P S Buccaneer and two destroyers B P S Rattlesnake, B P S Firedart. Made a sensor contact with an unknown vessel, well within sensor range. When the Buccaneer attempted to communicate with the vessel. It turned swiftly, and rapidly increased its speed then vanished before it was out of range of the Buccaneer sensors. It would appear that the small vessel no bigger than a shuttle craft, diploids some type of stealth technology. Further search of the system was conducted but nothing was uncovered. An investigation into the neighbouring systems by the ShadowDancers will be conducted, to ascertain if there is a fret to The Body Politic in the Tau Ceti system.

2268

Now that The Body Politic has extended its influence to encompassing 30 systems, many are in the process of being terraformed. A merely 8 of these systems have Earth like worlds, these systems are precious jewels in the crown of The Body Politic and are the focus of, enterprise and commerce with large developing populations with their own unique cultural evolution. Traversable Wormhole still being use for the core of all fleet movement and Trade between star systems. And now with colony vessels employing Sub-space gate generator technology for the last 30 years, the flourishing Body Politic appears to be unstoppable. Numerous voices in the Collective debate the fact that humanity's position in the galaxy is sparsely stretch at best. And that time is needed to consolidate humanity's expansion in the last 60 years. This is essential before The Body Politic has contact with another extra-terrestrial race. The ShadowDancers concur with this argument, a period is required to strengthen The Body Politic. The Nova Legion perceive, that its vital that more resources become available to reinforce fleet and planet defences, before the Collectives interests conflict with the interests of other alien races.

2272

Incursion by the Caridin at Beta Hydri. The cruiser B P S Reliant and the destroyer B P S Cobra on a routine patrol 3 AU outside of the Beta Hydri system. When three Caridin vessels no bigger than a corvette was attempting to shadow the terran patrol. As soon as the Reliant and Cobra turn to pursue the vessels. The Caridin vessels powered up their Shield emitters and Disruptor cannons and moved into an attack formation. The Reliant and Cobra increased to attack speed with weapons locked and loaded, moved to engage the Caridin vessels. With the two races making hasted for one another like two knights of old charging with lances drawn. The five vessels exchange weapon fire as the crafts move between each other at speed. The leading Caridin vessel was destroy by a torpedo volley from the Reliant, and the two remaining vessels damaged but trying to scarper from the encounter, with the Reliant in pursuit. With the Cobra in distress, the Reliant disengages from the pursuit, to aid the damage destroyer to port. Minor damage to the Reliant, the Cobra did not fare so well with her main weapons off line, and her life support badly damaged, and the loss of four of her crew with ten injured.

2273

With the Caridin incursions increasing in intensity. The Nova Legion has learnt much from the Caridin's hit and run tactics. And with the faults amid our own vessel designs. Improvements will be made to fleet combat vessels in the near future, to help deal with the Caridin.

2274

Several incursions by Caridin vessels along the border between the two races has come to a conclusion, The Body Politic arranges the transfer of the Vigilance and her battle group to reinforce these systems, now that the war drums are sounding. Nevertheless, many in The Body Politic contest a war with the Caridin. There have been many attempts over the years to communicate with the Caridin, but all have failed. The Collective is hopeful that a diplomatic solution can be reached by means of a more aggressive posture. Consequently, Star-Defence and Planet-Splitters combine to create a fleet never seen Before in The Body Politics history. The flag ship Vindicator a dreadnought class battleship with the Admiral S T Johnson at her helm will command a fleet of two carrier class superdreadnoughts; the Invincible and Victory,

with 25 battleships and battlecruisers and over 500,000 personal, with 200 vessels, 2000 mechanized marines, the Steel-Legion and Ironsplitters Divisions, and with 1000 planet fall assault craft. Plus, countless escort vessels and support vessels fill the Beta Hydri system in readiness for the pending assault.

The larger vessels in the fleet move into position to open Sub-space gates, great vortexes of blue green Plasma swirl into existence, so that the smaller vessels in the fleet will be able to cross the threshold into Sub-space, an impressive but time-consuming event. A number of sensor contacts were observed in sub-space, Admiral Johnson believes Caridin vessels are shadowing the Fleet. An armed conflict in sub-space would not be favourable for all concerned. Navigation in Sub-space is challenging in the best of conditions; great columns of blue green Plasma erupting from nadir to reach the zenith of Sub-space, with strange Plasma fluctuations, plus unpredictable Plasma eddies. Makes for an agreeable place to hide, but extremely difficult to conduct manoeuvres, and without Sub-space prediction navigation systems impossible. It would seem that the Caridin are under the same impression.

With the fleet now positioned 5 AU outside of the Gamma prime system. Confronting a small fleet of Caridin war vessels in a star burst formation just inside Gamma prime. The Admiral orders, the diplomatic vessel B P S Comet to brake formation and head to Gamma C. The small vessel armed with nothing more than shield emitters, moves towards the Caridin warships. The Comet transmits its mission parameters to the Caridin fleet, the lead vessel confirms and instructs the Comet to standby. Some hours passed while the comet stares down at the 60 warships. Patiently the comet awaits permission to enter the system, and at the last moment permission is granted. On landing on the Gamma C, a lush green fertile world with myriad structures interwoven with some impressively gigantic vegetation, bearing some resemblance to trees. With no sign of technology apart from the sea of well arm Caridin, waiting to greet the Comet. The diplomat Colonel P T Brown plus his interpreter, with an escort of four marines in full parade dress, disembarks the Comet, and move towards a group of Caridin standing apart from the sea of glistening weapons. As the group move towards the Caridin, one of the marine state, for such large humanoids they have such small warships, fasten your tongue young marine and we just might live through this day, Colonel Brown replies. Intense discussions last for days with the Senior Colloquium of the order of Caridin. The Caridin demand that their Vessel be returned. So that they can conduct their own investigation into the tragedy. And are furious about the way their deceased have been handled. This is understandable, and The Body Politic greatly apologizes, but many attempts were made to communicate. And so, Star charts are exchanged, and agreements are made, diplomatic avenues are open for discussion. But the main point is that the Caridin stop their aggressive posturing, with The Body Politic before it breaks out into a conflict that all parties concern will regret. A non-aggression pact is reached.

The Caridin are one of the more agreeable sect of the V aridin race. Most of the 14 V aridin sects are xenophobic at best, and some are more extreme. The V aridin race are large cooperative of diverse sects that inhabit 120 systems. All are answerable to the Hight Colloquium of the V aridin, situated on their home world V arix Prime. It would seem that the Caridin would like to keep this whole incident out of the Hight Colloquium. As the loss of one of their vessels and more significantly their technology to an alien race would not be well received, by all the Varidin sects. And the Caridin would more importantly lose its place in the Hight Colloquium, this would not be in the best interests of The Body Politic.

THE COLONY CRUSADER WARS

2287

In one of the outer colonies in the Gamma Leporis system, a group of scientists working in obscure secrecy merged a human brain into a cyborg configuration, that in itself was nothing new as this technology its used in rehabilitating war veterans, however then the scientists incorporate an extremely technically advanced artificial intelligence within the cyborg, in a symbiosis relationship. Several of the scientists working on the project undergo this procedure and numerous more follow. This spread throughout a number of systems in the outer colonies unchecked. By the time the Shadow-Dancers uncovered the conspiracy, two factions had arisen. One the Evolved Rubric with Leporis B as there Homeworld. The other The Emancipated Colonies with Pi Orionis as their Prime. The carrier class superdreadnought B P S Repulse was loss to mutiny and joined one of these factions. This is of great concern to the Sentinel-Legion as this class of vessel can independently assault a planet with minor effort. In all 1/4 of the fleet was absorbed into the rebel forces, and nine-systems were capture from The Body Politic, before they could stop the spread of these man-machines. Sub-space communications, commerce, movement and trade between these systems its prohibited, the battle lines have been drawn. This is a crime against The Body Politics' whole way of life,

contaminating the collective consciousness of humanity cany's great consequence, these machine men are abomination that must be destroyed before they contaminate humanity. The war cry is sent out to all colonies in The Body Politic, to assist in liberating the populace of these ill-fated systems, and all replied to the call to arms. More resources are sent to reinforce these systems along the borders with the rebel factions. Skirmishes and incursions from both side escalate near the borders with the rebel's states. Interstellar Command is focus on refitting a core part of the fleet, the dissidents chose the right time for their insurrection, these machine men will have to wait for now.

2288

The Shadow Dances have identified the rebels known as The Evolved Rubric. Who were responsible for planting a device that destroyed the Military shipyards orbiting Proxima Centauri in the Alpha Centauri system. Thru sensor readings taken by the stations engineer on duty at the time, the Shadow Dances identified the self-replicating nanotechnology, that was used to disrupt the Anti-matter reactor to create an Anti-matter explosion by means of a Plasma surge, this ruptured the containment fields in the reactor. The entire process was observed by LtCdr Raymond Woodward the engineer, who alerted the station's commanding officer Admiral Steven S Bates to abandon the orbital station. The engineer managed to delay the explosion for about 6 mins, granting some of the crew time to man the escape pods. More importantly it also provides the two carrier class superdreadnoughts Victory and Vigilance, just enough time to raise their shields and try to put some distance from the station, both Carriers where badly damaged by the blast radius but not destroyed. The two vessels were in drydock for refit at the time, and where fortunate that their shield emitters were not being replaced that week. The Shadow Dances determine that the carriers where the main targets. The two carriers have been escorted in tow to the shipyards at Calisto for repairs and refit. Over 4000 personal were lost in the attack, nevertheless 7000 personal were saved by the actions of Raymond Woodward who also perished, Lieutenant Commander Raymond Woodward received the Order of Star legion for Valour above and beyond the call of duty.

Interstellar Command is combining a fleet to begin a major offensive into both rebel held territories. In the meantime, the Independent Cruiser B.P. S Hood has received orders to penetrate deep into the Gamma Leporis system, and cut-off The Evolved Rubrics, communications with The Emancipated Colonies, by destroying a large communications station. This new design of Cruiser is armed with two wings of SF-9 Starlance fighters and with two wings of SB-3 Marauder bombers, and platoon of mechanized marines and array of Plasma, Gauss, and Disruptor cannons with Hyper-velocity torpedos. Also, this class of vessel its equipped with a prototype cloaking device, which utilizes the shield emitters to absorb Tachyon beams, and other forms of sensor technology. This formidable cruiser is capable of operating behind enemy lines, independent of fleet actions for extended periods of time. Five AU outside of Gamma Leporis a blue-green vortex of Plasma swirls into existents as the Hood emerges from Sub-space. Captain P R Dorson orders Ensign Moore the counter measure specialist to engage the hoods cloaking systems; in silent running mode its vital that only passive sensors are engaged, and movement is limited to speeds under 6500km/s, these restrictions increase as the Hood advances closer to its pray. Not fully trusting the new cloaking technology, Capt Dorson consults the navigational charts and exploits an asteroid field, to help mask his approach to the unsuspecting station. While on approach to the station Capt Dorson orders the helm to power down the Hyper drive engines, yet still concealed amidst the asteroid field. He orders the use of a small stealth surveillance drone, to secure some thermal images and passive sensor readings of the target area. It does not take long for the drone to recon the target and return to the Hood. The captain reviews the sensor readings and was in disbelief from what he had learnt, a battleship and two automated repair vessels in close proximity to the station, the Hood is no match for a battleship, the captain accesses the ships database and is horrified at what he discovers, the Icarus he scans for more information on the vessel and its movements within the last few months. The battleship has been harassing three systems along the border, with a number of engagements destroying several Body Politic vessels. And so, Star-Defence sent a task force to hunt down and destroy the vessel, thus the last incursion the Icarus took part in, she was ambushed by several warships and narrowly escaped. And here she its conceal behind an asteroid field, but not destroyed with priority one target on her head. With further analysis of the sensor reading reveal that the Battleship is damaged, but how badly is the question. With no delay the Hood starts her attack approach to the battleship. The captain orders the helm to try to keep out of range of the station's weapons, one at a time please Lieutenant Barkley, pleads Captain Dorson. Arming her fighters with anti-ship missiles and her bombers with Hyper-velocity torpedos, plus loading her own torpedo bays and Gauss cannons, as soon as the Icarus is within weapons range of the Hood she decloaks and launches her attack craft, and she also raises her shields at the same time firing a weapons volley at the Icarus. The fighters and bombers dart behind the torpedos and Gauss rounds to follows then towards the target. In the meantime, captain orders all communications to. be jammed, we do not need uninvited guests coming to the party, Dorson remarks, and orders the helm best speed to the target plus, charge the energy weapons and reload the torpedo and Gauss canons, we are going in for the kill. The Icarus loads her torpedo bays and fires the 3 of her 12 main Gauss cannons at the Hood. The Icarus is more damage than I assumed Capt Dorson states. The stricken Battleship raises her shields and launches a storm of plasma bolts from her Vulcan cannons to try and destroy the torpedos, this lit up the Icarus like a Christmas tree, while the Plasma Vulcan cannons are focus on the torpedos. The fighters and bombers firer a second volley, before they are in range of the

battleships defence systems and brake off to return to the Hood and rearm. The Icarus manage to destroy 11 of the 16 torpedos, but 5 find their mark three slam into the portside of the vessel, energy waves ripples throughout the shields as they fail, the two remaining torpedos shatter some of the armour plating on the portside, but the Gauss rounds find their target piercing the armoured Disruptor and Plasma turrets, detonating and destroying most of the energy weapons and torpedo bays on the portside. With the second salvo erupts along the portside of the crippled vessel, her guns fall silent. At the same time the Hoods Plasma defence systems deal with the three Gauss rounds with little effort. The captain of the Icarus attempts to turn the Vessel to starboard, to bring the ships starboard guns to bear, but it's too late the Hood is upon her. In a brave attempt to save the doom vessel, the two repair vessels try to get between the Icarus and Hood by joining the melee, with a salvo of small calibre Disruptor and plasma fire, which didn't penetrate the Hood's shields, but when the Hood returned fire with her much larger energy weapons, one of the vessels exploded into fragments and the other when dead and drifted off into space. Saving her main guns for the Icarus, the Hood fires her forward torpedo and Gauss cannons into the stem of the battleship as she attempts to turn, the Icarus' engines go dead as she majestically pivots forward and rolls to port, a number of internal explosions blow hull Plating off the battleship, as the ship's crew inject into space in escape pods. The hood turns away from the stricken battleship, before she is in range of the stations defence systems, firing a volley from all her aft weapons this destroys the Icarus in a massive explosion of blue-green plasma, fragments of the battleship crash into the stations shields and the Hood but do no damage. The crew of the hood erupt into cheers, but the job is only haft done. With the element of surprise now gone, the station's automated defence systems are activated, somehow, I don't think that we are going to sneak a platoon of marines with charges into there now, remarks Capt Dorson. Now that the fighters and bombers are rearmed, the Capt orders then to be launched and to follow behind the Cruiser as they make their attack run on the station. The Capt also orders the auxiliary power to the forward shield emitters. The communications station is fully automated with an impressive array of Plasma and Disruptor cannons, but no long-range weapon systems, and with time on her side. The Hood fires all the forward weapons at once in an attempt to bring down the station's shields and the station returns fire and rips the forward shields from the hood. The hood turns away from the station, firing all her portside weapons as they come to bear. Then the fighters and bombers weave from behind the cruiser and launch a barrage of missiles and torpedos, four of the fighters and two of the bombers are court by the stations Plasma defence systems and destroyed, but the volley manages to bring down the station's shields, the Hood fires it's aft weapons into the station and it erupts into a ball of blue-green plasma. The sensor officer Ensign Blackwool reports to the Capt that he has several contacts approaching fast, the Capt orders the cloak to be engage. Ensign Moore replies, the forward shield emitters are burnt-out, we cannot cloak. Capt orders the helm to open a sub-Space gate, we will just have to take our chances in Sub-space.

2289

Barking dogs will not strike fear into the Hearts of lions. Now that the Body Politic has the resources free to deal with the rebels. Fleet Admiral S T Johnson will command a combined fleet of Star-Defence and Planet-Splitters divisions into battle. The Admiral will split his forces and assault both rebel factions simultaneously, Star-Defence will initiate the spearhead attacks into the rebel held territory's, the Vigilance, Victory, Invincible, annihilate all who stand before then, the two taskforces seem unstoppable. Field Marshal T S Whiteman coordinating the ground pounding with a large fleet of orbital assault vessels at his disposal,

and with the Black knight mechanized marine's battalions creating beachheads in all the planetary assaults, so that heavy Armor will be able to make planet fall unhindered by the enemy. The Ironsplitters and the Steel Legion are in conduct most of the ruthless warfare on the battlefield, the Field Marshal finds that his forces only facing AI controlled machines, the Planet-Splitters, For Honour, Homeworld, Valour, Discipline, too many of these brave men die in the conflict. Nevertheless, with the cunningness of both the Admiral and the Marshal they manage to succeed in keeping the civilian population out of the fire storm throughout the campaign, and military casualties to a minimum. Dealing with pockets of stiff resistance from the rebels in the form of AI piloted heavy armoured robotic infantry, and small AI piloted corvettes, with no crew and life support these vessels are heavily armed and lightning fast, and they cause many delays with resupply, by deploying guerrilla tactics that only serve to slow the unavoidable end to the conflict. Star-Defence destroying or capturing most of the core of the rebel fleet. Fleet Admiral ST Johnson is left slightly puzzled as to why the rebels have not put up more of a defence, as they had the means and the time to construct a sizable fleet, and where is the Repulse? Now that the Admiral has his gaze upon Pi Orionis and Leporis B. Johnson orders Whiteman to keep his heavy armourer out of the city, and to draw the rebels out onto the battlefield, the smaller Ironsplitters will have to deal with any resistants within the major cities. Field Marshal and his Planet-Splitters make short work of what was left of the rebel forces. Now that the war is over The Body Politic celebrates the hard-won victory by the Nova Legion. With the search for the machine-men within the two systems being conducted, the warships in the fleet will have to delay their return to their home systems.

Admiral Johnson orders the engineers to reinitialize the Emergence beacons in the liberated systems, in an instance the collective consciousness of millions of minds in brace the Admiral Johnson in warm adoration at what he has accomplished, their freedom. Within hours of the Beacons being operational once again, Shadow-Dancers start receiving intelligence reports on what has been occurring in the last two years of occupation. The rebel strategy was to destroy Victory and Vigilance in drydock before the ships were overhauled. This would have tipped the balance in their favour enough for the rebels to make a swift assault into The Body Politic, but this strategy was unsuccessful, with the rebel's plans in disarray, they constructed three colony type vessels and fled somewhere into the galaxy, with the Repulse and an undisclosed number of capital ships. An extensive investigation into all the possible systems will have to be conducted by the Shadow-Dancers, this will take time, but until we find the machine-men, Fleet Admiral S T Johnson will have to disband the fleet.

2290

Now that the task force is disbanded and return to their home systems, they took with them the collective recognition and the adoration of the accomplishments of Fleet Admiral S T Johnson, and with this a revolution from within The Body Politic begins, the collective consciousness of the Body Politic recognizes a need for change in the administration and defends of the Terran Empire. And with this a Senate is formed on Earth, one senator indigenous to the star system will be elected, to represent his brothers and sisters in the senate, with this in place an emeritus position is needed, an Emperor of the Terran Empire, this new Emperor will also be elected, to guide the hand of The body politic across the empire, regional governor's will be elected from the star systems they inhabit to administrate the Emperor's will, and the Senate will counsel the Emperor on the needs of The Body Politic within all-star systems, and the need of the Empire as a whole.

2291

Fleet Admiral Steven Toeknee Johnson is placed before The Body Politic to be elected to the position of Emperor, and with not a soul wanting to stand against him, and so with great ceremony, the 156-year-old man makes his way to the senate, one of the young men in full dress uniform accompanying the newly elected emperor steps forward, and whispers in the man's ear, Steven remember that you are just a man with a job to do, and with this the new Emperor stands before the senate and is sworn an oath to protect The Terran Empire. With unknown and known frets barking at the door of the empire a massive new investment in shipyards, orbital defences, and warships is underway, this breathes life into a new expansion into the galaxy, and with this brings new problems for The Terran Empire.
THE END FOR NOW ...

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