
Escaping the War

by Mike Rozak
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The War

Recon prep

In the orange glow of the camping-tent's bug-lantern, Shk turned to me and asked: *"So, what kind of house are you going to build?"*

"Um. Non-traditional. It'll have a flat roof. And a rectangular clover-leaf design," I answered.

"How many bedrooms?"

That question was leading. I expected to NOT have children. I smiled at the implication, and then diverted. *"Well, I need a room where my friends can stay the night, and an extra one for a pool table."*

Shk smiled. *"Pass the ammo cartridge."*



I took an EEP cartridge (Encapsulated-Explosive Projectile – what you Earthlings call a “bullet”) out of my bag, and handed it to my friend.

Shk loaded the EEP cartridge into her black-gun. The cartridge locked-in with a click.

“Terracotta?” she asked. (We Nor context-switch quite-often.)

I checked the ammo in my zap-gun. “Orange-red tiles, and some blue-teal ones arranged into a chequered-border.”

“Cool.” She added, “Barbeque?”

“A shish-kebob pit in the kitchen.” I double-checked my 30-centimeter knife. It was pointless in combat, but it looked good.

“Yum [shish-kebobs].” Switching subjects, Shk asked, “Are you ready to head out?”

“Yep,” I answered glumly. I exhaled a sigh. “Another typical hunt today.”

Wr, also in the tent, handed a small steel-cylinder spark-grenade to me.

“Here you go. You’re missing one.”

I accepted the weapon and gave a shrug-smile. The shrug-smile meant both, “Yeah, you’re right,” and “I don’t really care.”

Shk peered outside through our tent’s closed flap.

“The sun rises in an hour,” she said.



What else do you do with your spare mental faculties except try and remember if your path spells anything? I once thought one of our paths spelled “Ook”, but that’s a nonsense word.

Today’s path wasn’t nearly so “romantic”. We had already doubled-back twice. “Haven’t we been here an hour ago?” “And half-an-hour before that?” The device only displayed a path-history for the last ten-minutes, on purpose. If we knew where we were relative to anywhere we had been, enemy telepaths could also use that information against us.

We rounded a hill’s ridge to the right. Our elevation was half-way up the hill.

“Oh crap,” complained Shk as she shock-stared at the GPS, “The [male] Bitches want us to traipse down the valley and up the other side.”

And then, without warning, she fun-yelled, “RUN!”

We all ran. I hadn’t yet rounded the corner, so I turned-about and bolted.

“Ffffwwwk” went the bunker-blaster.

Some sparkly lights.

Radiation blast.

Ten seconds later. “Gotcha 😊,” called-out Shk to us.

We set-off a bomb nearly every-other day. Shk’s GPS had detected an invisible extradimensional Alotian-bunker, and silently signalled for her to detonate a bunker-blaster bomb. She had ten seconds to get us away, set the detonator-timer on the soon-to-be deposited box, and bolt-away herself.

If any of the Alotians hiding in their extradimensional bunker were mind-reading us, which they would be, then their defences and/or automatic-evacuations would be activated twenty seconds after Shk realized her GPS had signalled her to detonate her bomb.

Having pissed-off Alotians suddenly-materializing all-around you wasn't very fun; that's how I died the first time.

The traipsing-down-the-valley "joke" might have been Shk's effort to cover her sudden surge of emotional excitement when she saw the blinking bunker-blaster icon on her GPS screen.

The bunker-blaster left no visible signs of detonation, other than a slightly-melted box. If an Alotian extradimensional-bunker had been there, it was invisible and ethereal before, and its detonated carcass was still invisible and ethereal. Any Alotians in the ethereal bunker would have suffocated and/or been extradimensionally-melted when their bunker's physics-pressurization-field was "popped" by the detonation.

We left the carcass of the bomb on the ground, and continued along our pre-programmed trail, still directed by the GPS.

It was two hours into our eight-hour shift.



Nor woman

(Evolved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thylacoleo>)

The Alotian ether-faeries attack

One hour later, our GPS hadn't yet spelled anything meaningful as it meandered us about:

"Beep beep beep beep..." went Djen's proximity-alerter.

A brilliant-red zap-bolt (think *"Star Wars Blaster"*) flew-out from nowhere and into Krft's back, at heart-level. She fell down instantly. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaster \(Star Wars\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaster_(Star_Wars)))

“... beep beep beep beep...”
continued Djen’s proximity alerter,
even after it had hit the ground,
discarded for a weapon.



I dropped my black-gun and un-holstered my own zap-gun.

“... beep beep beep ...”

I scanned around. Alotians in faerie-suits could sometimes be seen as watery outlines when they moved.

A zap-bolt flew past Shk.

“Faerie dust!” yelled Umfk, as she detonated her duster-bomb. Any nearby invisible Alotian faeries would soon be glowing. We’d all have shit-nasty headaches tonight, though.

“There’s one!” said Shk, pointing at/behind me.

“... beep beep beep beep...”

You never want to have your best-friend do that.



Unseen to me, a glowing Alotian faerie stood ten meters behind me. An Alotian zap-bullet blew out my heart two beats later.

That was the second time that I had died in my half-year of military duty.



Life as a medic (One year later)

New friends

We Nor bitch-session about everything. (Notice the self-referential bitch-session statement about us bitch-sessioning.)

Welcome to my bitch-session.

I think I was infantry in my prior life.

Now I was an apprentice medic.

I had been in a war, fighting against, I think, Agamidae. (For the record, we weren't fighting against them, but I didn't recall this at the time.) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agamidae>).

I was killed enough times that I forgot who I was.

My medic apprenticeship centred around paid work, with accompanying online computer-courses.

After waking up in my new body, medic-training was one of the occupation choices I was offered. Another was returning to the battlefield – no way. Work in a prefabricated-building construction-factory may have been a fifth option. Life as a medic sounded better than any of the other eight choices. At the time, I was far-too dim/sozzled to inquire about other career alternatives

After four-weeks of reincarnation rehabilitation, I was flown to a podunk town to undertake my medic apprenticeship. The strip-mining town had, maybe, 500 people... or that's what I thought at the time. The population was closer to 1500.

"Big Rock," I think that's what the town was called, was built near a 150-meter-wide canyon. The only road-access to the town was via a "steel" arch-bridge that spanned the 300-meter deep canyon. That bridge was all that the town was famous for... Not that the town was famous.

While working on my medic apprenticeship over the past year, I had begun befriending new people. My old friends were still in the battlefield, and on a very-distant planet. I'd never see them again. Functionally, they were no-longer friends.

We Nor HATE acquiring new friends. Our evolutionary design is to grow up with a group of friends, all of the same age. We remain friends for life. Packs of five-to-eight girl-toddlers grow-up into girls, then girl-teenagers, and then mature into women together.

Members of a pack all live in the same town. We either all work in the same business, for camaraderie, or we take separate and intentionally-diverse jobs for economic stability. We usually live in our own single-person apartments. Socialization, which includes meals, is entirely pack-based.

My new friends, I was acquiring through work in the clinic. They were the only people I saw regularly, so I naturally bonded with them.

Kin was the clinic's doctor. Her senior medic was Zana. Zana's younger sister, Leen, also lived in the town. I think she worked at the grocery store. The three had already bonded into a pack. Over the past year, they had gradually included me in their pack-activities. It would take another decade before I was fully bonded.

Being a medic

Life in a community medical-clinic is simple. This is how Nor clinic-medicine works from an apprentice-medic's point-of-view:

People show up for half-an-hour to hour-long visits. Half of the visits are scheduled, the rest are walk-ins with injuries, infections,

viruses, and malaras. "Simple" patients were sent in my direction. More-serious ailments were assigned to Kin the doctor, or Zana the senior medic. People requiring surgery would be driven or flown to the hospital, a thousand kilometres away.

By default, I gave everyone an extradimensional "MRI". They're really cool and lots of fun.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mri>)

The MRI scanner is a torso-tall clamshell. The patient would stand in front of the back of the open clamshell. I'd close the clamshell, leaving their head and legs exposed. A minute later, a three-dimensional image of their chest would appear on my MRI-display box, a .5m x .25m x .13m display and computer.

If a patient's head looked damaged, I'd raise the MRI clamshell and clamp it around their head... which they really-really hated. Just imagine having the monster-jaws of the clamshell being closed around your vision, your head being cushion-clamped into place, and then spending ten minutes in a field-buzzing difficult-to-breathe darkness.

BONEMELTER

The MRI computer analysed the person's health based on the scan, their medical records, and a few multiple-choice questions that I'd answer. *"Has the patient consumed any recreational drugs recently? (a) No, (b) Yes, (c) They are hesitant to say."*

After the scan and questions, the MRI computer would display some instructions for me to relay to the patient, print out more-detailed instructions on thermal paper, and write a prescription. Only once-in-awhile would I have to refer the patient to Zana or Kin.

We had a cool-room in the back. It was filled with glass-faced refrigerators full of glow-stick-like medication-vials. I'd grab the

prescription, show the patient how to “crack” and shake the medication-vial, and send them on their way. I’d also get them non-medicine supplies when necessary, such as wet-bandages and joint-braces. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glow_stick)

That patient finished, I’d stop by Zana for my next MRI victim. Failing that, I’d watch Kin or Zana while they worked with a patient.

“The Bitches”

For you to understand “*The Bitches*”, I should first explain Nor physiology.

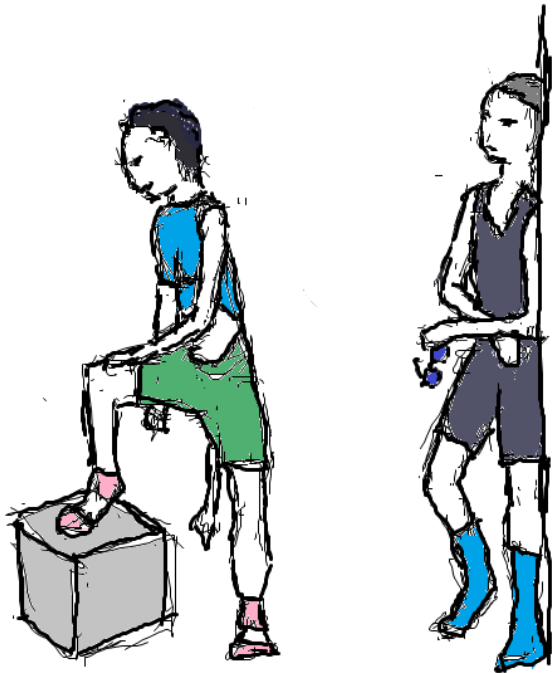
Nor Women are taller than men. We have shorter tails, half of the men’s tail-length. We have small breasts, a pouch, and a small penis.

Nor men have long “luscious” tails. They are extremely proud of their tails, and often extend them with synthetic pink or baby-blue lion-like fake-fur “puffs”.

They have “round perky breasts” – their words.

And a pouch.

And of course, a penis.



Left – A Nor man.
Right – A Nor woman.

When Nor women give birth, their children look like Kangaroo “pinkies”. After half a year in the pouch, the pinkies grow a light-covering of white fur. Their stubs grow into arms and legs. Somewhat mouse-looking, and by-then poking their heads out of the pouch, they look much cuter.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joey_\(marsupial\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joey_(marsupial)))

We women can raise our pinkie children in our own pouch... if we choose. Most of us women are less-excited about raising children than the men. Men (and boys) LOVE to have their pouches filled. Schoolboys walk around with Troll-like dolls sticking out of their pouches. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troll_doll)



Nor men are fanatical child-raisers. As an overreaching and very-rude statement, the only reason that Nor men need a woman around is to get a pinkie from them. In reality, Nor men think of Nor women as people, but women are people they'd rather not hang-out with. And vice-versa.

Nor Women have personalities similar to Earth-Sol alpha-males. The character of *Ripley* (Sigourney Weaver) in the movies *Alien* and *Aliens* could be a Nor woman. Unlike the *Alien(s)* character, *Ripley*, Nor women are spontaneous and fun-loving. We hang out in packs, and are NOT loners, like *Ripley*. While all Hominid-women conversations begin with "How are you doing?" and degrade into "Did you know that Lucy is going out with Mark?", all of our conversations begin with "Fucking-shit-weird day," and ultimately degrade into a bitch-sessions.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigourney_Weaver,
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_(film)),
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aliens_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aliens_(film)))

Nor Men also hang out in packs, up to five men in a group. The “worst” males are very effeminate. Earth-Sol people would think they acted like hyperbolized homosexual men.

A pack of men raise their children together. A single Nor woman is selected to be a mother by ALL five men. She is then impregnated by them, either all the men as a group, or one man every two months, depending upon what the men prefer.

Over the course of a year, the men get five pinkie-children from her. A sixth pinkie-child might also be produced, and raised as a twin by a particularly-effeminate male.

Once she has given birth, the Nor woman usually stays away from the men, and vice versa. In some societies, Nor women help to raise their children. Similar to divorced husbands on Earth-Sol, Nor women have weekly visits, give their children gifts, and sometimes provide financial assistance.

Men stay in town to raise the children. A men-pack will intentionally take different work-shifts so that someone is always at home when the children return from school, or have a school-day off. The men also work in different professions to ensure aggregate income stability.

Nor women are expendable. We are more-likely to travel and trade. In times of war, we are the first into battle.

Medic/Nor tales/tails

If our patients' ailments were sufficiently noteworthy, we'd bitch-session about them during lunch.

"I just had someone come in with...!"

The most memorable tale was when a Nor (male) Bitch showed up with a very-short and bloody tail. His sixth tail-vertebra was exposed. We couldn't do much-more for him than clean-up his wound, and put him on the next commercial flight to the city.

At lunch the next day, we had a lengthy debate about him. Legally, we were supposed to report potential assault injuries to the magistrate. As the man told his story, he had accidentally caught his tail in a kitchen food-blender during lunch-break... which was possible, though unlikely.

As previously mentioned, the Bitches love their tails. The injury could well-have-been "payback", some sort of male semi-legal vengeance between two packs. We checked for knife marks, but there weren't any. We suspected that another Bitch-pack managed to get his tail chewed up by an exposed gear in a mining vehicle, or perhaps a wood chipper. We never could understand the men's zeal to abuse one-another.

Or maybe he genuinely-accidentally got it stuck in a mining vehicle's engine-bits.

Or perhaps he had quite-stupidly sat on his kitchen blender.

We had no evidence that a kitchen blender wasn't the cause.

Our bitch-session that day was certainly interesting, as we hypothesized all of the ways he could have mangled his tail, including getting it caught in an industrial-elevator door. We curled-over laughing at that one... Not funny to you? Yeah, well, you had to be there to find it funny... Being a Nor woman would also make the elevator-door joke more humorous.

Other, more-believable tool-injuries were much-more common amongst men. Despite what the movie *Lethal Weapon II* shows, nail-guns don't kill, they just embed their nails very deeply into someone's chest cavity. Reciprocating saws accidentally cut through men's muscles, and/or they accidentally impale their chest cavity. Male bones and muscles were frequently crushed by industrial machinery. Pry-bars had a way of gouging out men's eyes. Tail-injuries were very rare.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lethal_weapon_2,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reciprocating_saw)

The rest of a medic's work-life was quite boring...

We never had to deal with dangerous viral outbreaks, like the flu. They would have been a sign of a biological attack against our race.

We had no alcoholism.

We had no diabetes.

We don't smoke.

Recreational drugs occasionally caused problems, but the drugs are designed so they won't harm their users that badly.

Unlike Earth-Sol, people weren't put on a stream of medications as they got older. Part of the reason we didn't prescribe many ongoing medications, was that we would be given new bodies once we reached the equivalent body-age of 50.

Children didn't go fishing, so they didn't embed fishhooks in their fingers and other extremities.

Broken bones were common, but not terribly interesting.

Our entertainment came from the clever industrial "accidents" that afflicted The Bitches.

Dinners

My friends and I would head-over to one of the town's taverns or bistros after work. They featured dim lights, a smoke-free environment, and booth-action seating. The taverns typically had a couple of pool tables at one end, where competing men-packs would play snooker all-night.

Culinary variety is not a Nor-woman's strong-point. I ate shish-kebabs nearly every night. I might have eaten a handful of nuts occasionally. If the bistros served curries, I never tried one.

I don't recall what my friends ate. I don't recall thinking to watch what my friends ate.

After eating, I would air-inject coloured stim-drugs into my forearm to alter my mood. There were several flavours, all (mostly) non-addictive. Blue would calm me down. Green made me feel edgy. Red induced a feeling of camaraderie. Purple just made me forget.



Clinic-patient bitch-sessions stayed at work, but we'd bitch-session about The Bitches (men) we were acquainted with. Or we'd bitch-session about work. Or we'd rant about the state of the world.

I never mentioned the war.

Fuck. I hate the fucking goddamn shit war!

The Alotians were in the war...

Let me rephrase that:

I recalled the Alotians being there, but I wasn't sure if I had fought against them. I did know that Nor nations fought against

Alotian nations, and concluded that I must have also fought the Alotians as part of the Nor military.

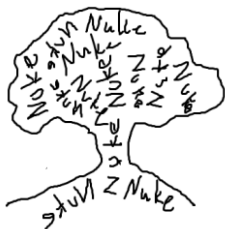
The Agamidæ weren't in the war. They may have been indigenous civilians living on the planet. Or they may have been on our side. I didn't remember clearly.

Fuck! War!

The weapons that people invent to kill one-another.

You think nukes are bad. They are KIND.

As I write this story, I am crying, as I recall shadows of war memories.



Apartment

I hadn't noticed that I no-longer thought about building a house. Nor had I noticed that I hadn't noticed.

I had an apartment of my own in "Big Rock". It had a small kitchen, separated from a bedroom/living-room combination by a thin partition wall. Attached to the bedroom/living-room was a small toilet room. Showers in the five-story apartment complex were communal.

I didn't watch television or listen to the radio. The kitchen had a 2-meter by 1-meter E-paper information "wall". The screen would update every ten seconds, displaying new text, and black-and-white images. There was a channel for men, which I never watched, and one for women, which was mostly news, and a few others. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_paper)

My living-room had a couch, which I slept on.

I owned very-few clothes.

I owned even less of anything else.

I may have had some hand-written get-well letters from friends.

<Pause in writing while I stop crying.>

We never...

I don't know how to put this.

We never asked each other how we were feeling emotionally.

Nor women do NOT talk emotions. They fun-punch one-another on the shoulder, and get one-another recreationally-drugged when one of the pack is feeling down.

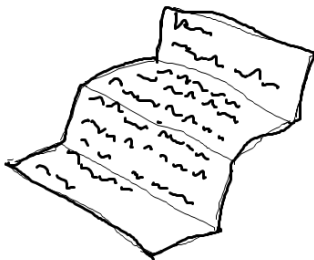
The "get well" letters were a monumental touchy-feely breakthrough for us.

I didn't realize this at the time.

All I knew was that I cherished them... the letters and my friends.

But I didn't know why.

Goddamn shift fucking crap war!



Migration

An official letter arrived at the clinic. I had been selected for relocation/evacuation because of my combat and medical skills. Being the only expendable person in the three-person clinic-staff, I would be relocated/evacuated alone. Leen, Zana's sister, wasn't relocated/evacuated either. Not only did she not possess appropriate skills for relocation/evacuation, Leen was already bonded to Kin and Zana. My three emerging-friends would stay behind.

Once again, social bonds were cut, and I stood unsupported. Nor can make friends with almost anyone, and with almost any personality... but we need friendship consistency.

Kin, Leen, Zana, and I didn't really say goodbye. We had a last bitch-session in the tavern over shish-kebabs and cashews.

The next morning, I was bussed out of town and put onto a large "iron" spaceplane.

The ship was fucking huge.

My stateroom was a 2.4-meter by 3.6-meter metal box constructed of thick "iron" walls. The entire room was self-contained in the event we were attacked. The room's door was a World-War-II Navy-vessel pressurized-door, with a hefty latch instead of a wheel. No oxygen vents aerated the room; oxygen got into the room when the door was opened.

The room contained a bed, and a fixed porta-toilet suspended over a shallow tub of chemical solution. I could have borrowed books from the library, but I didn't care to read. I had a video-display with three channels; I kept the news channel on round-the-clock.

Back
to
work

My room was welded into a row of twelve rooms. The bloc sat on a track, and could be moved left-and-right like an archival bookcase in a museum, eliminating or creating the hallway in-between. When we were confined to our room, which was most of the time, our row would be slid tight against another row. If we opened our airlock doors then, all we would see would be the rear-wall of another row of rooms.

The track-sliding movement of our rooms would alert us of our impending release-and-recreation. Once our rooms were locked in place, a buzzer would go off, and a light would turn on over our doors.

Recreation consisted of a walk, proper toilet facilities, and feeble bitch-sessions in the library. We didn't know one-another well-enough to get a really good bitch-session going.

Food was microwave dinners in the cantina, mostly curries and wet-grains, like risotto.

Two hours later, we'd trudge back to our rooms and be archived.

News-reel videos played in our rooms, updated as we travelled along. Every one of our days was twenty days in the real world. We watched the war progress at lightning speed. Our entire sector went-up in flames.

Goddamn war!

My military friends from the war were most-likely still in the war.

My medical friends, who I had been growing into, were almost certainly engulfed by the war. The solar-system where the tiny village of "Big Rock" lived was shaded grey on the television. This time, the war wasn't embodied by the Alotians. The news-reels kept mentioning Hominids and/or Simians.

Astonishingly, the news-reels showed packs of men fighting as infantry. They NEVER fought in infantry or as battleship crew... not unless the war got really bad.

← NEED TO OXYGEN →
← OXYGEN →
← OXYGEN LESS OXYGEN →
← OXYGEN OXYGEN →

Poor Hominids and/or Simians.

Nor men are incredibly nasty when they fight... as exemplified by tails-in-blenders, eye gouging, reciprocating-saw injuries, and nail-gun chest injuries. Never-ever-ever make The Bitches angry. They go into a furore.

Goddamn war!

How do I escape this thing?

It chased me even into my armoured room.

My transport was attacked by a Hominid battleship. Another of my bodies died again. I forgot more of who I was.



Walking down the streets of Los Angeles

I awoke further away from the war.

I don't get my own body this time. I had sustained too-many injuries. The Flea-evolved people (they prefer to humorously be referred to by their diminutive-cousin's name, Fleas) gave me the choice of being merged with a pet-animal, and retaining my personality, or being merged with an existing person, and experiencing radical shifts in my personality.

I shared a body with someone else until we merged.

Who needs bitch-sessions anyway? I don't miss the urge to bitch-session. I do miss my playful nature though.

Los Angeles isn't bad for a city. I like the shopping and gadgets. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_angeles)

I cannot accurately remember what I looked like. Neither can I remember my friends' names. Thanks to all of the war-inflicted mind-and-soul injuries, I have forgotten most of what I knew.

I remembered some of my medic training.

And some combat.

As well as myself from Los Angeles.

The war hasn't reached here yet.

Hominids from other planets are secretly hiding-out here from the impending war.

Meanwhile, contracted Hominid botters based on other planets control the Los-Angeles indigenous population. Their nosy-neighbour attitude and thought-control keeps the crime-rate down. They also mould the subconscious thoughts of LA's residents; I suddenly have the urge to watch movies and stay up until midnight.

The war is following me, creeping over the horizon.

This time it isn't embodied by Alotians or Simians. The Hominids on the planet aren't war-carriers either.

But still, the war is there. It hides in the botthers. It hides in the invisible spaceplanes smuggling people to Earth-Sol. It even hides in the Hollywood alien-invasion movies, which both frighten the locals, and which can be distributed to other Hominid planets to be shown as anti-Hominid propaganda.

Goddamn fucking shit war!

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