

Gnarl Writes a Book... Sort of!



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Word count 10023

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“The great warrior ran up the jagged rocks and leapt into the sky as the vicious monster flew along the cliff. His mighty blade...”

Gnarl heard the knocking at the door and rose from his chair. He usually liked to get company but right now had a deadline for the new book. He looked over at the coffee pot as he passed by on his way to the door.

“Hello” He said with a smile as the mailman handed him a package. The postal worker greeted him back with a smile but did not say a word, just nodded and went on his way. Gnarl looked down at the small package and noted that it was not for him. He set it on the edge of the counter and would be sure to tell his son of the package later. Gnarl then walked over to the coffee pot and taking a cup from the cabinet started to pour the coffee. He gave a stare as he realized that the coffee was cold. Gnarl then emptied the cup in the sink and proceeded to make a fresh pot. He hit the button on the grinder and then found that there were no beans in it. His shoulders slumped a little at first and then taking a deep breath he went to the fridge. Taking the bag of coffee beans he shook it to make sure there was still something in it.

“Maybe enough for one more pot!” He walked back to the counter where the coffee pot was and emptied the bag of beans into the grinder. After replacing the lid on the grinder he hit the button.

It whirred and made lots of grinding noises that reminded Gnarl of a chipper shredder. Once the beans were ground he counted out the right number of scoops into the filter and closed the lid. It would not be long now until there was coffee. He headed for the restroom to take care of that, as long as he was up.

After washing his hands he went back to the kitchen and poured a cup of the fresh hot coffee. Gnarl walked back to the computer at his work station and sat down. His chair made that same familiar pop sound as he leaned forward. Apparently there was a loose screw on the bottom of the chair that made a pop every time he shifted his weight or when he sat down. He did his best to ignore it as he started to read the story so he could continue.

“Rocks, jumps, monster, Ah yes!” He had a habit of talking to himself. Whenever anyone caught him doing it he would explain that he was talking to the dog who usually sat at his feet when he wrote.

“His mighty blade sank deep into the wing of the creature and....” RING...Ring....Ring

“Damn phone!” Gnarl picked up the handset and calmly spoke into the receiver.

“Hello” He listened and his eyes almost squinted as he heard that familiar voice.

“This is Judy, I am calling about your current credit card account...Click!” He almost slammed the phone down. He then made a mental note to get an unlisted number.

“His mighty blade sank deep into the wing of the creature and holding on for all he was worth, the two crashed into the rocks of the cliff. They plummeted to the bottom of the gorge and splashed into the river below.” A smile crept across his face as he pictured a large dragon splashing about in a narrow river like a robin in the bird bath in his backyard. He took a sip of the coffee, it was bitter, he had forgotten the sugar. He rose from his chair with a loud pop and the seat of the chair fell to the floor.

“Dag –nab it all!” The old wolf smiled and his tail drooped to the floor. He went to the kitchen and put sugar in his coffee. Then he took the screwdriver from the kitchen drawer and started to head back to fix his chair.

“Don’t forget to feed the chickens! I will be back in a couple of hours.” He knew that tone. It meant that his wife was going to go shopping in town. Setting the screwdriver on the table next to his computer he headed out to feed the chickens. This was not a choir he liked very much as the chickens were rather mean and tried to eat his tail every time he went into the chicken coup.

Gnarl was mumbling to himself as he gave the chickens a stare. He tried to growl at them to get them to back away but that just seemed to make them all gather around him like a mob. No sooner had he gotten through the gate when several of them were pecking at his boots.

“Hey now those are shoe laces, not worms!” This old wolf was a rather gentle soul and even if he tried to act angry at them the chickens could tell that he would not harm them.

“If it were not for the eggs, you guys would be stir-fry!” He tried to brush them away. Having finally made his way into the coup he reached for the bag of feed and one of the roosters jumped up and pecked his hand.

“Ouch!” He swatted at the dumb bird but it just looked at him as if he were taking too long. Gnarl barred his fangs at the rooster and started to growl. The rooster then leapt up and landed on his head. Gnarl tried to jump back but the dumb bird would not let go. He knew that that bird was up there for only one reason. PPPHHT. Yep, sure enough it had taken a dump on his hat. The rooster then jumped off and Gnarl shook his head as he grabbed the feed. At least it was easier to get out of the pen once they were fed. The chickens were all pecking at the feed now so he put the bag away and made a run for the gate.

Gnarl counted the chickens to make sure that they were all still there and then took off his poor hat. He whapped the hat against the fence post and headed back to the house. He went straight to the laundry room and washed his poor hat then hung it up to dry. When he at last reached the study and his computer he was greeted by the site of the chair still in pieces on the floor. He pulled open the second drawer on the table and took out yet another screw. He turned the chair over and set about repairing the darn thing. Once it was repaired he sat down and noted the stupid pop was still there.

He reached over for the coffee without thinking and took a swig of cold coffee, it nearly made him spit it out.

“Yuck!” Gnarl stared at the cup and was upset with himself. He should have known better. This time he rose and the chair at least stayed together. After getting a fresh cup of hot coffee he returned to the computer and looked at the screen to see where he had left off.

“Still holding the mighty sword in his hand, the great warrior climbed up on the rocks of the river bank and...” He felt a tugging at his pant leg. He looked down and saw the sad stare of the dog.

“What do you need boy?” He would have been very shocked if the dog ever answered him. POP. Gnarl rose from the seat and went to check on the food and water and see if the dog wanted to go out. Having taken care of that issue Gnarl poured himself another fresh cup of coffee and went back to the computer. He stared at the screen for a moment, it was dark. He put his finger on the mouse pad and nothing happened. Then he tried to hit the power button and nothing happened. He checked the cord and found that the computer had come unplugged and the battery must be dead.

“Someone does not want me to write this thing!” He plugged in the computer but knew that it would be at least half an hour before it would turn on again. So he decided to head out to the mail box and see if there was any regular post today. He had gotten almost half way to the mail box when he had to stop in

his tracks. There in his driveway was a pair of skunks, not the anthro kind mind you but a pair of the non-polite animal sort. Gnarl backed his way back to the front door and went in, giving up completely on the idea of getting the mail today. He returned to see if the computer would turn on. When he pressed the button the screen lit up and an error message appeared showing that the document he had been working on was deleted. Gnarl was good at saving these things, having had this happen more times than he cared to think about. He loaded from the last save point and realized that so far today he had only written two sentences.

“Not an issue! I will just type those back in and hit the save button, and....” The screen had gone black again. Gnarl sighed and leaned back in the chair. POP. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Suddenly there was a strange feeling of floating as if weightlessness had come upon him. He tried to open his eyes but was surrounded by bright white. He instantly thought of a sheet of paper with nothing on it. He struggled to try and get some form of bearing on his environment but there were no reference points, no nothing, just Gnarl in a forever white. Then he could hear in the distance strange sounds getting closer and closer. As suddenly as it had come the white was replaced by the vision of stars and space ships in a battle. He was seated in the cockpit of a space fighter and headed straight into the heart of the battle. His thumb was on the fire button for the forward lasers and the target was flashing in the view of his visor. He went with the flow not knowing what the heck he was doing. The laser cannon fired and the target was destroyed. He could hear the shouting and cheers in the speakers that were mounted in the helmet.

“You got him! You did it wolf! The emperor is dead!” he did not have a chance to reply and really wasn’t sure that the voice was talking to him anyway. He pulled back on the stick and the ship responded to his commands. He looked at the controls around him. Gnarl had no idea how to fly a space fighter but this looked like the controls of the video game he had watched his son play a thousand times. He tried to

remember the story from the game. He knew that there was a second game because the evil bad guy had actually escaped in a transport pod. He looked around and saw the transport pod from the end of the first game. He headed the ship straight for it and again fired. The target was destroyed.

“What are you shooting at?” The voice in his helmet sounded a bit confused.

“Space junk!” He replied. He looked around and saw several other fighters pull up alongside of his ship.

“Boys, I’m buying! Let’s get back.” The ship off to his left then peeled off and headed for a larger ship that seemed to just be floating in the distance. He held the stick and followed the other fighters. The green lights on his console went amber and started to flash. His ship was being controlled by the larger ship. The landing cycle completed and the deck crew came over and opened the cockpit.

“Awesome flying Commander Wolf, sir!” The crew were all patting him on the shoulders.

Gnarl was very confused and undid the chin strap for the helmet. He took off the helmet and tucked it under his arm. He looked around and saw where the other pilots were headed so he headed there also. He followed them into some sort of locker room. There he saw a locker that had the markings CMDR WOLF. Gnarl opened the locker and placed the helmet inside.

“There you are Wolf!” Gnarl turned to face the person who had spoken.

“I told them, having a Wolf in the squadron was the best thing to ever happen!” The large creature resembling a bear came over and patted Gnarl on the shoulder.

“The reports can wait! There are celebrations all over the ship. Hell, all over the Galaxy. The name Gnarl GreyWolf will be down in history as the person who ended the evil emperor once and for all!”

Gnarl was stunned, this officer had used his real name. What the heck was going on here? He just wanted to have his coffee and finish the story he was writing. Where the heck was he? The first real

thing to cross his mind was how upset his wife would be when she found out that he had gone out in space without telling her. Then he wondered who was going to feed those stupid chickens?

Gnarl unzipped the flight suit and found that he was wearing a uniform underneath. Was there something he was not remembering, could something have happened that affected his memory?

“Now as soon as you boys finish with the Doc, come on up to the bridge!” He patted Gnarl on the back again and laughed as he went out the door.

“Gnarl!” His eyes suddenly shot wide open. He knew that voice, it was Nurse, his loving wife of more than two decades. She was here also? He turned and looked at her. She was still the most beautiful she wolf in the galaxy. But there was something different, she was younger. There was no silver in her hair and when she strode up to him she did not have any trouble walking. Gnarl could not help himself, he threw his arms around her and picked her up. He smiled at the surprise on her face. Commander, what the heck are you doing? She patted him on the head then whispered to him.

“Not in public! What if someone sees us?” That was when he began to understand that not everything here was the same.

“Aren’t we married?” He had a confused look. The female gasped and looked at him.

“Are you asking me to marry you?” He could not tell if she was smiling or stunned.

“I am not married to someone else, am I?” He gave her a look.

“No silly! And Yes! I will marry you!” She pulled his head between her breasts and kissed the top of his head. Gnarl smiled to himself and though he could remember the last twenty years, it apparently never happened, at least, not here. Her tail was whipping so hard from side to side that it kept hitting him on the sides of his head. He put her down on her feet and then kissed her.

“Hey there, did the lump finally ask you to marry him?” Several of the other pilots had their heads poked in through the door. Gnarl had a funny feeling and reached into the locker. It was there in a pouch hanging on a hook on the side. He opened the case and looked at the ring then turned to face Nurse. She almost screamed when she saw the ring. It was the ring his Nurse had been wearing ever since they ran away and the justice of the peace said “I now pronounce you”. Gnarl did not care what reality he was in, nor what the circumstances of his life were, he would always take her as his wife. That was a choice he would never change. He learned that Nurse was actually the flight surgeon for this fighter group. It was at this point that he got a look at his own reflection in a mirror. Gnarl was amazed as he looked into the eyes of a much younger self. His mane and snout were black and sharp. He looked rather fierce and stood tall as any proud Wolf would. The celebrations did not last long and were interrupted by the attacks of an empire cruiser that had not yet heard of the Emperor’s death.

“Gnarl, that stupid cruiser is headed for the Alliance senate ship, Get your wing out there and stop them!” It was the same voice of the bear like creature.

“AYE” Gnarl heard the growl that seemed to come from his chest but as startled as he was, his feet had already started to run for the fighter deck. It seemed almost second nature to him as he ran straight for his ship and launched himself into the cockpit. One of the deck crew threw his helmet to him and he strapped it on as the cockpit closed and his ships launch cycle was already started. Before he could even get a good grip on the stick his ship was among the stars. He watched in horror as a small transport which had placed itself between the cruiser and the senate vessel was hit hard and began to break up.

“Bastards!” Gnarl knew, from watching the game, that if he took out the targeting turret on the conning tower the enemy ship would be firing blind. He had seen his son do it several times. He rushed in from behind the tower and spun his ship around destroying the turret with his cannons. Then he hit the thrusters and fired his missiles straight into the bridge of the cruiser. The explosions sent the large

ship spinning. The decompression of the hull was like maneuvering thrusters and caused the cruiser to warp in shape and start to break up.

“There he goes again! Hey, Commander, you could let us help a little! I mean cripes sir, we are your wing men!” Gnarl felt a bit embarrassed as he realized that he had taken out the target without his crew. The game was a one player game, so to Gnarl, this was a new development.

“Sorry guys! I just get a bit excited. Any way to save anyone from that brave little transport?” Gnarl looked over at the ship that had almost completely broken up.

“They abandoned the ship in the pods when they set the course to protect the senate ship. Not a soul on board when she went down. Pretty daring prank if you ask me!” The captain who was a larger Fox started to laugh. It reminded Gnarl of the sound a fox makes when it is playing with its pups.

Gnarl, suddenly felt tired as if he might pass out any second. He closed his eyes and that was when all the sounds around him suddenly went quiet. He tried to open his eyes but they just would not cooperate. Then he heard the sound of people screaming and the smell of smoke filled his nostrils. Gnarl was no longer in a fighter ship. He was standing with a great sword in his hand and could see the flaming breath of a Dragon swirling straight at him.

“Gnarl, look out!” He heard nurses voice as she screamed to him. He turned and saw her tied to a post as if she were a sacrifice to the Dragon. With a single swing of the great blade he cut the leather bonds that held her. She fell over his shoulder and he ran with her out of the way. The large beast seemed to not notice them as the rest of the village tried to defend their homes. Gnarl knew that there was only one safe place to set Nurse for the time being. He cut her bonds and then dropped her feet first into the village well. He cut the leather that held the bucket up and let the bucket and rope drop down to her so that she would not drown. Then he turned to face the great beast. The dumb thing had nearly completely turned its back to him. Gnarl was not thinking straight at this point he looked around

and saw the chains that were hanging from the blacksmiths stall. Grabbing the chains he ran straight at the beasts back and leapt with all his might. He swung the chain and it went around the creature's throat. Startled the beast jumped and started flapping its wings to take flight. Gnarl pulled for all he was worth on the chains and put his feet against the hollow at the base of the dragon's wings. He figured if he was going out he was going to do it with style. Ten, twenty and thirty yards into the sky they rose. The dragon's head was thrashing about but no matter how hard he tried he could not turn to face the space directly between his shoulder blades, the very spot where Gnarl now rode like a god. Gnarl felt a strange vibration on his back, it was the great sword. Wrapping the chains around his left hand he reached up and pulled out the now glowing sword. He knew that he did not have the strength to stab the beast and pierce its scales but he could shove the sword under the scales and pierce the soft hide underneath. It was not easy as the beast was still thrashing and trying to fly. Gnarl managed to pry up one of the scales and so, thrust as hard as he could. The sword sank deep into the beast and a great ball of flames burst uncontrollably from the creature's mouth. It still tried to fly but more flailed about as it fell back to the ground. Gnarl was thrown from the beasts back but the chains around his wrist kept him from going far. The Great sword still in his hand he could see that the beast's life was almost extinguished. The villagers slowly started to come out and see the hero who had defeated the dragon. Gnarl looked at all of their faces and then gasped. He let go the chains and ran for the well. As quickly as he could he pulled his love from the well.

"You did it again, didn't you! Defeated another Dragon and again I didn't get to see a darn thing. What was it this time, huh, sword in the nuts like last time or did you strangle it like the time before? No wait, don't tell me, you actually fought it this time?" She crossed her arms and realized that her white dress was almost completely see through from the water in the well. She grabbed one of the clothes that was left next to the well by the ladies doing their washing when the dragon arrived.

“Did you get an eye full? Cause you are not going to see anything more until I get to see you defeat the next one!” She huffed off and left Gnarl standing with his mouth open and tail drooping. Again Gnarl closed his eyes and felt the strange feeling of being pulled away. Surrounded by the silence he waited for whatever would come next. It was not a long wait before he was splashed in the face by the salty water of the sea. He held on tight as the bow of the ship dipped below the waves and rose again from the swell. He looked aft and could tell that this was a fine ship.

“Gnarl, look out, the line is free!” Gnarl turned and saw the rope heading straight for him. He reached out and grabbed the rope, losing his grip on the rigging. He clung to the rope tight as it swung him out over the sea and then back to the gunnels. His weight had tightened the furell on the sail and he secured the line at the mast head. It was again as if he knew what he was doing but Gnarl still had no idea.

“Fibber me jiggers, that be one way to do it!” The old salt laughed as he continued to tighten the lines.

“She’s gonna be a heck of a gail!” The second officer came over and put his hand on Gnarls shoulder.

“You alright sir?” He seemed worried.

“Yep, one heck of a ride!” Gnarl replied as he looked at the clouds on the horizon.

“Sir, you should go below, the crew can handle this!” Gnarl gave him a look.

“Am I not a part of the crew sir?” Gnarl gave him a stare.

“Aye, Cappin, that ya be!” The boatswain was a rather thin looking Otter with a scar on the side of his face. He gave a stare at the second officer.

“That is not what I meant sir, I only meant that you are the only one who knows these waters and we would be doomed if anything happened to you.” The second was a much younger officer. He would have been a dashing figure for a fox if it were not for the fact that he was drenched to his skin.

"You got it Boats?" Gnarl looked at the older Otter.

"Aye sir, we got her from here. She be ship shape and storm worthy." The Otter headed off to check the rest of the ropes. Gnarl had been on ships many times and it only took him a few seconds to get his sea legs and match the rhythm of the ships movements.

"Lead on then sir!" Gnarl pointed roughly at the aft cabin, and then followed the second officer into the captain's cabin. There were maps scattered about and two large sections held onto the large table by a pair of daggers. When Gnarl was young and in the Navy he had learned to read maps and knew how to plot a course. He looked at the maps and discovered that they were off the Cape of Good Hope. He also knew that these were the most dangerous waters on the planet for a sailing vessel.

"Keep her in sight of the shore, but watch for the reefs. Take our depth from midship only!"

The second nodded and headed back to the aftcastle where the helm was. Then he heard the sound of humming and a song that seemed to keep time with the ships swaying. The cook had learned long ago to keep the lid on the kettle with a dagger and only pour the mugs half full in foul seas.

"This swill aint much cappin, but it will keep the fire in yer belly and the light in yer eye!" He pulled up the lid and instead of using a ladel to dip out some of the food, he dipped the mug right into the kettle.

Then he wiped off the outside of the mug and handed it to Gnarl.

"Thanks! You're a good one as always!" Gnarl took a sip from the mug and found that it was wonderful chicken soup. He knew better than to put the mug down until it was empty. Gnarl studied the maps and checked the course. There were enough notes that he was able to guide the ship safely through the passage and into calmer waters. The island that was marked on the map took three days to find.

"So this spice we is loading cappin, it is gonna make us all rich, ya say!" Gnarl looked at the old sea dog and could almost hear the gears grinding.

"If we can make it back, and if we can find the right spice trader, and if you do your job." Gnarl gave him a look of distrust.

"It not be me ya be watching fur. I be loyal as the ship herself. That second of yurn though, he got the look about him. The look what says he wants more than a man's fair share!" Gnarl looked right into the old dog's eyes and could see the rough edges of age but he could also see truth and took note of his words.

"You worry not, I will make sure that the crew makes it home safe and that every man jack among you gets a true fair share!" Gnarl put his hand on the seadogs shoulder and gave him a shake.

"I be at your side, cappin!" The old dog nodded and headed back to the birthing compartment. The one thing that not many of the modern sailor were aware is that sound carries on a wooden ship. The Captains cabins were often built so that the voices from the officer's quarters and the crew quarters could be heard, depending on where you stood. Gnarl was walking about the cabin when he came across the sweet spot. He moved a panel on the wall and could hear what was being said in the cabin below. He tried to pick out the voices and knew then who the men were. He listened into the crew quarters and smiled at what he was hearing. Gnarl took the key for the weapons locker and went to find the old seadog. He had the old sailor listen with him as the three officers plotted to take the ship and get rid of any of the crew who would not serve them. The pair then gathered the loyal men and went to the weapons locker. He armed the men he trusted and then one by one took the traitors and chained them in the brig. Once the ship was secure the sailors came to him to turn in the weapons. Before he could tell them to hold on to them he felt that same strange pull and closed his eyes.

Gnarl was pulled towards a light but suddenly and violently was yanked in another direction.

He opened his eyes and could not make out his surroundings, everything was a blur as if someone was stirring the very colors of reality. It was all liquid, yet dry.

“You are not done yet! There are still things for you to experience before you can relay them correctly!”

Gnarl knew that voice well, it was his own but had not come from him.

He suddenly had a sense of falling followed by a splash into the river below. The water was cold and the current seemed to carry him some distance before he could get a hold on the rock. The great sword was still in his hand as he climbed up on the rocks and turned to see the large beast splashing around in a panic. It was not a dragon but it looked more like a Pterodactyl. Gnarl caught a glimpse of the look in the creature's eyes and it sank deep into his chest. No, not even a great warrior could allow a poor animal to die like this. He gazed around and seeing the low hanging vines that lined the sides of the gorge he took a deep breath and ran for nearest bunch. He noted that the loin cloth nearly fell off from being full of water. He cut and slashed at the vines and in a moment had enough to form a rope of sorts. The creature's feet could almost reach the bottom and so it had been trying to bounce to keep its head above water. Gnarl wedged the sword into the rocks and waited for the bird like thing to bob its way to him. He threw the line and on the third try got it around the creatures head. The current then combined with the drag of the line pushed the large animal to the river bank where it was able to climb out, then collapse from exhaustion. He watched and tried to retie the loin cloth. Gnarl went to the animal and looked at the wound on its wing. It was not a fatal wound and in time it would heal and be able to fly again. He tried to recall the story and could not remember why the warrior was after the dumb bird in the first place. He began to understand the ill-logic of many of the events in the stories he was writing.

Gnarl sat down next to the creature and put his paw on the animals head. He thought about the events of each story and started to see the holes in each of them. Little things like why would the emperor be caught in a transport when he had a flagship at his side? Or If Nurse wanted him to prove himself wasn't there a better way? What was the adventure in just locking up the bad guys before they had done anything? Gnarl began to understand that if he wanted to write these stories maybe they should make a

little more sense. Maybe he should tell the whole story and not just the exciting parts. He closed his eyes and hoped to be pulled back but nothing happened. Gnarl took a deep breath and patted the large creature on the top of the head to see if it was still alive. He had to use all of his real life skills that night to make a fishing line and catch enough fish not just for himself but for the beast as well. He did not want to get eaten in his sleep. He then bound the animals wound with mud and leaves from the vine plants. He tied the creature so that it could not reach him in the night while Gnarl slept.

He was able to make a shelter of sorts from the wood along the river bank but the night was still cold too someone in a loin cloth. As the sun started to illuminate the gorge Gnarl awoke and found the beast sitting like a chicken waiting for him to feed it. Catching the fish from the river was not that difficult and since the creature would eat them still flopping Gnarl had no trouble with this part. He tried to find some way to get out of the gorge but the rock walls were far too sheer and high for him to climb. Gnarl thought that if he could keep them both alive long enough the creature could fly them out, but that might take a long time and he had no idea how much time he had. He looked at himself and took stock of his resources.

"I swear to god, I will never write another story where the hero wears a loin cloth!" He shouted at the river. The bird started to squak at the river as well. Gnarl began to laugh at how much like a chicken this thing acted. The driftwood along the river bank was good for a fire, a bit hard to get started but once burning it kept Gnarl and the bird warm. Gnarl noted that on the rock face there seemed to be several different water lines and a couple of them looked rather recent. On the third day at the bottom of the gorge he could hear the rumbling of thunder from above and was worried that the gorge might just flash flood with the rain. He looked up at the rim and was now even more concerned as to how to get out.

"So there you are! Well I'll be. You actually did catch one alive!" Gnarl turned quickly at the sound of the voice. He had no idea who or what this person was.

“So jump on its back and let it climb out already!” The person waved at him. Gnarl looked at his chicken friend and picked up his sword. He cut a vine and made a makeshift sort of harness to hang on too.

Gnarl then took ahold of the rope around its neck and cut the vine that had held it down. The large bird then stood up and flapped its wings a couple of times then started to run and jump from rock to rock until it reached the top. It then sat down and Gnarl was determined to let the thing go. He cut the cord for the harness and started to walk away from the bird. It squaked loudly at him and then got up and started to follow him. Gnarl turned and waved his arms at it.

“Go on, your free, go home!” Again he turned away from it and started to walk. Again the bird followed him. The people that had been watching were amazed at the site.

“No one has ever caught a Herlong alive before. What are you going to do with it?” The Fox walked over to Gnarl and stood beside him looking at the bird.

“Herlong? Is that what those things are called?” Gnarl just stared at the bird. It just sat down and waited for him to move again. The fox turned from the bird to Gnarl and started to laugh.

“You look ridiculous in that loin cloth! Your cloths are in the wagon, so why don’t you get dressed?” The fox shook his head and started to walk back to the wagon. Gnarl followed him to the wagon and saw a pile of clothes he assumed to be his. He quickly got dressed and turned to see that the bird had followed him again. The bird was looking into the wagon to see if there was something to eat.

“You do realize, Gnarl, that we cannot take that thing with us?” The other fox who had stood on the far side of the wagon was keeping a distance from the large bird.

“I know, but I don’t think that the thing can fly just yet. I did a number on his wing.” Gnarl was feeling sorry for what he had done. He patted the bird on the side of its neck and it sat down. The rain started to come down and the three of them sat in the wagon with the tarp over the top.

"We only have about three days left until the transport comes to pick us up, Commander." Gnarls eyes opened wide. Could this be a part of the other story. He shook his head and was not believing that the two stories had merged.

Nurse is going to give you what for if you even think of bringing that thing back!" The foxes started to laugh. Gnarl thought for a moment and decided to make a statement that would only make sense if they were merged.

"Now Captain, I am sure you would like to fly one of these instead of a fighter." He waited to see what the response would be.

"Probably more maneuverable, but where would we put the missile launchers?" the three leaned out and looked at the dumb bird. It had put its head under its wing and appeared to have gone to sleep.

"Remind me now, why did we come here?" Gnarl looked at the fox on his left.

"It was supposed to be one last adventure before you and Nurse tie the knot!"

"I wonder what the locals would do with it?" The other fox was staring out at the sky.

"I think they eat them. Not sure of that, let me look." He pulled out a small pad and started typing on a heads up virtual display. It did not take long and he was chuckling.

"There is a reward for anyone who can catch one of them alive. It says that they want to start a breeding program." He stopped for a moment and then started comparing the image on the screen to the bird.

"I think you have a female here sir. She is worth nearly a million Darian credits!" They all started to nod.

"What is that in alliance currency?" Gnarl gave him a look. The fox hit the reset button and then typed in the information. He started to chuckle again.

"About 12 dollars sir!" They all started to laugh. Then they just sat and waited for the rain to stop.

“Can you contact them on that thing of yours? Tell them where we are and tell them to bring fish, she likes fish.” Gnarl stood up and stretched. The bird tilted its head and snapped at Gnarl's tail.

“Hey there, none of that now. I am rather fond of my tail.” He scolded the bird and it just stared at him.

Only two hours had passed before a large group of rather excited locals showed up with a large transport and several buckets of fish. Gnarl was able to coax the bird into the transport with the fish and the locals gave him a small chest filled with coins. Gnarl just smiled and waved at the bird that seemed to not be paying any attention to anything but the fish. Just before the transport took off with the bird a small group of local females showed up on Sorhe back and nearly begged Gnarl to tell them the story of how he had captured the beast. Gnarl tried to make it sound as adventurous as possible but still felt bad for having harmed it.

“So wait, you jumped off a cliff and landed on it? What if you had missed?” One of the females gave him the look of horror. The others stood next to her with eyes wide.

“Then I would have gotten wet when I hit the river below.” Gnarl smiled.

“But that gorge does not normally have water in it! It only does now because it is the rainy season.”

The girls all looked at each other and then seemed to notice the two foxes standing there listening to the story. They started to whisper among themselves. The small group set up camp for the night and the females joined the foxes in their tents while Gnarl made dinner. The next morning when Gnarl arose the females had already left and his two comrades were all smiles.

“This is so much better than that hallo program for the 18th century spice ships, don't you think sir?”

Gnarl was beginning to understand how all this was starting to fit together. He still had no idea how he would get back to his own reality. Several weeks had passed and even with all his research he was no closer to the answer. The day for the wedding was getting closer and Gnarl found himself actually

looking forward to starting all over with his one true love. He was not having any luck with the dumb computer console in his quarters so he closed his eyes and leaned back. The sudden sense of being weightless came to him and had the feeling of falling back. Suddenly there was a great pain in the back of his head, a sharp light and things seemed to fade in and out of existence. He thought that he heard the sound of Nurse crying and lots of other voices shouting in urgent tones. There was sharp prick in his left arm and for a moment he opened his eyes and saw the broken remains of his chair on the floor beside a puddle of blood. He struggled to turn his head and heard Nurse tell him to lie still.

"I fed the chickens." Then Gnarl fell fast asleep only to have even stranger dreams.

Having faded in and out for a couple of days, Gnarl finally came awake to the awful smell of Hospital.

"Where the heck am I now?" He looked around but there was no one in the room.

"Great I battle Dragons, defeat emperors, sail the seven seas and capture a dumb bird then end up here." He sighed and tried to move his arm to reach for the button but his arm did not move.

Without thinking he reached up with his other hand and scratched his nose. Then he looked at his hand.

Gnarl looked down at the arm that would not move and saw that it was strapped down so that he would not pull the IV from his vein. He started to chuckle. The door to his room opened and Nurse stepped in with her arms crossed.

"If you didn't want to feed the chickens you could have just said so!" She walked over to the side of his bed. Gnarl looked up into her wonderful grey and green eyes and smiled. He could see the streaks of silver in her hair and had seen the slight limp from her bad knee. He sighed and took hold of her hand. Nurse did not smile. She squinted her eyes at him.

"I told you a hundred times to get rid of that damn chair!" She almost started to cry.

“But I fixed it!” Gnarl looked at her with his eyebrows up.

“Adding more screws” She patted him on the head.

“I fear dear, that you have few screws lose!”

Gnarl part 2

Gnarl now sat at his computer in the brand new office chair with the arms on it and made sure that no one was looking. He checked the hall way and peered into the kitchen. He pushed the chair back from the desk and then pushed with his left foot, he held on to the arms as the chair spun around and around making him dizzy. He liked how this new chair would swivel from side to side as he concentrated on the story. It even had a lever on the side that made it go up and down. The chair was great fun to the old wolf. He sighed and knew that it was time to get back to the story. He started by deleting the last few lines. He looked at the dog who seemed to think that he was nuts.

“We know what to do, don’t we?” Gnarl nodded and the dog just laid down and put his muzzle on his paws.

“The great warrior dressed in his leather boots, britches and a fluffy shirt stood on the edge of the cliff and waited for the creature to fly closer. When the creature approached he reached down and grabbed the large fish at his feet and started to wave it as if it were a flag.” He chuckled to himself.

“No more loin cloth for you, my friend!” Gnarl stopped typing and reached over to unplug the phone.

“Not today Judy!” Instead of the phone he plugged in the new single cup coffee pot and placed his cup on the warming pad. He then tore open a small bag of sugar and placed it beside the new coffee pot.

“Who says you can’t teach an old wolf new tricks?” He shook his finger at the dog.

“Talking to the dog again Dad?” Gnarl’s son had walked into the room.

“Yep, sure am. Say, did you ever win the second game of the star fighter thingy?”

His son gave him a serious stare.

“There is no second game, they defeated the emperor in the first one. I would not mind if there was a second one but as yet there isn’t.” The young male shrugged his shoulders and walked out.

Gnarl had no idea what to make of this. He turned back to his computer and called up the old files for several stories he had never finished. There was one about a 17th century sailing ship during the age of the spice traders and one about a space rebellion. He started to read the stories. Something was different now. It was like putting a jigsaw puzzle with a few missing peices together. He did his best to weave the stories into one. Gnarl was not sure how to make the character of the Commander get from one story to another in a manner that would make sense. BEEP. The little green light on the small coffee pot came on to tell him that it was done brewing. He took the spoon and added the sugar to his coffee and then sipped the hot coffee and closed his eyes. That was one good cup of coffee. He waited to see if anything would happen but nothing did. He opened one eye and looked around, nope he was still sitting at the computer. Gnarl began to type furiously on the keyboard and nearly knocked the space bar off of the old unit. He looked at the technology in front of him and tried to imagine what a hundred generations from now what this stuff would look like.

“Deep space travel would be very boring, so maybe a virtual chamber.” He looked at the dog and it picked up its head and returned the stare.

“That might make sense, a flaw in the chamber so that they don’t remember which reality is the real one.” Gnarl knew that it had probably been done before but hey, what the heck, it fit the story.

“The commander was vaguely aware that something was wrong. His confusion about one minute being on a sailing ship and the next on a pleasure planet told him that he was not in the real world. He tried to

find the control that would shut down the virtual chamber but the chamber had control of his body functions. The failsafe was not working. He knew that at this point he and half of his crew were at the mercy of the computer, a computer that was now failing.” Gnarl smiled and continued to type far into the night. By early the next morning he had managed to tie three old stories to the one he had been working on. The dog had long since gone to the bedroom and was fast asleep in his bed. The sun was now showing in the sky. Gnarl now had a plan on how to feed those dumb chickens without getting attacked. He went to the reffridgerator and took out a cucumber. He cut it in half and then the slit it in half again. He walked out to the coup and the chickens ran to greet him at the gate. He then showed them one of the pieces and when they had all seen it he threw it into the enclosure. They all ran and were fighting over it while Gnarl walked calmly to the feed bag, opened it and filled the scoop.

He stepped out the door of the coup and then spread the feed out on the ground for them. The chickens did not even notice him until he was already out the gate and on his way back to the house with his tail intact.

“Now Commander Wolf, you will save the crew, rescue and marry the girl and then go on to other adventures.” Gnarl leaned back in his new chair. He closed his eyes and then felt the gentle hands of his mate as she started to rub his shoulders.

“That’s no ending. How does he rescue the crew and what if the girl does not want to marry him?”

Nurse had been reading over his shoulder. Gnarl’s eyes popped open and he looked up into her eyes.

“So how would you do it?” He knew that she was just giving him a hard time for being predictable.

“Why can’t the girl save them and be the Hero?” He looked at her and his eyebrows furrowed.

“Well why stop there, maybe the darn chicken should be the hero?” Gnarl was being sarcastic because she had no idea how much re-writing that would take.

“That could be interesting! At least it would not be the old cliché of the hero saves the day and gets the girl.” Gnarl looked down at the computer screen. He stared for almost an hour and then went back to the beginning of the story. He followed the story along and then started to add little things.

“The bird loved most of all the red and green fish. The crew had to keep it locked in its pen or it would go after the lights on the console.” Then when he got the point of the computer failing it auto-unlocked the chicken’s pen. He smiled and knew that this just might work. Gnarl started to laugh.

“The pen door opened as the computer failed. Having been cramped in that cage for so long the large chicken began to roam the passageways looking for the fish that it should have been fed. It finally came to the chamber where the virtual tubes were and seeing all the red and green lights began to peck at them as if they were food.” He read the next few pages.

“Darn that works perfectly!” Gnarl smiled and his hands were a blur over the keys.

Once that part was changed he thought about the girl and the Commander again.

“Fine, then she does the getting!” He searched the whole thing and made several changes.

In the end it was the girl who gets the Commander. Gnarl sat back in his chair and was startled that it did not pop. He sighed and spun the seat around. Nurse was standing in the door way with her arms crossed again.

“You did not just do that” She scolded him.

“UH, the chicken saves the universe!” He turned back to the computer and cringed, with his shoulders up. Nurse came over and looked at the last few lines of the story.

“I want to read this one!” Gnarl almost fainted. 23 years and 11 novels and 12 novellas and she had never before asked to read anything he had ever written. Once he was past the shock of her asking, he

hit the print button. Of course the printer was out of paper and since he was writing e-books the ink had dried up. So Gnarl opened the bottom cabinet and dug around until he found the paper and the new cartridges. He got the printer working again and listened as the story printed, the first hard copy he had made of anything in a very long time. Once it was done he picked it up and took it in to her.

Nurse was asleep in her chair as often happened when she got home from work. Gnarl quietly placed it on the table next to her and pulled the blanket over her. He took the coffee cup from her hand and placed it on the table as well. Then he quietly went back to the computer.

“Now it is time to spell check and do the edit part.” Of course he was only kidding himself, he had no idea how to edit one of his own stories. He usually just went outside and sat on the porch and read it aloud to himself. He had no idea that Nurse had sat inside on the couch and listened. He checked the status of his battery and then made a run to the restroom. When he returned to his computer he could hear Nurse laughing. He carefully looked around the corner and saw her sitting there with the story on her lap. Gnarl smiled and almost started to cry at the sight. Gnarl sat in his chair and listened as Nurse went through page after page. She got up several times for Coffee and to go to restroom but each time she came back and started to read again. In all the years they had been together this was the first time he had ever seen this. His heart was happy and he could not concentrate on anything. When at last she turned the last page she was laughing and knew that he had changed the story just for her.

She walked into the study area and put the story down on the desk. Then turned to go. She knew that Gnarl wanted her to say something, anything, about the story. Was it good, was it bad, what did she think? He was waiting for a comment with baited breath and his hands white knuckled on the arms of his new chair. She looked back at him and then came over to him. She leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

"It is pretty good, but come on, a chicken saving the universe!" She laughed and headed for the bedroom. Gnarl hit the save button and waited for the computer to finish. He pulled the flash drive from the side of the computer and placed it in the little pouch in the drawer.

"This one is for you my dear, loving wife!" He vowed never to publish the thing and would look at it everyday. He then placed a blank flash drive into the slot and sighed as he looked at the blank screen.

"So what new adventure shall we have Commander?" He once again started to type but this time it seemed as if it did not really matter. It was almost as if his grand quest to write a story for Nurse had ended and maybe it was time to rest. Gnarl then shut down the program and turned off the computer. He took his coffee cup to the kitchen and then went back to the bedroom. He brushed his teeth and got into his PJ's. Gnarl turned off the light and walked towards the bed. He suddenly found himself falling forward, forward into a large white nothing. When he opened his eyes he was standing beside Nurse at the alter, on the bridge of the large ship, in space. He gazed at her and didn't care why or what had happened this time, he just gazed into her eyes. Gnarl felt a soft poke in his ribs.

"The ring, give her the ring!" The captain was his best man and knew that the Commander had lost what he was doing. Nurse was the most beautiful bride Gnarl had ever seen. He swore that when he got back to the other reality he should ask her to marry him all over again, but this time in a wedding dress and with lots of guests. Commander Gnarl put the ring on Nurse's finger and then kissed her. The Admiral himself, a large bear like creature had performed the ceremony.

"I now pronounce you both Mr and Mrs GrayWolf." The crowd gathered behind them started to cheer. The celebrations were no small event. This time there were no cruisers to interrupt, no strange sense of being pulled away or falling into another reality, just Gnarl and Nurse. The pair were escorted to a rather plush shuttle, which had been provided by the alliance senate. The shuttle took them to a planet where they spent their first night together in a private villa on the side of a mountain overlooking the most

spectacular set of waterfalls they had ever seen. The twin suns were setting and the planets moon was starting to climb into the sky. The setting could not have been more perfect. He held her in his arms and gave a big sigh. She then turned to him and with both hands grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him into the bedroom. She nearly tore the cloths off of him and pushed him onto the bed.

“Your mine now, Commander!” Gnarl had an almost shocked look. Nurse was after all a she wolf and it was time for her to claim her territory. Neither of them got any sleep that night. Nurse was all smiles the next day and as giddy as a school girl. He knew that she would stay like that for many years to come.

End