

Report from Colonized Planet Delta Four, Part 1:

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Journal Entry of Sydney Fox, Post-Grieving-Time 209

by [Robert Gear](#) (February 2021)



Starry Sky, Attempt, Wenzel Hablik, 1909

Day 7, Month of Ghazali

Jung Chou, my chaperone, said, "You are probably wondering about the use of head protection for these guardians. Please observe."

My attention was drawn to the desktops in front of the screens. In unison, fems and near-fems bowed low and drummed their heads at first gently and then with increased ferocity against the plasticated surfaces. They appeared to be intoning some of *The Ten Musts*, although the sound was garbled and unclear to me by virtue of the randomized order in which the words were enunciated. The effect was of a low-pitched cacophonous murmur. I did catch "*Remember Gloria*," and perhaps an extract from the *First Must*, which as you know, compels humals to believe in "*The Way Forward*." I also caught a slogan, possibly of their own contriving, since I did not recognize it from the ancient litany of K B Harris, "*Do unto mals what they don't dare do to you*." At least, it sounded like that.

The headpieces wobbled slightly, but nevertheless maintained an upright stiffness, even in the rhythmic forward and backward movements. The thick bands at the base gave some protection to the foreheads which continued to thump and tap.

"How are these headpieces kept upright?" I questioned.

"Well, you are observant." Jung Chou hesitated. I imagined zhe held back a faint smile.

Zhe went on, "They are filled with straw; straw from the stables, collected nuweekly, by a serving class of unskilled low-level mals."

"That is useful information. Now, I would like to question some of your resident fems as part of the review process. May I?"

Jung nodded and brought on to zer features an

inscrutable look, which I took to be a form of reluctant consent.

I stepped forward and waited until the murmuring had ceased.

I showed my Beijing Wallet. The nearest fem, the one I judged to have the most wondrously embroidered headgear, and therefore perhaps of senior guardian grade, curved slightly forward and produced an eyephone document from the gaping sleeve of her tunic. A tag on zer collar showed that zhe went under the name of Polly Femus. Zhe motioned me to read the screen on the eyephone.

I read the following passage titled "Dealing with Unruly Mals" by Julia Orwell.

Here is the segment:

The mal was chinless. The large puffy cheeks trembled without control. The shoji door slid open. A young gender-neutral officer entered and stepped to one side. There emerged from behind zer into the hexacell a heavily muscled transfem with enormous arms and shoulders. Zie stood in front of the trembling chinless mal. The officer signaled, and the huge transfem let fly a blow, with the full weight of zer body behind it, right into the prisoner's mouth. The body was flung across the hexacell and landed against the plasticated lavatory seat. Dark blood bathed the lower portion of the mangled face. A noise like that of a frightened rabbit came from somewhere within the bloody mouth. Zie raised himself slowly onto hands and knees and a dental prosthesis dropped to the floor amid a pinkish mixture of blood and saliva.

I was familiar with this passage. It came from a Pre-Grieving time literary work which had once been recommended reading for the most ardent promulgators of The Great Riddance. The words had been changed to be sure, but that was

in line with item seven of *The Ten Musts: Change Whatever Zie Think Necessary*.

This leading fem tried to read my thoughts. Zer eyes were filled with aversion. They tried to penetrate mine, but received back only my unadorned stare. I had the impression that zer eyesight was weak, since zhe approached my face much closer than was usually permitted by a decree issued in Post-Grieving Time 57. This closeness was, after all, an attempt to get a clear image of my features. To the side, Jung also searched my face for signs of awareness.

“This is what wezie do, this is ourzie purpose,” said this fem with the beautifully embroidered headgear. Again, I noticed a facial expression, not admitted by the etiquette norms of *The Way Forward*. The eyes were greyish brown and watchful. Was zhe trying to tell me something? Or more likely, I thought, trying to suppress rather unsuccessfully some inner compulsion. “Do you wish to see more?”

I nodded.

Zhe escorted me over to a screen, zer headpiece bobbing slightly. “Read this!” zhe announced, with what I detected was a trace of pride added to habitual coldness. Clearly, The Department of Gendering Studies did not insist on expressive concealment. Perhaps isolation in this desert region had allowed these fems to revert to earlier notions of comportment. The dress forms too indicated a lack of conformity in this regard.

On the screen I read:

The fem is born free and everywhere zhe is tied up. Many genders believe themselves to be supervisors of all mals, but in fact they are slaves to mals. How has this thing come about? I do not know. There is no justification for depriving fems of their freedom.

This also was from a Pre-Grieving time tract of some sort. I swallowed carefully, hiding my growing impatience with this strange brew of muddle.

“Do you believe this?” I challenged Polly Femus in as neutral voice as I could muster. Zhe leaned in towards me slightly, this time coming closer to my face than was allowed by protocol anywhere in The United Conglomerates. I felt the eyes burrowing into mine.

For answer zhe clicked the screen again. Another passage appeared. This one I recognized. It was from Younis Swift’s widely read *Tales of the Barrel*.

Last week I saw a mal terminated, and you will hardly imagine how it altered its person for the worse. Then I saw the carcass of a mal stripped in the presence of Guardian Ephorettes, and we rejoiced at finding such a faulty person. The brain, heart and spleen were also very faulty.

Polly Femus looked pridefully at me, as though responsible for this piece of writing. The segment of prose had been altered, I knew. I don’t think it did justice to the original of Younis Swift. I suspected that the stated function of the department had become diverted, or even corrupted. How were these nuwritings related to gendering-proliferation studies? They seemed more concerned with reworking classic Pre-Grieving-Time texts to suit their own visions. How could this text connect with *The Way Forward*?

As though sensing my deliberations, Polly Femus said, “We are still working on perfecting this passage. Our deep and lengthy studies of pronoun usage have resulted in a confusing medley of references.”

I stared intently and suppressed my bewilderment, giving nothing away.

“Now please follow me,” zhe announced sternly.

Practical training had taught me not to refuse orders from guardian-level fems, unless my life depended on it. My sole duty at this time was to uncover and report back to my Securitate contacts, Lemon or Whiskey.

I was ushered through several automatic shoji doors and found myself in a large dark hexagon. An iron grate closed with a clang behind me. I became aware that Jung Chou and Polly Femus were no longer beside me.

Why was that? Was this some kind of prison? My eyes slowly accustomed themselves to the space. A shaft of light from above was all that challenged the dark. I heard noises and then gradually became aware that I was not alone. I perceived several others sitting in the gloom. All appeared to be mals, and the noise I heard was a kind of mumbling sound. Rather like a subdued farmyard sound that I knew existed in The Pre-Grieving Time collective agricultural concerns. My eyes gradually accustomed themselves to the gloom.

End of Extract from Sydney Fox's Report from Colonized Planet Delta Four.

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