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*~R. Kane*

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***By***

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the  
PEACEKEEPER  
CORPS



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**The Peacekeeper Corps**

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the  
PEACEKEEPER  
CORPS

## Table of Contents

PART ONE.....	7
Prologue .....	9
Chapter 1- Awakening .....	11
Chapter 2- Dreaming.....	23
Chapter 3 - First Visitor .....	29
Chapter 4 - New Orders .....	47
Chapter 5 - What Went Wrong.....	67
Chapter 6 - Ambushed .....	81
Chapter 7 - Now What? .....	89
Chapter 8 - Connecting the Dots.....	101
Chapter 9 - What Makes a Silistel Corpus .....	109
Chapter 10 - InnerSpace.....	121
Chapter 11 - I Am Not Mac.....	135
Chapter 12 - Gathering Clouds.....	145
Chapter 13 - Some Speculation.....	153
Chapter 14 - Formulating a Plan .....	159
Chapter 15 - The Silistel Corpus Project.....	175
Chapter 16 - The League of Five .....	185
Chapter 17 - Coming to Terms .....	209
Chapter 18 - Action .....	223
Chapter 19 - And Reaction .....	233
PART TWO .....	247
Chapter 20 - A New Way.....	249
Chapter 21- Meeting the League of Five .....	273
Chapter 22 - The Cabin .....	311
Chapter 23 - Show Me What You've Got or Anything You Can Do... ..	315
Chapter 24 - A Different Kind of Peace .....	327
Chapter 25 - The League is Dead.....	337
Chapter 26 - Long Live the League .....	341
Chapter 27 - Earthward Ho!.....	347
Chapter 28 - Planet-Striders.....	353
Chapter 29 - Mac Buys the Farm, Again .....	363
Chapter 30 - What about Linda?.....	369
Chapter 31 - At the Waldorf.....	375
Chapter 32 - Regrouping.....	383

**Chapter 33 - Relationships are a Bitch ..... 391**  
**Chapter 34 - Encrypted Messages ..... 397**  
**Chapter 35 - We Are At War Here, People ..... 405**  
**Chapter 36 - Help ..... 413**  
**Chapter 37 - Earth's Ambassador..... 419**  
**Chapter 38 - The New League of Five ..... 425**  
**Chapter 39 - The Peace Makers..... 431**  
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR..... 443**

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## PART ONE

BREN





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## Prologue

*“Captain Faulkner,” the pilot blurted. His eyes remained fixed on his instrument panel while the ship shuddered and jerked. “She’s not responding.”*

*“Not responding at all?” Captain Brennar Faulkner leaned over his pilot’s shoulder, dark blue eyes scanning the same panel. He braced himself as the ship bucked, veered sharply, and then continued to shudder as the pilot struggled to maintain their course.*

*“No, sir. She’s being pulled back into the atmosphere,” the pilot replied calmly, though his fingers trembled as they moved expertly over the panel.*

*“Have you tried auxiliary drives?”*

*“Affirmative, sir.”*

*“And?”*

*“Nothing. It’s as if something is draining our energy reserves, sir.” The pilot glanced up as he spoke, his eyes troubled. “I’ve never experienced anything like it, sir.”*

*Faulkner glanced over at his second in command, First Sergeant. Seth MacDougall.*

*Their gazes locked.*

*“Put all you can into the bridge shield!” Brennar commanded the pilot. “Mac, tell the crew to report to the bridge, on the double,” he told his second.*

*“Bren—” Mac stepped toward him.*

*“Just do it.”*

*With a nod, Mac did as he was told, even though they both knew it would be useless.*

*“Bridge shield up, sir,” the pilot reported.*

*“Send out the distress signal.”*

*“Done.”*

*Brennar held his breath, hoping others would make it to the only semi-secure area on their small shuttle. Too few, he thought as his gaze flickered over the pilot, co-pilot, communications officer, and Mac.*

*“Captain!” the pilot shouted, “a surge in the auxiliaries!”*

*There was a pause—like a large inhalation—and then a retina-searing flash followed by crushing pressure roared through the ship.*

*Metal groaned in protest as the hull burst into shards like glass.*

*Inside, the explosion shattered bones and bulkhead with the same intensity.*

*Outside, it looked like a bright flare was abruptly extinguished, its shock waves gently rocking the ARK shuttles, which had already launched in response to the distress signal.*

---

## Chapter 1- Awakening

I slowly realized I was hearing several voices, but only one was familiar. And then there was a blinding light.

Explosion?

*Where was I?*

I tried to move my head away from the glare, but there was no relief.

"I believe he's back with us," said a voice.

"Captain, are you in there?" inquired the familiar voice, quietly commanding but with just the hint of amusement.

I tried to open my eyes, but the light! *Too much!* I tried to tell them, but couldn't speak past my dry throat.

"Cut the lights by fifty percent!" someone barked.

"Okay, sir," said the familiar voice, softly. "Try again."

I felt my eyes fluttering open and focused on the source of the familiar voice. The broad features leaning over me seemed as familiar as the voice, but I could not recall his name. His skin was dark, his kinky salt-and-pepper hair cropped short. He had an eager expression, as if everything he

saw was a puzzle, and he exuded a confidence making others believe he could, indeed, solve those puzzles.

“You are in restraints, Captain, for your safety.” He watched to make sure I understood and then continued, soothingly. “Do you know who you are? Don’t try to speak. Just nod if you know.”

I nodded as much as the restraints allowed.

“Good, very good. Now, do you know who I am?” he asked conversationally.

I frowned.

“But am I familiar to you?”

Again, I nodded.

“Good! This is very good, indeed, Captain.” He lifted and cradled my left hand. “Now, can you move your index finger for me?”

I concentrated and found I could.

The man beamed at me, making me feel oddly victorious. “All right,” he said in his calm voice, “I will quickly try to get you up to speed, sir, while your corpus comes back online. Don’t try to move anything but your index finger. If you wish me to slow down or repeat myself, simply lift the finger. If you have questions, sadly, those will have to wait until you can speak. But I know you fairly well, and I believe I can anticipate your questions.” The man smiled again. “This is not the first time you’ve found yourself in this situation, so understanding should return relatively quickly. Are you ready?”

I lifted my finger, curious.

“Good. You are Captain Brennar Faulkner of the

PeaceKeeper Corps, Division A. On your last mission, while you were off-planet, your ship was shot down. You and your crew were blown to bits.”

I had a brief memory of a sudden explosion, cries of agony and surprise, blinding color, sorrow I could not save more, and then nothing.

The man continued. “Fortunately, we were able to Resuscitate some of them. I am your primary physician, Micca Gauge. I have been your primary doctor for more than forty years now. You call me Doc.” He paused his eyes crinkling at the corners. “Do you remember me now?”

Yes! I raised his finger. I tried to smile. Doc! How many times have I seen that same slow smile upon awakening from a Resus? How many times have I heard “Welcome back, Captain” in his rich, sonorous voice? Once I recognized Doc, I knew I was safe, no matter how many monitors and scanners were attached to me.

“Good, and do you remember the ambush?” Not really. I wiggled my finger from side to side.

Doc snorted. “And is that because you remember some and not all of the ambush?”

I raised my finger. Smart guy, Doc.

“Understandable. This is all exceptionally good news, Captain. Now, please listen carefully to what I am about to say, because it may create some confusion until you are totally back and aligned with your corpus.

“Your ship was shot down fifteen years ago. (*Fifteen years!?*) You have not been Resuscitated the normal way. Instead, we have replicated your corpus in a body made of a newly developed, ultra-secret, silicon-based substance called

Silistel. It was a gamble, and it took us fifteen years, but we have obviously succeeded or I would not be having this conversation with you. Do you understand this?"

I raised my finger, my thoughts darting around chaotically. *So many questions.*

"Good, good. You may not like this next bit of information, Captain. "

I honed in on his expression.

"We need to send you back into your seed atoms, sir. Your corpus is still too unstable. You are our first Silistel Resus, and we want to be one hundred percent sure it will be fully functional before we turn you loose."

"Where?" I asked, barely managing a faint croak. *Still so many questions.*

Dr. Gauge squeezed my hand. "You are not to worry. You are very safe. You are too important for us to take any chances. If we are unsuccessful, we have a carbon corpus at the ready. "

I frowned.

"Where?" I croaked again.

"Your seed atoms?"

I lifted my finger.

"Safe, very safe, indeed. We will tuck them away again while we work, wrapped quite cozily around the central column of a 3rd, an Unawakened One. Untraceable."

*No! No!! I had to speak. They didn't know...what? The explosion!* It was on the edge of my consciousness, I was about to send an urgent message to headquarters... ..get my seed

atoms out!... *must warn them.*

“Not to worry, sir. Your host is a 3rd on an Unawakened planet. There is absolutely no chance of any bleed-through or discovery.”

I tried again to speak, to make them understand.

Dr. Gauge nodded to someone next to him. “We are sending you back, now, Captain. Just a few more adjustments.”

*No! Wait!* I moved my finger frantically.

Everything went limp.

I dreamed.

Images and scenes flickered constantly behind my eyes, most of them involving a pretty girl with fluffy blonde hair and large, round, deep blue eyes. I dreamed her at various ages, and in diverse places...the beach, an office, in school, in odd gatherings, camping with her father.

I learned her name was Rosie, and she dreamed of spaceships and far horizons. And boys, of course. Oddly, as I watched her grow and develop, I felt proud of her, as though...not like she was my child, exactly...but rather she was part of me somehow.

I'd learned as a child my dream world could be not only fascinating, but also useful for solving problems in the waking world, and had trained myself to remember them when I chose. One dream in particular I instructed my dreaming mind to recall when I awoke.

*The late afternoon sun slanted through the dojo windows, striping the green matting. Rose knotted the brown belt securely about her GI and took several deep, calming breaths as she waited for*

*her private session with the Sensei.*

*She had asked for the session because she felt it was time to face her fear. To reach the next level of advancement and gain her black belt, she had just one more technique to master. It was the last one because it had terrified her, and whenever she tried to practice it during class, she froze. She was afraid because if it was done incorrectly, someone ended up with a broken neck.*

*Her dojo specialized in control. It did not matter how slowly or quickly a technique was executed, it first and foremost had to be executed with the utmost control and perfection. The rules had been drummed into her since she began her martial arts training as a four-year-old were: form, control, speed, power. First was form. With perfect form came control. When control was perfected, then speed. And only then was power added.*

*Now, at eighteen, she had a problem.*

*The problem with this particular technique was, in order to make the form perfect, it had to be executed with speed and power. Over and over, she had practiced the technique in her mind. Again and again, she had practiced the moves in front of a mirror. And today was her day to do it with a partner.*

*Waiting for her Sensei to finish with the student ahead of her, she took a deep and steadying breath, trying not to let her fears dominate her.*

*She flashed back on the walk with her puppy earlier in the day. Her puppy always made her smile, with his clumsy gait, and the way he would just gallop back and forth from exuberance. What had struck her was, for all of his clumsiness, the puppy's coordination was flawless when he was running. She grinned at the memory.*

*And then it was her turn.*



*When she bowed onto the mat, she was calm and relaxed. Together, she and her Sensei went over the components of the technique. Then she performed it.*

*Flawlessly.*

*"We will stop here," Rose's Sensei told her, "Let your body settle into the perfection. Today, you have achieved Shinbu."*

*"When all the principles of martial arts are applied at the same time and perfectly balanced," Rose replied, quoting from her notes.*

*"Can you tell me the pathway you took?" he asked. "If you can explain it to me, you will find it more easily the next time."*

*Rose thought about it and the image of her puppy came to mind. She explained to her Sensei how perfectly coordinated the puppy was when running and how it made her happy to remember it.*

*After a moment, her Sensei commented. "I believe it is more than that, Rose. I believe you saw what joy did for your puppy. His joy brought him into Shinbu. As yours brought you."*

*\* \* \**

*A hand on my shoulder shook me gently. "Captain?"*

*The explosion! Something urgent was on the edge of my consciousness. I had been about to send an urgent message to headquarters...my seed atoms!*

*Rigid with effort, I tried to speak, but only managed to croak, "get them out! We found..."*

*"You can relax, Captain, everything's fine. And welcome back. We have already dimmed the lights, if that's what you were trying to say. You may open your eyes."*

This time, I immediately recognized the voice, and knew whom it belonged to.

But...what had I been trying to remember? Squeezing my eyes tighter, I struggled to catch the panic that woke with me, but it evaporated. I *knew* it had been vital, but...nothing.

I sighed and did as the voice suggested. My eyes adjusted easily, and I glanced at the faces hovering above me, resting upon the one face I knew, although I recognized a couple of others from before.

I tried speaking. "Doc?" My voice felt unused, rough. New. Yet it sounded familiar, it sounded like me.

"Ah! You recognized me right away this time. Splendid." At Doc's nod, others began to scan me, reporting and charting the readings. "Welcome to your new corpus! How does it feel?"

I turned my attention to my corpus, wiggling toes and fingers. "Like it...fits." I told him. I started to rise but Dr. Gauge stopped me with a hand on my shoulder.

"Not so fast, cowboy. We've still got some final testing to do. It's been five plus years since we last brought you online."

*Another five years?* There was that urgency on the edge of my consciousness again, still just out of reach, evaporating fast.

The Doc paused as he looked at my readouts, "But I've got to say you are much more coherent than before. I'm very encouraged. Let's sit you up."

I grinned as Doc adjusted the bed. I could see a familiar skyline out the window of Montorea, home of the Federation's Galactic Headquarters and the seat of government. And

somewhere up above I knew Salinio 5, the enormous space station serving as PeaceKeeper Corps headquarters, orbited the planet.

Based on the shadows, I guessed it was late afternoon. “How long did you say I’ve been gone...total?”

“About twenty years, give or take.”

“You don’t say?” I tried to sound calm, but I had never heard of anyone being out-of-corpus for that length of time. And a body fabricated of some new substance? That was momentous.

Realizing I could not absorb this important new information when I was also trying to remember that warning, I forced myself to focus on the present for now, studying my hands and flexing my fingers. “And do I remember correctly? This body is one hundred percent silicon-based? What did you call it? Silistel?”

Gauge nodded and grinned. “I’m amazed you remember. It is a one-of-a-kind, ultra-secret prototype,” he said with pride. “Since the technology is still very new, expect to be brought in and tweaked from time to time.”

I nodded. Then tried for my own smile. “Then how about giving me some basic operator instructions, since there’s apparently no owner’s vid. What do I need to know about it?”

I brought my hand to my face and sniffed it, startled to discover I smelled like myself. I thought I’d smell different.

“Maintenance first,” Doc said. “Like a carbon corpus, you are mostly water—a saline solution—so you will need to keep yourself hydrated. As for nourishment,” Gauge shrugged, “we really are not sure what you will be able to

ingest. We programmed you to crave foods containing the chemical compounds your cells require to regenerate themselves. We will need to monitor this aspect." He paused to glance at a reading one of the other medical staff held out for his inspection.

"You should also be aware," Doc continued after a moment, "some of the foods you have enjoyed in the past will not nourish this new corpus, although they should not harm it. We copied all the functioning systems of a carbon-based corpus, so it would make your transition to a silicon-based corpus easier. You will have to learn the strengths and weaknesses of this apparatus as you go." He grinned. "And report them to us, of course."

Dr. Gauge noticed me studying the hairs on the back of my arm.

"Although silicon-based, your corpus is identical to the last one in every detail." He smiled. "And yes, you will still need to shave."

It was difficult to wrap my mind around such comprehensive changes. "Reading between the lines, then, I'm hearing there is a great deal you do not know about how this thing functions."

Gauge nodded. "But there's a great deal we *do* know. And what we do know is it will not fail on you. It is self-sustaining. It is self-modulating. It heals if damaged." He paused. "And it is much superior to any other corpus you've inhabited. After a period of adjustment, you should be quite pleased with it."

"You've never let me down before, Doc." I stretched out my legs. "Okay, then. I'm ready to check this out. "

Doc put a hand on my shoulder. "Not so fast, Captain. We're still running tests. You're going to have to bear with us for a few more days."

I must have sighed with frustration, because he continued, saying, "May I suggest you catch up on your history? Now that you're back, your team will want to bring you up to speed with current events." He squeezed my shoulder. "You've been sorely missed, Bren, by friends and colleagues alike."

I nodded, remembering the times I was the one waiting for fallen comrades to be Resuscitated and reconditioned. But at the very most I'd waited for a couple of weeks. Never for twenty years.

"Do me a favor, Doc, and give me a few days before the visitors begin." I ran my hand through my hair, noticing its familiar softness. "I need to ease back into this." I shook my head. "Twenty years. That's a long time."

He smiled in understanding. "Of course. I'll need to file my reports, but I won't let anyone in until you give me the thumbs up. Doctor's orders. Anything else?"

"You don't happen to have my memory unit handy, do you?"



---

## Chapter 2- Dreaming

Fortunately, Doc Gauge and his Merry Band of Technos left me alone with the beeping and whirring machines busily analyzed every molecule of my new corpus and its functions. I studied some of the screens and was amazed to see I was being monitored from the molecular level all the way up to and including basic vital statistics. Apparently they were determined not to miss one atom of information.

I glanced down at the fingers holding my mem-unit. They looked like mine. As did my legs and my feet, my torso—the works.

I looked...and felt...like myself. It made it hard to imagine this corpus was actually a completely different substance.

So far—although it had been barely twenty minutes—the only thing I'd noticed that was slightly unusual was the acuteness of my senses. Normal lighting was almost painfully bright. Noises, uncomfortably loud. Smells...I sniffed, and immediately my eyes watered at the disinfectants. I pulled at an arm hair and gasped in surprise. Like I said. Acute. Hopefully I'd adjust, learn to turn down the intensity or learn to work with it.

I debated whether I should watch twenty years' worth of news vids, but they didn't interest me much.

What did interest me were my crew, my mission, and how I happened to get blown to bits twenty years ago. So, grateful the mem-unit had been safe in my quarters on the ARK the day of the explosion, I slipped the headset over my head, inserted it, and then leaned back and closed my eyes, allowing my recorded memories of the last couple of months before the explosion to wash over me...

I was looking at the weathered face of a man who was more of a Planet-Strider than a Sky-Rider like me. I'd been born and raised on a space station, as had my parents before me, and their parents before them. First Sergeant Seth MacDougall, my second in command and a comrade I trusted like my own brother, as well as a friend for many years, was definitely a Planet-Strider. I smiled, looking forward to seeing—and hearing—the real, creatively profane Mac instead of a mem-unit vid.

In the vid, Mac was worried. "I don't like this, Bren," he was telling me. "Once a planet of 3rds gets into the sky..." he shook his head. "And these are nasty brutes."

Ah, yes. We had been on a scouting mission to see if the residents of our assigned Unawakened planet were ready to learn there were galaxies full of sentient beings eager to meet them, and to determine if they were ready to join the Galactic Federation.

Seeing this now from the future, I had to agree with Mac's assessment. After all, they blew us out of the sky. We'd trusted them a bit too much. And after we realized it, we barely had time to escape the planet with our lives. I was anxious to know who had survived the blast and who had



not.

I believe the hardest thing for PeaceKeepers to overcome is their natural tendency to trust and believe a 3rd will tell the truth. In reality it's a mixed bag. Some tell the truth. Many don't.

*3rds!* I had been trying to recall something about 3rds when they brought me online. Maybe Mac knows...what? Damn it! What was I trying to recall...was it about 3rds...and my seed atoms? Did Doc say my seeds were stored in a 3<sup>rd</sup> for twenty years? No, that couldn't be right. Everyone knows there could be risk of bleed-through. Why weren't they stored the same way as a normal Resus procedure?

Whatever it was just kept drifting further and further out of reach, dissipating like smoke now. Perhaps if I quit trying to grab on to it...

Back to my mem-unit and the challenge of trusting 3rds.

Now, we 5ths are incapable of lying. At most, when we are dealing with a 3rd or going into deep cover among them, we can omit the truth. But to actually out-and-out lie? It is just too painful. That's not to say we are not good at what we do. PeaceKeepers are very, very adept at misleading with the truth. In addition, when in deep cover, we tune our energy frequencies to those we are emulating. Makes it less painful for us and harder for others to notice any difference between us and those we are helping to Awaken.

And I agreed with Mac's concerns about 3rds in the sky. I adjusted my mem-unit to 3rd-level frequencies so I could be better attuned to those sensations. When you record your memories with a mem-unit, it just pulls the raw data directly from your mind and senses. It's up to you to adjust

the frequency levels while you're reviewing. In other words, you view a segment of experiences from different frequency levels or emotional layers. The story can seem very different, depending on how which frequency you're tapped into.

Many 5ths and 7ths refuse to experience mem-unit data at the lower frequencies. Much too painful.

It's true. It is painful, but I have learned to separate myself from the pain. It's worth it to me, for how can you really understand a 3rd if you don't look at segments of experience from their level of frequency, and then expand your understanding by alternating between 3rd and your own frequency?

While I was tinkering with my unit, I decided to begin recording my current experiences, chronicling my return to life in my new Silistel corpus. I assumed at the very least the information would be of interest to Doc's Merry Band.

And I assumed the happier I could make them, the sooner they'd let me return to work.

Some sentients install mem-units into their corpuses running in the background, constantly monitoring and recording experiences. I choose not to do that. Perhaps it's my Artisan background, but I prefer a little hands-on control in my life. Thus, I prefer to control when I do a download. I enjoy the sensation of relief. It feels good to let go of all that raw data of experience in a way that allows me to sift through it later. I am convinced it is one of the reasons I have never needed to be rehabbed after a mission. My method allows me to separate what is my natural 5th essence from any other frequencies. You would think others would adopt my method.

Installed mem-units are easier, but they make you lazy.

In the mem vid, Mac was worried and now, tuned to those frequencies, I understood I was worried as well. We both sensed something didn't add up. I changed the frequency level to a lower wave to see if I could sense any paranoia. I've discovered some interesting facts that way—hone into the paranoia, a frequency level only found within 3rds and undercover 5ths, and then replay a segment. This time, I could see when Mac expressed concern, I responded with an image—a thought form I kept to myself at the time—of a government sub-committee. I flagged it and moved forward in time.

I repeated this process for about forty minutes, but didn't uncover any truths, just suspicions strong enough to justify aborting the mission. Because the last download was done while I was off-planet, I did not have trustworthy data to use in reconstructing precisely what happened after I returned to the planet to recall my people. I made a note to check the survivors' reports after I was discharged from the hospital, or relocated to a reconditioning center.

Finally I disconnected from my mem-unit and closed my eyes with a sigh. I'd forgotten how tiring it can be to adjust to a new corpus, not to mention getting used to the idea the memories I'd been viewing, ones seeming like just a few days ago were, in reality, twenty years old. Give or take a few.

I drifted off into sleep.

I dreamed.

It was the girl, again, Rose. She was working in an office. The equipment looked complicated and outdated. I placed it on a sentient planet where they were just beginning the early stages of technological advancement. What we called the Computer Age. Something the Watchers would flag as the

beginnings of an Awakening planet. In the dream, Rose was concerned because she thought someone was sabotaging her work and trying to get her fired. She could not decide if that was the cause, or if she was suffering memory lapses. Either way, she was upset.

When I woke, I wondered why my subconscious would remember such a dream.