

Creative Writing Reflection Sheet

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Title: Mapping Up

1. What stage of the writing process are you at with this particular piece of work?

Check all that apply

- Just getting started Still exploring Know what I want, but not there yet
 Need others to read Need more time Need to leave it alone for a while
 Have specific questions Feeling good Totally bumfuzzled

Explain: I have a clear mental image but the story is, as they say, scattered. What can I explain?

2. What was the original spark for this piece of work?

Who cleans up between missions in video games?
Corpses don't just vanish, y'know

3. List three things you like about what you've written? Give examples...

Bland protagonist
Comedic focus
Decent sci-fi

4. What's non-negotiable for this piece of work? What are you sure isn't going to change?

Setting and protagonist

5. List three things you're struggling with and want to improve in this piece?

Focus, consistent tone, and length

Can it be longer?

6. What feedback do you expect readers will give you?

Jumps around too much.

7. List three questions you want to ask your readers?

Where can I put more?

What's cool?

How much more power can I give the protagonist without getting silly?

The rifle of humanity's future is an auspicious weapon. The curved magazine of the standard model calls to mind the hard practicality and durability, the warrior's functionality, of the 20th century's assault rifles, rendered obsolete centuries ago. The ornate decoration on the charging handle, grip, selector switch, and along the barrel of the gun speak to the time, devotion, and craftsmanship put into these weapons. And the .50 bullet that comes out of that barrel at a rate of 45-60 rounds per minute in semi-automatic speaks volumes in and of itself. Despite the fact that there are thousands of them in the universe, they are that rarest of beasts: Weapons meant for weapons. The USEC Marine Corps are deadly, unstoppable warriors, feared for their efficiency and precision. They have no need for brutality. They carry brutality in their rifles.

You may wonder what role the future, where humanity populates the stars, has for big angry folks with guns. As it turns out, spreading humans further apart doesn't make them get along better, and someone needs to come in and put a halt to all the brush wars (or dirtball wars, as they're colloquially known), through means of extreme violence and superior firepower. Of course, the scions of those shut-down rebellions infiltrate USEC seeking revenge, and it's now more rife with internal conflicts than external conflicts. Fortunately, humans are the only unlimited resource.

The various upgrades and enhancements for standard armour have made the USEC Marines into the epitome of a selective fighting force. The so-called Iron Man suit renders the user a walking tank, capable of laying waste to anything without nigh-miraculous armor-piercing capabilities. Assault Packs, with their thrusters and wings, allow the wielder all the extra combat space of up, adding a new dynamic to the battlefield, and allowing the infantry to be their own

close air support. These valuable roles render those who take them elites, better than their already unstoppable peers.

All this technology in the hands of the most fit, capable, lethal people gives the USEC Marines a certain value, both as combat troops and as merchandise. Rare is the Earth child who doesn't have some USEC-sponsored gear, for they have a reputation. They are more than men. They are more than guns. They are more than armor. They are humanity's gladiators, eternally questing and challenging among the stars.

Of course, having that many heavily armed ladies and gentlemen soaring about the cosmos requires infrastructure. An army marches on its stomach, they say. One can extrapolate the amount of supplies it would take to get an army airborne and then to sufficient velocity to break atmosphere and the Earth's gravitational pull. For that, you need less glamorous, less dangerous people. You need the USEC Janitorial Corps.

If you're not in the physical or mental condition required to be a supersoldier, then one of the logistics divisions is for you. If you're a scientist, or an engineer, or a linguistics expert, that's great. The USEC has too many of those doing their jobs already. You're going into the service service. And remember, whatever you think you're capable of now, you're going to be amazed at how much worse things can be.

This brings us to the events of here and now, where the latest batch of recruits come off the line, ready to serve their planet in the war against the unknown. Welcome to the "Heart of Gold", a Chaffee-class carrier with the 603rd Voyager Group, currently headed for points

unknown. The standard crew complement for one of these fine vessels is around 30,000 crew, and another 5,000 marines.

Waking up is, quite often, a disorienting experience. You've just de-escalated from a phase of your body wherein you are unconscious, defenseless, and downright useless for at least several minutes. Waking up in space is very similar, except it happens with a strong falling sensation. Had Janitorial Officer First Class Norway Jones not already known about the falling sensation, he might have been surprised at the volume of vomit in the ready room. Fortunately, he, too, was in the dim, bitter haze of that awakening. His main thought was something along the lines of "Dammit. I knew I should've stayed on Earth."

His disappointment in his life's choices was immediately filled in by a siren, and a strong, direct voice urging all new crew (which indirectly meant him), to report to the main assault bay for a briefing.

The captain of the ship, a short, stout man who was quite clearly central casting's idea of what a farmer should look like, stepped up to the podium to begin the briefing.

"Hello, and welcome! The Heart of Gold has been in service for 70 years with distinction. I served my first tour aboard it, and, like its previous commander, I will serve my last tour aboard it. That may well occur while you are on board. You are part of a legacy. Mankind has always sacrificed itself in order to get closer to the stars." After a lengthy spiel about the glory of humanity and the necessities of space, he got to the important bits. Norway watched as the musclebound men and women around him vanished in groups to their squads, and soon he and around 200 other comparatively scrawny weaklings stood, shaky and nervous, before the captain.

“You lot. Janitorial Corps?”

A resounding “Aye” shook the deck.

“Great. Go clean up your predecessors, and the other casualties we’re replacing. The blood is starting to dry on Deck R, and the technicians are complaining about it.”

On that auspicious and not-at-all grim note, Norway Jones officially entered his capacity in the Janitorial Service aboard the “Heart of Gold”. Time to clean up. He whistled on his first day, through the cleaning of the gore and blood, and through his first medical exam, too. It’d be a shame to fail that, really, as that’s how they determine if you’re fit for space, and going back when you’ve come all that way and time is heartbreaking. All the practice you do on Earth, all those tests, pale next to your first day of actual work in space. That’s when the realization that you’re isolated, that you’re floating among the black, kicks in. That’s when the weak crack, and the strong break through. Fortunately, Norway Jones was strong. Or possibly just not paying enough attention.

Future Captain’s Log, 5/44/2703

Hey-o, Norway here. Not really sure why I’m recording this, but the doc says I should try to keep a trail of my thoughts on my way through the stars. His words, not mine. Figured I might as well make it accurate, so, hopefully there’s a nice long chain of these “Future Captain’s Log” recordings, just so I know where I started from. Mom, I hope your garden is doing well, Dad, tell Frank and Claire I miss them. As I say that, I’m not sure if you guys’ll see this, or if it’s just for my own “peace of mind”. Anyways, I’m doing real good, and will see you guys again in a few years.

Norway, for all his mental resilience and general good cheer, was not the happiest of campers. They'd run out of room in the Janitorial bunks, and he was rooming with a squad of Marines in a spare Cooking bunk. The five of them were decent folks, and there was no tension, but Norway wasn't sure how he felt about being in the same room with that quantity of explosives, let alone the sort of people who would kill him if he woke them up wrong. But that was a dilemma for a later date. He was currently more than occupied with trying to get the soup out of the kitchen after one of the new deck officers accidentally stopped the constant rotation of the ship used to generate gravity in a more energy-efficient fashion.

The natural consequence of this loss of gravity was that a mop was entirely useless. Fortunately, space provided another suggestion, whispered in the annals of science and human knowledge: vacuum. Soon, the soup was slurped, and Norway was on to the next task, with a jaunty, unreturned wave at the cooks and assorted waitstaff patiently arrayed outside. Space was a pretty decent gig, and he made good money. Day Two had been a blast.

Future Captain's Log, 6/42/2703

So it does send! Turns out the intelligence division looks at the negative submissions and heavily [REDACTED] the negative parts, and even after that, only some messages get through.. That's why it seems so enticing. That said, it really is great up here, aside from some of the nastier stuff I've had to clean up. I can see home, and I spent about .25 to rent one of the magnifiers, and take a peek at our part of town. Also some foreign nations, since I had the perspective. Frank, Claire, keep your heads up in your classes. It's freakin' spectacular up here. Don't worry, I'm making friends and doing well. Hope to get a message back from you soon!

Norway closed the window, and turned back to the room before him. His bunk was a mess, partially out of defiance towards those who would subdue him, and partially as a result of rooming with a full squad. He liked it that way. Gave his space a homey feel. So far, space had been pleasant. It was, odd, though. He wasn't expecting the vacuum, the emptiness. He expected aliens, adventures, maybe lasers. All that was happening aboard his ship, though, was a dullness, a disappointment.

Perhaps, then, the trick was to create his own excitement. I mean, space rebellions happened all the time. He was out here, right? Probably meant that someone could start a rebellion anywhere. How, though? Stage a mutiny? Blow something up? He had all those weapons right there, it couldn't be that hard. After a few minutes of hard pondering, he resigned himself to a course of action. He would take the- CLANG!

Norway came to seconds, perhaps minutes, later. Red lights were flashing, and it seemed the hallways were screaming at him. The squad thundered into the room, loaded up, and slapped a spare EVA helmet on his head, yelling something about "evacuation" and "follow" that was, in his state, disorienting. They stampeded down hallways, past detritus left in the rush to flee, and over bloodstains that had already dried enough that they were going to be a pain to get out. He paused. What was he doing? He was part of Janitorial. This was not his time, nor his place. He was quickly propelled forward by an open hand to the back, which launched him into the small pile of humans huddled at the back of the rec room.

One of his well-armed roommates stood up and waved at the room for their attention. "We're under bombardment. A nearby ship went rogue. They're targeting the largest rooms with

air in them, then working down until the ship looks like Swiss. If anyone has any grand ideas for not dying before rescue cutters get here, now's the time to speak up."

A girl from concessions raised her hand.

"Yes, you."

"Surrender. They'll leave us be if we join them."

"Vetoed by virtue of being the one with the rifle around here, and the one most likely to get killed in a surrender."

Next was one of the cooks.

"We should all stop breathing."

"That's a great idea, but there'll still be oxygen in the room."

That's when it hit Norway. "Blow a small hole in the bulkhead. The air will leave, but we won't."

"Meh, at least we have our oxygen tanks."

Future Captain's Log, 7/43/2703

So, uh, that didn't go as intended. You guys have probably seen it on the news by now. There's a war. In space. While I'm up here in it. And I know I said I wasn't going to do anything stupid, but it's a bit past that time now. I'm going to ask to join the Colonial Marines. They can fast-track me back to my ship, and I'll serve as an assistant loader for the squad I was with. Frank, Claire, be careful down there. Mom, Dad, don't let them follow me out here. I'll write you when I can. I love you.

