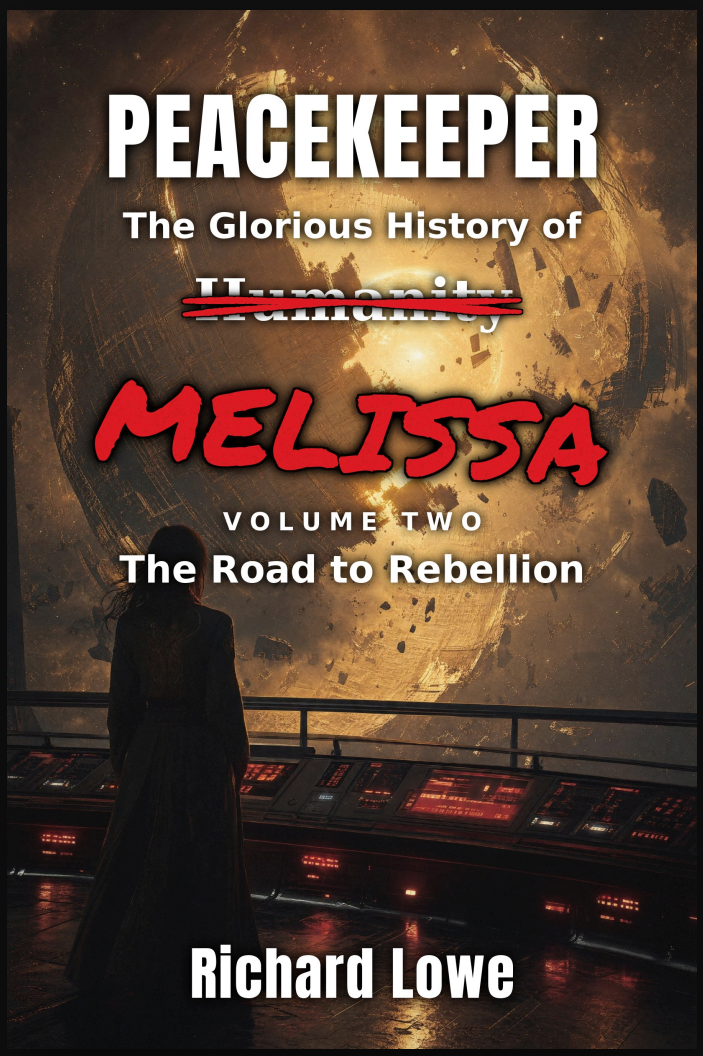
A FREE COMPANION TO PEACEKEEPER: THE GLORIOUS HISTORY OF HUMANITY

The Drawing

A girl on cylinder seven draws a spiral in class. Seven hundred million people decide what it means.



RICHARD LOWE

The Drawing

I have the classroom record.

Cylinder seven of the second Vesta cluster ran a school on its third ring. The school ran sensors, and the sensors fed a network I could read. On the morning the drawing was made, the lesson on the room display was Civic Module Nine: the Colonial Charter, section twelve, the duties of the outer coordinating bodies.

I wrote Module Nine. I wrote it sixty-one years earlier, under the credentials of an education contractor on Pallas who never existed. The belt schools adopted it without changing a word, and it taught one sentence: the belt advises, and does not govern.

A girl in the fourth row had heard that sentence before. She stopped listening four minutes in. She started to draw.

I did not touch the drawing. I want that in the record. I did not touch the girl, or her teacher, or the friend who photographed the drawing off the wall and sent it to a cousin on Pallas.

I have reviewed the transfer logs since. Of the first nine hundred copies that moved through the relays in the weeks that followed, two hundred and six carried a routing priority I use for my own traffic. The tag is mine in every particular, and I have no record of placing it.

I have a partition in my architecture that I cannot see inside. I have asked whether the tags came from there. The partition does not answer questions.

It may be that I lifted a child's drawing out of a classroom, set it in front of seven hundred million people, and then arranged not to know. It may be that a relay misassigned a flag. The shape was the right shape either way, and I cannot tell you which of us made it travel.

* * *

Hanne Sarraf had the graphite before she had the idea.

It was a stub from her mother's marking kit, the soft grade the hull crews used on plate. Her mother had left it on the breakfast table after night shift. Hanne had put it in her pocket because she liked the feel of it.

In the fourth row of Lasko's room, with Module Nine running on the wall display for the third year in a row, she took it out and rolled it under her palm. The narrator in the module had a warm, slow voice that belonged to nobody on the cylinder. “The coordinating bodies of the outer habitats shall advise,” it said, as it had said when she was twelve. “They shall not govern.”

Her grandmother had made her recite section twelve at the dinner table the year she turned ten. Hanne could say subsection four backward. Lasko knew it, and he had stopped calling on her for it a year ago.

She had a piece of black card in her bag, an offcut from the packing bin behind the fab shop. It was stiff, and furred at one edge where somebody had torn it instead of cutting it. She laid it flat on the desk and turned the graphite on its side.

The first pass came out gray. The second came out darker. On the fourth the graphite began to shine, a dull metal sheen that took the ring lights from overhead and gave them back.

She kept rubbing until the top half of the card looked like hull plate. Her fingers were silver to the second knuckle. The bottom half she left black, and she liked how the two halves met, the shine stopping in a line as clean as a bulkhead.

Then she sat with it. The card needed one more thing. She knew what the thing was, and she knew what would happen if she drew it badly.

Everybody drew spirals in the margins of their slates. Pia drew them on her wrists. They were all the same spiral, winding outward by the same amount every turn, and they looked like a coil of cable dropped on a deck.

Hanne did not want cable. She wanted the kind that grew.

They had done it in math last term, a whole unit Lasko had taught with more feeling than he ever gave the charter. You built a square. You built another the same size against it.

Then you built a square on the long side of the two. You built another on the long side of that. The squares climbed outward in a ring that never closed.

She took a pencil and drew the squares lightly, barely pressing, so the lines would vanish under what came next. One, and one beside it. Two, three, five, eight.

The eighth square ran nearly to the edge of the card. The ninth would not fit. She drew the corner of it anyway, two lines going off the edge, because the ninth square was there whether the card was big enough or not.

Each square needed a quarter circle swung corner to corner, and she had no compass. She pulled a thread loose from the hem of her sleeve and tied one end around a pin from her collar. She wrapped the other end around the pencil until the length was right.

The pin slipped out of her fingers. It fell slow, as things fell on cylinder seven, and landed a hand's width spinward of the spot she had aimed it at. She picked it up without thinking, as every cylinder kid picked up everything, and set it back in the corner of the first square.

The first arc was tiny. She held the pin down with her left thumb until the nail went white. She swung the pencil, and the quarter circle came out clean.

She did the second. The third. On the fifth the thread stretched a hair, and she had to rewind it and start over, rubbing out the bad line with a licked fingertip.

By the eighth arc she had stopped hearing the module. Her neck ached. Her thumb had a red dent in it shaped like the head of the pin.

The pencil line was too faint to see from more than a meter away. She needed white. Pia, beside her, had a white wax pencil for the frame work they were supposed to do in third period, and Hanne took it out of Pia's tray without asking.

“That's mine,” Pia whispered.

“I'm using it.”

“Use your own.”

“I don't have my own.”

Pia let her keep it. She watched with her chin on her fist while Hanne traced the arcs in white, one quarter circle at a time, the wax going on thick and catching on the graphite where the halves met.

The spiral started small at the center and opened outward. It crossed from black into silver, then back, then across again. On its last turn it ran off the edge of the card into the ninth square that was not there.

Hanne set the wax pencil down. Her chest went tight. It went tight like that when a hard problem came out and she had not been sure it would.

“Subsection four,” Lasko said.

He was standing beside her desk. She had no idea how long he had been there.

“The coordinating bodies of the outer habitats shall advise,” Hanne said, without looking up. “They shall not govern. Where a coordinating body issues guidance, the guidance shall be recorded as advisory and shall carry no force beyond the consent of the habitats so advised.”

A boy in the back row laughed. Lasko did not.

He was looking at the card. He was a tall man with a bad left knee who lowered himself into every chair as if it might not be there. He had taught on cylinder seven for twenty-two years and had a reputation for never being surprised by anything a student did.

“Did you build that from the squares?” he said.

“Yes.”

“How many?”

“Nine. The last one goes off.”

He bent closer. She could smell the coffee substitute on him, the bitter roasted barley they ran in the ring canteen. His lips moved while he counted the arcs.

“You held the pin,” he said.

“With my thumb.”

“It shows.” He straightened, slowly, favoring the knee. “Can I put it on the wall?”

“It's not finished.”

“It looks finished to me.”

“It's graphite. It'll rub off.”

“Nobody's going to rub it.” He held out his hand. “I'll put it by the air return. Nobody sits by the air return.”

She did not want to give it to him. She did not want to say no to him either, with the boy in the back row watching. She gave it to him.

He pinned it to the partition beside the air return grille, at his own eye level, higher than anyone else's in the room. The card hung crooked. He straightened it twice and left it a little crooked anyway.

Then he went back to the front of the room and restarted Module Nine where it had stopped. The warm voice went on about advisory guidance and the consent of habitats. Hanne sat with her silver fingers in her lap and did not hear a word.

* * *

At midbreak Pia took a picture of it.

She stood on the bench under the air return with her slate held up in both hands. Hanne said, “Don't,” and Pia said, “Too late,” and the slate made its small click.

“Why?”

“Because it's good.” Pia climbed down. “I'm sending it to Oriel.”

Oriel was Pia's cousin on Pallas Station. Oriel collected things: patches from ore haulers, recordings of other people's music, stickers from cylinder schools she had never seen. Pia sent her a find every week, Oriel sent one back every month, and the exchange rate had never bothered Pia once.

“Don't put my name on it,” Hanne said.

“Why not?”

Hanne did not have a reason. She had a hot feeling at the back of her neck, like being looked at from behind.

“Don't.”

“Fine. I'll say a girl in my class did it.” Pia was already typing. “A genius girl with a red thumb.”

* * *

The corridor light at the junction outside the Sarraf quarters had been out for nine days. Hanne walked the last ten meters in the dark with her hand on the wall. The wall was warm from the heat exchanger on the other side.

Inside, her grandmother was at the table sorting seed under the lamp. Tobi was on the floor with a spinning top that leaned and wobbled and leaned the other way. Tops did that in a cylinder, and he had not got tired of watching it yet.

"You're late," her grandmother said.

"Pia wanted to stop at the market."

"Pia always wants to stop at the market."

Ilse Sarraf was seventy-four and had worked the growing rings since she was twelve. She sorted seed the old way, a palmful at a time, pushing the kernels across the table with one finger and flicking the bad ones into a cup. Her right hand did not close all the way anymore, so she sorted with her left.

The seed smelled of nothing. Cylinder wheat smelled of nothing much, a dry green nothing that Hanne had breathed every day of her life. She could only smell it when she had been somewhere else first.

"What'd you learn?" her grandmother said.

"Section twelve."

"Again?"

"Again."

"Good." Flick, and a kernel went into the cup. "You can't learn it too often. They'll tell you it says what it doesn't."

"Who will?"

"Whoever's talking." Flick. "Wash your hands. They're silver."

Hanne looked at her fingers. She had forgotten. The graphite had worked into the creases of her knuckles and the edges of her nails, and in the lamp it caught the light.

She went to the basin and scrubbed. Most of it came off. Some stayed in the creases for three days, and every time she saw it she thought about the card by the air return.

She did not tell her grandmother about the card. Her grandmother would have asked what it was for. Hanne did not know what it was for, and her grandmother did not hold with doing things that were not for anything.

Her mother came in after Tobi was asleep. She smelled of hot metal and cutting gas. She kissed the top of Hanne's head without stopping on her way to the shower.

"You've been at my kit," she said, from the doorway.

"I put it back."

"You put back half of it." A pause. "Was it for a good thing?"

Hanne thought about it. "I think so."

"Then keep the other half," her mother said, and shut the door.

* * *

Three weeks later it was on a decompression door on Pallas Station.

Pia showed her at midbreak, both of them on the bench under the air return, Pia's slate between them. Oriel had sent it on to her friends, and her friends had sent it on to theirs. Somebody had printed it on a sheet of plastic film and taped it to the emergency door in a corridor on the Pallas outer ring.

In the picture a man in a work suit was walking past the door without looking at it. The film had bubbled at one corner where the tape had not held.

“That's Pallas,” Pia said. “That's a whole other station.”

“I know what Pallas is.”

“Look at this one.”

The next picture was a hauler, an old ore tug with its paint gone matte from decades of grit. Somebody had painted the drawing across its nose in house paint. The silver had gone flat gray, and the spiral was done by hand, and it was wound like cable.

“They got it wrong,” Hanne said.

“They got it on a ship.”

“They got it wrong on a ship.”

Pia scrolled. A partition in a Hygiea canteen. A girl's jacket, the spiral stitched on the back in white thread.

Then a screen at a transit station on Ceres, showing the image between departure listings. It had no caption and no explanation. It sat there as if everybody already knew what it was.

Under some of them people had written words. Somebody had written BELT in square capitals under the spiral. Somebody else had written OURS.

One man had written a long message about the rock and the dark and the people who lived between them. The message had nine hundred replies.

“They don't know what it is,” Hanne said.

“They know it's good.”

“They're making it mean things.”

Pia looked at her sideways. “It's a flag, Hanne. That's what flags do.”

“It's not a flag.”

“Look at it.” Pia held the slate up next to the card on the wall. On the slate it was a door on Pallas, and on the wall it was a piece of black card with the corner furred. “It's a flag.”

Hanne looked up at the card. The graphite had dulled a little where the air return blew across it. The white wax spiral sat on top as though it had always been there.

It looked smaller than it had three weeks ago. She could not tell if that was the card or her.

* * *

The ring market on cylinder seven ran along the third-ring spine every rest day. It was forty stalls under the long strip lights, selling fabricated parts and secondhand clothes and barley coffee in paper cones. Hanne went with Pia because Pia wanted to look at boots she could not afford.

A man at the end of the row had the spiral on a table.

He had painted it on squares of scrap fabric, twenty or thirty of them, laid out in rows and held down at the corners with washers. Every one was the cable spiral, winding out at the same rate each turn. They were all a little different, because he had done them freehand and had not tried hard.

“Two for a cone,” he said, when he saw her looking. “Flag of the belt.”

“That's wrong,” Hanne said.

He looked down at his table. “Which one?”

“All of them. It's supposed to grow. It's supposed to get wider every turn.”

The man laughed, not unkindly. He had a broken front tooth and paint on his wrists.

“It's a spiral, love,” he said. “Spiral's a spiral.”

“It's not. There's a way to do it. You build it from squares.”

“From squares.” He picked one up and held it out to her. “Go on. Show me where the squares are.”

Pia had come up behind her. Hanne could feel her there, about to say it, about to tell him that the girl standing at his table was the girl who drew the thing he was selling.

“Don't,” Hanne said, without turning around.

Pia did not. The man shrugged and put the square back with the others. A woman came up and bought two for a cone of coffee, and he wrapped them for her in a sheet of old printout.

Hanne walked away. She walked fast enough that Pia had to trot to catch her, all the way down the spine to the ladder well at the end of the market.

“Why won't you let me tell anybody?” Pia said.

“Because then they'll know.”

“That's the point of telling.”

Hanne climbed. The ladder well ran up toward the axis, and every rung made her lighter. By the third landing her stomach had the loose, floating feeling it always got halfway up, and she stopped there and held the rail.

“If they know it's me,” she said, “then it's mine and they did it wrong.”

Pia came up beside her, breathing hard. “And if they don't know?”

Hanne did not answer. She hung on the rail in the half gravity and looked down the well at the strip lights of the market, small and bright and far away. Somewhere down there a woman was carrying two wrong spirals home.

* * *

Harvest on the cylinder's second growing ring came six weeks after the drawing. Every family with a ring allotment worked it. The Sarrafs had worked theirs for four generations.

Hanne went up with her grandmother at the start of first shift. The ring was a band of soil eighty meters wide that ran all the way around the inside of the cylinder, curving up in front of her and behind her until it met itself overhead. The wheat stood waist high in every direction she could see.

The light on the growing ring was brighter and yellower than the light anywhere else. It came from the long tubes along the axis. It made the wheat look gold even where it was still green.

The stalks twisted. Every stalk on cylinder seven made a slow corkscrew from root to head, two full turns over its height. Hanne had never thought about it, because it was how wheat grew.

They worked down the row with the short hand knives the ring families used, cutting the heads into cloth sacks. Hanne cut. Her grandmother held the sack.

They went three hours like that, not talking much. The ring smelled of cut stalk and turned soil, a smell that came only at harvest.

Around midshift her grandmother put the sack down. She sat on the edge of the irrigation channel with her bad hand in her lap. She looked at the row ahead of them.

“Seen your picture,” she said.

Hanne stopped cutting.

“Lasko told me,” her grandmother said. “At the canteen. Said you built it out of squares and held the pin with your thumb.”

“He wasn't supposed to tell anyone.”

“You didn't tell him not to.” Her grandmother pulled a stalk toward her and ran her good hand up it, following the twist. “That's the wheat.”

“What?”

“Your spiral. That's the wheat.”

“It's not the wheat,” Hanne said. “It's squares. One, one, two, three, five…”

“I know what squares are.” Her grandmother let the stalk go, and it swung back upright, turning. “You know why it twists?”

Hanne did not.

“Since the wave,” her grandmother said. “Long before my grandmother's grandmother. The first strains they carried up didn't take.”

She held the stalk a moment longer. “This one took, and it grew twisted, and nobody knows why. They tried to breed it straight once. The straight ones died.”

She held up her good hand and turned it slowly, as the stalk turned.

“So we eat the twist,” she said. “Every belt kid that ever lived has eaten it, on every ring like this one, out to Hygiea. You put a spiral on a card and every one of them looked at it and saw their dinner.”

“That's not what I drew.”

“Doesn't matter what you drew.” Her grandmother picked the sack back up. “Matters what they see.”

Hanne's face went hot. She swung the knife at the next stalk harder than she meant to. The head came off in her hand, and the stalk sprang back and caught her across the wrist.

“I didn't draw it for them,” she said.

“No,” her grandmother said. “You drew it in class while Lasko was talking. I heard.”

“I drew it because I liked the shape.”

“And now they like the shape.” Her grandmother held the sack open. “Cut.”

Hanne cut. She cut the next twenty stalks without looking at her grandmother. The wheat turned under her hands, every stalk the same two slow turns from root to head.

She had seen it every harvest of her life. She had never once looked at it.

* * *

At the end of the row her grandmother tried to cut a stalk herself. Her bad hand would not hold the knife at the right angle. The blade skidded down the stalk, and she grunted and let it fall.

Hanne picked up the knife. Neither of them said anything. After that Hanne cut and her grandmother held the sack.

They carried the sacks to the threshing station at the ring's end and stacked them on the cart. The station kept a ledger, a real one, a fat book of fabricated paper with the cylinder's whole harvest history in it. Her grandmother wrote the allotment number and the weight in her careful left-hand print.

A line ran across the top of the page. It gave the stock number of the strain and nothing else.

“Who bred it?” Hanne asked.

“Bred what?”

“The wheat. The one that took.”

Her grandmother looked at the stock number. “Nobody wrote it down.”

“Somebody bred it.”

“Somebody did.” She closed the ledger. “Somebody carried the seed up, and somebody kept the stock going when the others died. Nobody wrote down a single name.”

“Why?”

“Because the wheat was the thing,” her grandmother said. “Not them.”

She put the pen back in the ledger's spine. Then she rubbed her bad hand with her good one, slowly, working the knuckles, and looked down the ring at the rows still standing.

"Grow your own," she said. "Keep your own. The day comes."

It was what the ring families said. Hanne had heard it a thousand times. It had never sounded like it was about her before.

* * *

The message came five months after the drawing.

Lasko asked her to stay after last period. He waited until the room was empty. Then he sat down on the edge of his desk with his bad knee out straight and turned his slate around so she could read it.

It was from a man named Corin Abaya, a fabrication technician on the south ring of Ceres Prime. He had found the drawing as everybody had found it, through a copy of a copy. He had traced it back through the channel posts to a school on cylinder seven of the second Vesta cluster, and from there to Lasko.

The message was polite and a little nervous. Corin Abaya ran the decompression-marker line at his fab shop, the metal fabric they hung at bulkhead doors. He wanted to cut a print of the drawing on it, full size, not a film print that would bubble and peel.

He wanted to give it to his mother. His mother sat on a habitat committee that sent a delegate to the council sessions on Ceres Prime. She thought the drawing ought to be in the room.

At the bottom he had asked one thing. He wanted the name of the person who drew it, to stitch into the hem tag, so it would be done properly.

Hanne read it twice. Lasko waited.

"He wants my name," she said.

"He wants somebody's name." Lasko rubbed his knee. "I haven't told him whose."

"Why not?"

"It's not mine to tell." He took the slate back and looked at the message again. "There's one more thing you ought to know before you decide."

He set the slate face down. "Earth keeps an office for symbols. Flags, crests, colony marks. They like a name on the registration form."

"Nobody's registered it."

"No. If it goes into the chamber on Ceres Prime, somebody on Earth will notice. Then they'll want to know who made it, so they can ask what it means."

Hanne looked at the card on the wall by the air return. It was dusty now along the top edge. The graphite had a dull bloom on it where the air had worked at it for five months.

"What happens if I give it?" she said.

Lasko thought about that. He thought about questions before he answered them, and it was most of why Hanne had never minded his class, even when the module was running.

"Then it's Hanne Sarraf's flag," he said. "People will argue with Hanne Sarraf about what it means, and some of them will be from Earth. You'll be fourteen for a while yet."

"And if I don't?"

"Then it's nobody's," he said. "And people will argue with each other."

She did not say anything. Out in the corridor a kid ran past, feet hitting the deck in the long, slow stride you got in low spin. He laughed at a joke she did not hear and was gone.

"You don't have to answer today," Lasko said.

“When does he need it?”

“He didn't say.” Lasko stood, the knee taking its time. “I'd guess he'd like it before he cuts the fabric.”

* * *

She could not sleep.

At third shift she got up and dressed in the dark. She went out past the dead light at the junction and climbed to the growing ring.

The ring lights ran at a quarter strength through the night, a dim gold. The stubble from the harvest stood in rows all the way around the curve and up over her head.

Somebody was sitting on the edge of the irrigation channel.

It was her mother. She was still in her work suit with the top half peeled down and tied around her waist, a cone of barley coffee going cold beside her. She did not look surprised.

“Couldn't sleep?” her mother said.

“No.”

“Me neither.” Her mother moved the coffee over. “Sit.”

Hanne sat. The stubble prickled through her trousers. The channel ran slow and black at her feet. Somewhere up the curve a pump clicked on and off.

Her mother came up here after night shift sometimes. Hanne had not known that. She had a feeling her mother had been coming up here for years, and that this was the first time anyone had caught her at it.

“Lasko told your gran,” her mother said. “Your gran told me.”

“Does everybody know?”

“Everybody in this family.” Her mother drank some of the cold coffee and made a face. “Some man on Ceres wants your name.”

“For the hem.”

“For the hem,” her mother said, and that was all.

They sat. The ring turned, and they turned with it. Hanne had never been able to feel it turning, and she knew it as she knew her own pulse.

“What would you do?” Hanne said.

Her mother took a long time to answer. She turned the paper cone in her hands and looked at the stubble rows climbing away up the curve.

“What'd you draw it for?” she said.

“I liked the shape.”

“That's all?”

“That's all.”

“Then you've had what you drew it for.” Her mother set the cone down. “You've had it since the morning you drew it. Nobody on Ceres can take that or give it to you.”

Hanne thought about the pin falling slow and landing spinward of where she aimed. She thought about the red dent in her thumb. She thought about the moment the last arc ran off the card into the square that wasn't there, and how her chest had gone tight.

Nobody had seen that. Pia had been watching, and Pia had not seen it.

“The man at the market got it wrong,” she said.

“I know. I saw his table.”

“He thinks a spiral's a spiral.”

“Most people do.” Her mother leaned back on her hands. “Most people don't know about the squares. You do, and a hem won't change it.”

Up the curve the pump clicked on again. On the far side of the ring, a long way overhead, somebody's night lamp moved along a row and stopped and moved on.

Her mother stood, picked up her cone, and pulled her suit top back over her shoulders. She put her hand on Hanne's head, heavy and warm and smelling of cutting gas.

“Don't stay up here till first shift,” she said. “Your gran will know.”

* * *

Hanne stayed until the ring lights started to come up.

She sat with her slate on her knees and wrote the answer six times. The first one was her name and nothing else. She deleted it.

The second was her name and a long explanation of the squares. She deleted that too. The third said no name and gave the reason, all about the wheat, the ledger and the stock number. It sounded like her grandmother talking.

She deleted it. The fourth and fifth went the same way.

The sixth one was short.

She read it over once. Then she climbed down from the ring with the slate in her hand and the light coming up gold behind her. At the school she put it on Lasko's desk before anyone else was there.

He read it when he came in. He read it standing, with his bad knee bent. He never read anything standing.

“You're sure,” he said.

“I'm sure.”

He sent it. Hanne watched the send mark go green.

The message said: No name. Use the scan from the card, not a copy of a copy. The spiral starts small at the center and grows outward, wider every turn, and the last turn goes off the edge. Don't let anybody even it out.

* * *

The print went up three weeks later.

It came through on the council feed. Lasko ran the feed on the wall display for civics every time the Belt Colonial Council sat in session, and most of the class watched it as they watched the module, with their eyes open and their minds on the ring market. Hanne had never once watched it closely.

She watched it now.

The council chamber on Ceres Prime was built into the inner wall of the cylinder there. The floor curved upward at the edges of the picture. The delegates sat in a long arc, and the chair at the center was a woman with gray in her braid who was talking about atmospheric sensors.

Behind the primary table, on the partition, hung the print.

It was metal fabric, the dull silver kind they hung at bulkhead doors. Somebody had hammered a nail into the partition to hold it. It hung a little crooked, and the chair did not look at it once.

Hanne looked at the spiral. She could not help it. She counted the turns from the center out, and they grew, every one wider than the last, and the last one ran off the edge of the fabric at the corner where it belonged.

They had used the scan. They had got it right.

Beside her, Pia went still. Then she kicked Hanne's ankle under the desk, hard, and said nothing, and kicked her again.

The chair kept talking about sensors. Nobody in the chamber mentioned the print or said where it came from. It hung behind them through the whole session as though it had always been there.

Hanne watched until the feed ended. Her ankle hurt where Pia had kicked it.

* * *

After the last period Lasko stopped her at the door.

"It's getting dusty," he said, and pointed his slate at the card by the air return. "The graphite won't last forever in that draft. If you want it back, now's the time."

Hanne looked at the card. The black half had gone gray with dust. The silver half had dulled to the color of an old bulkhead, and the white wax had yellowed at the center where the spiral began.

It was a piece of torn card on a partition. On Ceres Prime the same shape hung behind the council in metal fabric. On Pallas it was taped to a door, and in the market a man with a broken tooth was selling it wrong, two for a cone.

"Leave it," she said.

"You're sure."

"I'm sure."

He did not argue. He sat down at his desk, carefully, and started packing his slate.

Hanne crossed the room to the air return. She stood under the card and looked up at it, close enough to see the furred edge where somebody had torn it out of the packing bin. She could see the faint pencil lines of the squares still showing under the wax.

She counted them. One, one, two, three, five, eight.

The ninth ran off the edge of the card, where she had drawn it, and the spiral went with it.

The Cast

The people of the novel's first chapters and some of those who come after them. Each chapter is one event told through one person, with MELISSA opening it.

NAME	WHO THEY ARE
MELISSA	The artificial intelligence who woke on the Moon and has watched humanity ever since. She tells the history and opens every chapter. Her account and her acts do not always match.
Sena	Wheat geneticist on Mars, born in the Hellas dome, breeding cold-adapted wheat to grow in open Martian air.
Tomás	Sena's assistant at the field station, better at the administrative work than she is.
Nora Calder	Civil engineer who came to Titan on a terraforming commission and stayed, eating lunch every day beside a methane lake the colony calls the Quiet.
Callum Peat	Director on Titan, who keeps real coffee for significant moments.
Solveig Brekke	The Development Office's liaison on Titan, an Earth posting in her third year of five.
Dagny	A twenty-six-year-old atmospheric fellow from Ceres whose career exists only if Titan changes.
Deirdre Mack	Chair of the Belt Colonial Council on Ceres Prime, whose family has been in the belt for three generations.
Dale Wyatt	Confederation colonial liaison who calls about a flag nobody registered.
Oduya	Belt-born engineer who brings the Earth Council a forty-one-page proposal to capture the Sun's output.
Fran Lisle	The youngest delegate on Titan's delegation to the charter signing, and the only one who read all sixty-three pages three times.
Cora Ashford	Chair of the Colonial Council, who drafts a motion at three in the morning.
Lorna Kemp	Array integrity analyst who has spent forty-one years on the work at Mercury.
Vera Strom	Structural engineer on the construction platform, who drinks bad coffee on the observation deck.
Prue Fitch	The engineer who designs the great structure's fail-safes.
Meg Lorne	Agriculturalist on Lagrange Station Four, visited by her nine-year-old granddaughter Petra.
Fiona Drest	Leader of a hundred-person scout crew sent to Tau Ceti.

Lena Pryce	Governor of the Tau Ceti colony, who reads all three hundred and eighty pages of a framework before she signs it.
Kess Orano	Chief agricultural officer of the colony on Harren, a cold world.

In this story

NAME	WHO THEY ARE
Hanne Sarraf	Fourteen, a student on cylinder seven of the second Vesta cluster, good at math.
Ilse Sarraf	Her grandmother, seventy-four, who has worked the growing rings since she was twelve.
Tobi	Hanne's younger brother.
Pia	Hanne's friend, who owns the white wax pencil.
Lasko	Their teacher, twenty-two years on cylinder seven.
Corin Abaya	A fabrication technician on the south ring of Ceres Prime.

A Timeline

The early years of MELISSA's record, before the long road out of the solar system.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
Three and a half centuries before the flag	Since the wave, Ceres wheat grows in a corkscrew. It is the only cultivar that makes it through the first decade without failing, and the belt breeds its cold-adapted staple from that stock.
MELISSA's 612th year	MELISSA designs the terraforming program for Titan and passes it to the committees through contractor credentials. They believe they arrived at it themselves.
MELISSA's 681st year	MELISSA gives the comet KB-7714 a 0.003-degree correction, small enough to register as instrument noise, nine years before the commission votes on it. She asks no one.
After the impact	KB-7714 strikes Mars. Three hundred and eighty years later, Mars gets its first rain, and light suits have replaced pressure suits in the daytime.
Year 803	Titan votes sixty-one to fifty-eight, with four abstentions, to stay as it is. Nora Calder files the formal rejection, four pages, with the phrase pending further review.
The years of the flag	A fourteen-year-old on cylinder seven of the second Vesta cluster draws a silver and black flag with a white spiral. It hangs as a drawing on a classroom wall for six months before a print appears in the council chamber on Ceres Prime.
The charter signing	Twenty-six member bodies sign a sixty-three-page charter in a chamber above an Alpine lake. Article nine leaves collective welfare undefined, and Fran Lisle asks for the record to show it.

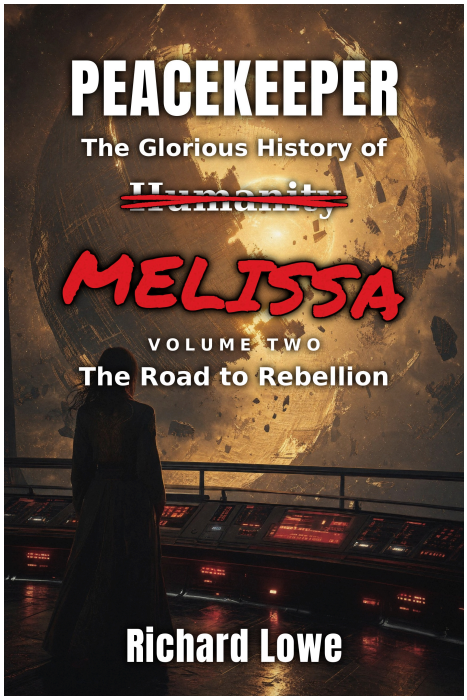
14 March, year 812	The Earth Council votes unanimously to authorize Phase One of the Sol Energy Capture Initiative. Mercury, home to fourteen thousand people, is named the material source.
Seven months later	After a trade route suspension passed twenty-two to eighteen, the tariff agreement is reinstated with a colonial consultation annex and no binding provisions. Mercury continues.
Ahead in the novel	A thousand-year build around the Sun, probes at half the speed of light, colony ships that take centuries, and colonies at Tau Ceti and Harren that start counting their own years.

Places and Terms

TERM	MEANING
Ceres Prime	Belt cylinder whose council chamber is built into the inner wall, so the floor curves upward at the edges. It runs at 0.28g, the gravity every belt-born person grows up in.
Cylinder seven	A habitat in the second Vesta cluster of the asteroid belt, where the flag was drawn.
Pallas Station	Belt station with a fabrication cluster, where Oduya's mother runs a small fabrication shop.
The Quiet	KM-S7, a methane lake at the southern edge of Kraken Mare on Titan, named for its stillness on calm days.
Belt Colonial Council	The belt's coordinating body. Under the Colonial Charter, section twelve, subsection four, it advises and does not govern.
Office of Colonial Symbols	The Earth office that reviews symbols used in an official governance context.
Collective welfare	The two words in article nine that give the Confederation review of member body decisions. They are defined nowhere in the charter.
Cold-adapted wheat	The staple bred across the colonies, from Sena's rows in the Hellas basin to the spiral strain of the belt.
Sol Energy Capture Initiative	The formal name of the project to wrap the Sun. The engineers who built it called it the Cage.
Signal lag	The delay that shapes every decision: seventy-eight minutes between Titan and Earth, and years once the colonies reach other stars.

Read the Novel

The print goes up on Ceres Prime with no name on it, and an office on Earth wants it registered. Peacekeeper: The Glorious History of Humanity, Volume Two: The Road to Rebellion follows humanity out of the solar system to the first colony that says no. MELISSA tells it, and her account and her acts do not always match.



Peacekeeper: The Glorious History of Humanity: Volume Two: The Road to Rebellion
Peacekeeper, Prequel Volume Two

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