

The Story of The Persolus Race

By Alex O'Neill

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Additional Editors: Ukchanna K., M.M. Dixon

Find out more about this booklet and the Persolus Race Universe at www.thepersolusrace.com

The idea for *The Persolus Race* came to me slowly and blossomed over a couple of weeks. Initially, when the COVID pandemic came in, I was at somewhat of a loose end and decided to fill my time by getting to work on a piece of creative writing. I consulted my father, who is a lover of classic science-fiction literature. When I told him that I wanted to write a book, he told me that unfortunately ‘A lot of the good ideas have been done now,’ and following this conversation, I had to go away and think about what an interesting twist on a well-established, popular genre would be—my two favourite genres being Science-Fiction and Fantasy.

Slowly, an idea began to form in my head. That idea was: what would a future look like if humans invented interstellar travel, including light speed, and travelled out amongst the stars, far into the known universe, only to find no other intelligent life—nay, any life anywhere at all?

I liked this idea and slowly it began to form into a plan.

Firstly, I started to think of how it would be best to express this idea. I thought of using one single novel, following one or several adventurers, set after humans had already colonized at least the Milky Way. This, however, didn’t cover the number of potential stories and characters this idea could potentially include, and I wasn’t particularly sold on my first book being some enormous space opera similar in length to *War and Peace*.

I picked up a science fiction short story anthology called *The Best Time Travel Stories of the Twentieth Century*. I enjoyed reading this immensely, and decided to change tack with the project slightly; I then thought that it was best to think of multiple short stories that fit into this universe, and have them all set at different times within the universe in the form of an anthology. I had some worries about how

much time this would take, and whether it would affect my completing my Master's degree.

I then had what I'd say was the defining lightbulb moment in the creation of this book: I could give other amateur and semi-professional writers my premise, they could write stories, and then I'd edit the anthology and get it published! I'd never done anything like this in my life, but in that moment, I knew this was something I wanted to do!

I loved this idea, and although I had no idea how to edit and publish a short-story anthology, I set about looking for a Facebook writer's group that took my fancy. I came across 'The Sci-Fi and Fantasy Writer's Guild' (SFFWG), and I knew it was the one. I joined and pitched my premise to the group, asking if anyone wished to work on an anthology with me. I got a surprising amount of interest from group members, and I messaged them all, asking if they were willing to be added to a group page that I had put together to work on the book. Before too long, and to my surprise, a copy editor called Rachel Shipp came forward on the SFFWG page, willing to work on the book's grammar for me.

Rachel proved invaluable to getting the book done, and along with one of the contributing authors, M. M. Dixon, supported me in forming a three-person editor's team. In terms of the authors, I'd had more interest than I'd expected, and before long we had a total of twelve:

- Three Brits (Myself, Jessica Milner, and Steph Millar)
- Five Americans not including Rachel (B. E. Waymire, C. C. Forshee, M. M. Dixon, Melina Munton, and L. E. Doggett)
- Two Australians (Andrew P. McGregor and Josh Whittle)
- One Dutch (M. S. Landwaard)
- One Italian (M. June)

None of us were full time authors, and we all had other jobs outside of work on the book, but we weren't about to let that hold us back. I was overwhelmed with the enthusiasm the other contributors had for the project, and in turn that increased my own passion for the project.

Our rundown of stories looked like this:

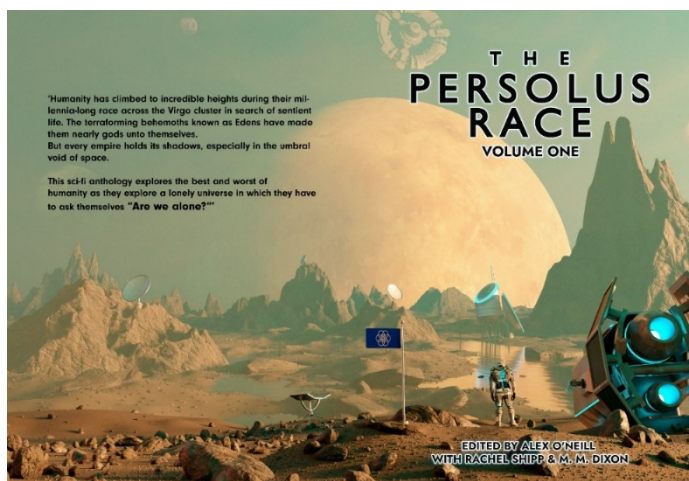
1. *Prologue: We Are Alone* by me
2. *The Man in the Mountain* by me
3. *The Snake in Eden* by Josh Whittle
4. *Oisettio* by Jessica Milner
5. *Chronicles of the Fallen Colony* by Andrew P. McGregor
6. *Starsong* by M. M. Dixon
7. *Thadeus* by M. S. Landwaard
8. *The Seeker* by C. C. Forshee
9. *Empire Reborn* by C. C. Forshee
10. *Undiscovered Nightmare* by B. E. Waymire
11. *Community Service* by Melina Munton
12. *In the Gardens of Eden* by me
13. *The Mine* by Andrew P. McGregor
14. *The Trip Home* by L. E. Doggett
15. *The Placebo Effect* by Steph Millar
16. *The Exhibition* by M. June

With none of us having met before, online or in real life, I set up a group chat with everyone in it, plus one with the three editors, and we were off. It was late May 2020 and we all had until the end of August to turn in one story each.

Andrew P. McGregor told me he had already written a thirty-thousand-word novella called *Chronicles of a Fallen Colony*, which he was happy to edit to fit into the universe. While *Chronicles* was nearly twice the length of the next longest story, I was happy to allow it, as the story was great. C. C. Forshee also wrote an extra story called

Empire Reborn to line up the gaps in the canon of the universe, barely five hundred words long. And finally, my father had promised to write a short story he'd had in his head for many years, about a potential way time travel wouldn't work. As we got closer to the end of August, it looked like his work commitments would prevent him from writing the story, titled *The Man in the Mountain*, so he gave me the outline and I wrote it for him.

My other story, *In the Gardens of Eden*, was a bit of a headscratcher at times. I had recently rewatched the Christopher Nolan film *Dunkirk*, which had inspired me to write a disaster story, and read a novel called *Sleeping Giants*, which was told through a series of fictional interviews – I put these together gave me a rough outline for a story, which eventually formed *Gardens*. *The Man in the Mountain* was more straightforward, and I read some classic Arthur C. Clarke short stories to be able to emanate them with my writing. Jessica Milner put me in touch with a friend of hers, Simon Thorogood-Hill, who designed and then refined our lovely cover design:



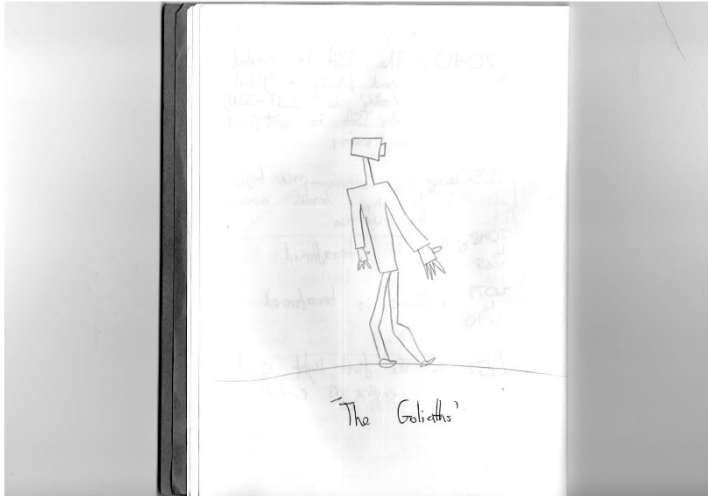
1: Full book cover by Simon Thorogood-Hill

Before too long, discussion within our group chat picked up, and I put together a series of shared documents on the group page to support the book. These included a timeline of the universe, where any major dates within the universe were laid down, and the dates of each story were then added in by their respective authors. This helped us see how the universe would develop, with stories sometimes being moved forward or backwards depending on whether they fit into the time appropriately. I also put together a shared document for the authors' bios, something which will be listed in the finished book, as well as story summaries, which have been predominantly used in our advertising.

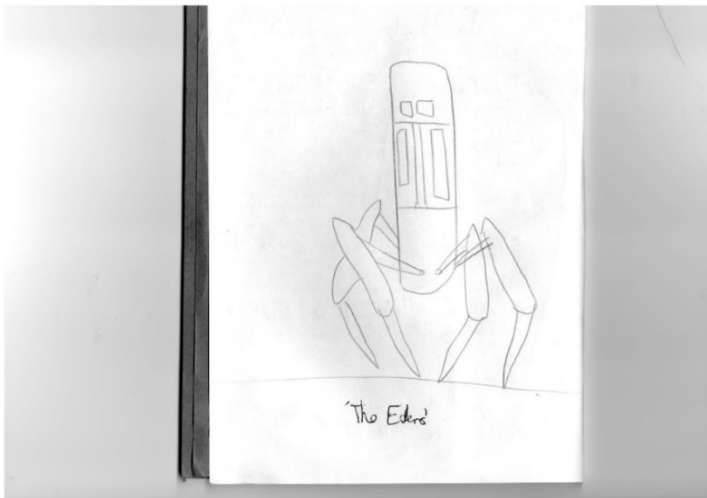
During the months between May and August 2020, Several of the other writers (C. C. Forshee, B. E. Waymire, Andrew P. McGregor, M. S. Landwaard and Steph Miller) and I 'screened' each story as it came in, which involved giving initial feedback to improve the first drafts on. This was all done before the build-up to submitting the stories to Rachel and M. M. at the end of August.

By Mid-September, the stories were all in, and the two copyeditors got to work, reading every single story, looking for grammar, spelling, and phrasing mistakes, but also any plot or canon issues. Discussion with the contributing authors died down, and the editors' chat began to get more active. I, Rachel, and M. M. used a google sheet to coordinate the progress of each story now.

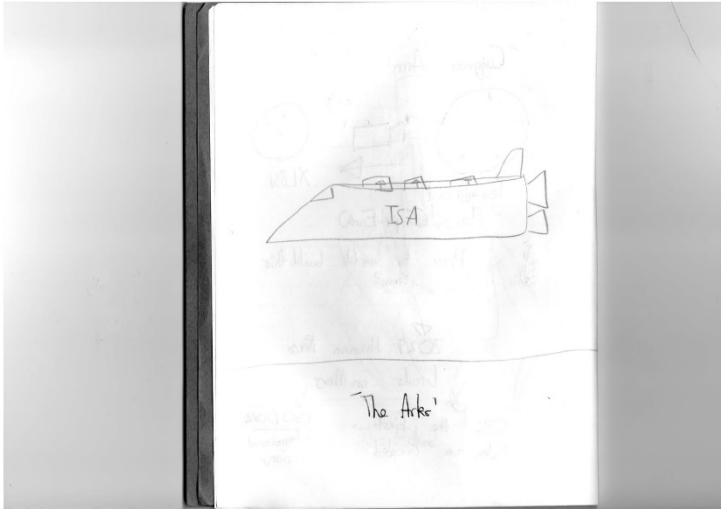
I took this time to put together some crude sketches of some of the technology invented for the Persolus Race universe. For your amusement, please find them on the next page.



2: Crude sketch of Goliath Robot by Alex O'Neill



3: Crude Sketch of 'Eden Ship' by Alex O'Neill



4: Crude Sketch of 'Ark Ship' by Alex O'Neill

From October to December 2020, there was discourse between the copyeditors and contributing authors, with two round of edits as we got towards the end of the year. Rachel and M. M. gave every author suggestions to improve the stories, and then when the authors had edited their stories, they turned them in to be read fully again. The copyeditors then got to work again and returned the stories to their respective authors. This was a long process, but it worked, and the stories were starting to look better and better.

Around this same time, turned toward how we would publish the book, and whether a print copy would be feasible, given high print prices. First, we looked at going through some form of an official publisher who would sign on—we figured this was unlikely, given that we were all unknown authors. Several outlets we looked at wanted specific requirements to publish a book (certain page number range,

font types, font sizes), only a few of which we met, and in the end we came to the decision, to self-publish through a website called IngramSpark.

The end of 2020 came around, and the book was in the editing process, with almost every story now being on the second round of edits. I set up a document to actually start putting the book together. My father put together a beautiful foreword for the book, in which he discussed the history of science-fiction literature, and the concept of being alone in the universe, connecting it to Peter Ward and Donald E. Brownlee's *Rare Earth Theory*. And, over January and early February, the stories came in one by one into the full first draft.

As a team, we set about bringing onboard beta readers. We gave them approximately a month, along with an attached feedback form for each story, covering how the story worked, didn't work, feelings towards central characters, etc., and then summarised the feedback in a table, which we sent to each author. Each author then had a month, in April 2021, to make any further edits and then return the story to have one last look over by the copyeditors.

I set up some advertising platforms for the book—most predominantly a website, along with contributions from everyone for the About the Authors section. B. E. Waymire wrote a new short story called *The Investigator* as an online exclusive. I also put together a Facebook page and an Instagram page to boost advertising, but also to increase our outreach. I decided to add the now-complete timeline of the universe into the end of the book as an Appendix, and by Mid-May we had a full draft of each edited story. Rachel then gave the book one last full-length proofread, to catch any continuity issues, before 1st June 2021.

During this time, M. S. Landwaard's friend, Amasja Koolen, then put together a second piece of artwork for the book, and a friend

of Steph Millar's made a piece of artwork for her specific story, *The Placebo Effect*. These two pieces helped in advertising for the book. If we publish second volume, then Koolen's piece would make an incredibly good cover:



5: Persolus Race astronaut by Amasja Koolen

Both M. M. and I made some formatting edits, while I also, with the support of the contributing authors, went about advertising. This meant regular posts up until the release and sharing the pages where we could. I put together an acknowledgements, afterword and dedication for the book, and added that in, before sending it on to M. M. for one last look over.

Unfortunately we hit a snag: IngramSpark needed a spine for the print cover, and we didn't have one. I looked for online templates, and after not much luck, M. June thankfully came forward with a contact, Andrea Mattevo, who could design us a cover. Simon sent us a layered version of the front cover, and the last push towards getting the book 'oven-ready' began.

Andrea managed a quick turnaround on the cover, and then along with my dad, I reformatted the book for IngramSpark to accept it. Around this time we had also started looking for ARC readers to give us early reviews, and on 6th August 2021, we received our first review, which described the book as *“fascinating and engaging, pulling the reader along with evidence of terrible cover-ups, an altered human species, egocentric artificial intelligence with a master plan, and a futuristic spin on the twelve labours of Hercules.”*

I started to think forward toward the future and started contacting small-scale, local comic cons to sell the book at. I found one local to myself, and other contributing authors came back with similar results.. Before too long, we had uploaded all the documents to IngramSpark, and we were ready to send it live for people to purchase. I ordered the very first print copy to check for any issues and waited tentatively for the postman to visit. On Friday 10th September it arrived, and on Sunday 12th September, I announced on my social media pages that the book was out!

When we started this project, I had no idea it was going to develop into what it became. At the start of this project, my only creative writing efforts belonged in the scribbles of teenage notepads, and by the end, I was a published author. For several of the contributing authors within the project, this book was their first published work. The project was massive, but it showed what could be done by a group of strangers who had a shared idea, a range of experiences, and a bucket load of enthusiasm.

**From everyone involved in The Persolus Race: Volume One
project:**

Thanks for supporting us on this journey!

The Persolus Race will return with Volume Two soon.