

Australian fiction, 1945-infinity

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THE PRIME MINISTER



By Sterling James Minniecon
Lowmead Australia

Prologue

The beloved harsh Australian bush

The heat encompassed his whole being like some huge fiery band that threatened to crush the very life from his body. He knew he could not last much longer. Already his mind had begun to lapse. His feet fumbled once more in the little sand hollows and he sprawled prostrate for a while on the sun-scorched plain. Through the numbness of his distressed mind, there penetrated the shrill cry of Galahs. He struggled to his feet.

Like wavering ghosts, through the heat haze he saw the line of trees and with new hope he stumbled on toward the darkest green, where the squawking flock told him there was water. The water was warm, brackish, but it caressed his body with the embrace of new life. Finally, he dragged his tired body from the small sandy surface-pool and sank down wearily in the shade of the old river-gums there.

It was as if time had stood still since the accident. His weary mind struggled back to a conversation with his father - when was it? Yesterday? A week, a month ago? The accident and lack of water had confused him, he realized now that he had water and hope again...

Chapter 1

Dad's world

The flickering firelight threw weird patterns upon the screen of night. Across the campfire the vague silhouette of his father's steady voice broke through the clinging tendrils of silence.

"Well son, guess you're glad we're going home again; pretty rough on you out here," he'd said, looking me over for signs of disquiet.

"Oh no, dad. I've enjoyed myself, it's been a real break," I'd assured him truthfully. The older man looked directly at him, grinning from ear to ear at the admission.

"It's been a real break for me too son," he said, handling the lump of metal they'd found, as he spoke. "A real bit of luck finding something for a change," he'd said, still overjoyed at finding a decent lump of gold; 'a genuine life-changer', he'd called it.

"Now I've got enough to give you the education I want you to have," he said happily. "Smarts like yours should be used for the country son," he said, always thinking of the broader view of things and, always pushing the value of Education as a necessity for all, and not just a great employment tool for rich people's kids; as it seemed to be now.

One thing about dad. He followed his own advice and kept up with all the news and gossip for his own edification about his beloved country. But I was still young and not as certain about education's value as he was. The old man had always encouraged honesty; silly or not, and I'd spoken my youthful doubt aloud.

"Well to be honest dad, I don't think education is everything. You know..." I began, but was interrupted as dad's abiding passion rose to the fore.

"Perhaps you're right, but I want you to have a good education; the best money can buy. You know I still hope that someday you will hold the reins of Government in this country," he said, reinforcing the dream he'd had since I showed promise as a child. And, promptly, he was off on his hobby-horse again...

'The Garden' lies down-under

"This is the greatest country on earth bar none, and this land, our own Queensland, is the Eldorado: the Aladdin's lamp of the

Commonwealth," he said, simplifying his broad, well-read knowledge of international economics. "But sad to say the genie still lies asleep, because the powers that be suffer from a lack of original ideas," he expounded. "We need Statesmen with initiative and drive, and a love for this land," he said, emotion poking through his usual stolid character. He shook his head gloomily before continuing.

"The patriotic spirit is a negative force in the Australian way of life. Everyone takes life as it comes; its programs, its policies, its privileges are taken for granted. In fact, the whole Government system suffers from an inferiority complex, and you know what that means!" he exclaimed irritably.

"No? What does it mean, dad?" the young man across from him asked seriously.

"Just this boy," he said, nodding sagely. "When someone with an inferiority complex is able to get someone weaker down, he not only puts his foot on the victim's neck, but he rubs his nose in the mud as well, and that's what is happening to Australia and its people," he said disgustedly, gazing into the flames.

"Parliament in Australia is no more than a tourist paradise for the politicians! You get to Parliament and taxpayers pay for your trips around the world," he spat out, obviously frustrated at the current politician's attitudes. He wasn't finished.

"Look son! They lay telecommunications cables that cost millions and then go and fly across the Pacific for a few hours talk that costs a lot more money and, nobody really knows what they talk about. Could be, they discuss the next winner at Ascot for all we know. They squabble and squall over passing bills for buying toothpicks, to purchasing a turbo-jet," he said drolly.

"You're sure sore at the Government, aren't you dad!" his son said and laughed.

"Well, son," his father answered, "not sore, but sick and fed up to the neck with leaders who bow and scrape, and copy ideas, making mistakes that should never be."

Being his father's boy, the son brought up humanity as imperfect. "We all make mistakes though dad? You sound like a 'Commo!'" the boy said, playing 'devil's advocate'. His father almost snorted. "Commo be hanged!" he retorted.

"The mistakes are there alright - for all to see! But when it comes to downright bungling... Listen boy, I saw a whole Flying-gang in north Queensland put to work on a short railway line: new rails, new sleepers, new dog-spikes. The Flying-gang had no sooner finished it than the line was closed down and everything was pulled up again!" he said crossly from actual experience of substantial financial and man-power wastage that had irked him greatly.

"Now, who pays for that sort of nonsense? And that's not an isolated case. Plain stupidity I call it!" the older man said flatly. His son spread his arms in a gesture of helplessness.

"Oh well, what's the use then dad? You're just a voice crying in the wilderness. Nothing we can do to reform them?" he said gloomily.

"That's the trouble boy," his father said crossly. "Everybody says the same thing. Everybody thinks the same way: 'we can't do anything!' And so, nothing is tried, and the mudhole grows deeper," his father simplified.

"Now you sound like a Professor, dad! Guess you've got the solution to it all?" he'd said with a grin. His father grinned along, but answered confidently - he'd obviously put some major thought into the problems his country faced...

Chapter 2

A solution for every problem

"The solution is simple," his father said. "It just means work; Work for the development of our country and the welfare of our people," he explained simply.

"But isn't that what they are doing dad?" the boy asked seriously.

In the flickering light of the low-burning fire his father shook his head negatively. "I doubt it son! I doubt it very much," he said, bending to throw a branch on the fire before continuing.

"Just look at it this way. They're spending billions on airplanes which are almost useless and obsolete by the time they're flying. And tell me son, what could an airplane or a hundred airplanes do in a nuclear war? Why! It would be over before they left the ground. Now look here..." his father rose and swung his arm in a wide circle.

"Richmond, Boulia, Birdsville, Camooweal, the 'Alice' and the 'Curry'. A land of far horizons. A good land. The best! All it needs is water. Now go and stand on any of the mountains along the coast, from Rockhampton right up to Cairns, in December through March and you'll see hundreds of thousands of billions of gallons of water flowing out to sea," he stated passionately. Across from him, his son spread his arms as he spoke.

"Well I don't see how they can do much about that though dad, do you?" he queried earnestly.

"Of course they can son," he said, winding up. "Do you know, if I were an enemy desiring to take North Queensland, I'd just go in and destroy their water supply. It's silly when you think about it. Townsville, the second city, or so they say, has three little lobster holes they call weirs and one two-foot pipeline. A few cases of gelignite and you'd have Townsville in a panic. Same with Cairns," he explained and continued.

"Now, you travel up the Gillies highway from Gordonvale and look back, you'll see the Mulgrave river flowing a banker most of the year, cutting a path between two mountains maybe less than a mile apart. Now, if they threw a wall across that there would be enough water and power for all north and west Queensland. They could run pipes over into those western waterways and from then on, well the possibilities are unlimited," he assured the boy.

"But that would cost a lot of money dad, and even so, they say the evaporation out here is too great for the water to do much good?" he said, remembering a research Paper he'd read on the subject.

"Well son, it would cost about as much as one or two of those airplanes they're buying. As for evaporation, all they need to do is bring the ocean down through Cooper's creek to fill Lake Eyre and keep it filled, and you'd have moisture in the air all the time," he explained.

The young man shook his head as he thought of something else that his country may need. "Sure sounds easy dad, but what say we did have an invasion? We would need those planes then," he stated boldly, causing his father to almost scoff.

"Invasion son? Who's going to invade us, unless it's like Rolf Harris says: 'Turn the Abos loose Bruce and tie me Kangaroos down,'" his father said and laughed. "No son! The Government doesn't want this country to go ahead; they want it for themselves, and I mean themselves," he said indignantly.

"So long as they can raise their salaries when they want to, go for long trips to the other side of the world when they want; Well! Why worry about anybody else? One-year tripping around the world, one-year tripping around Australia blowing a lot of hot air, and one-year planning their next election campaign," he mocked.

"You've certainly got a chip on your shoulder dad," his son said, softening the criticism with a smile, but his father shook his head.

"Not exactly son. All I'm trying to do is show you the picture; and when you get up 'there', you might remember these words and work for your country and your people," he said optimistically, and winking. "And you won't fail; you can't," he said smiling confidently at the flickering uncertain face of his companion. "You make it sound so positive dad, you'd think I was there already," his young companion said, amazed as always at his father's passionate visions of national political leadership for himself.

"You will son, you'll get there I'm sure. But come, it's time to turn in now, we have a big day tomorrow. Two, three days we'll be home," he'd said, unknowing what was in store for them on the morrow...

At the creek; Alone

However long later - here and now - and his bright-eyed, bright-minded father lay back there in that same beloved land he'd worshipped; in a shallow grave. The only landmarks, a pyramid-shaped rock and a broken twisted jeep to mark his passing.

With life-saving water within and over his parched bruised and battered body, the young man fell asleep, his weariness pushing all thought from his mind as he fell into a deep healing sleep...

Chapter 3

A lifetime later

The beautiful crescent-shaped space liner hung poised gracefully at Space Stage 7. Millions of miles away, her home planet, Earth, shone brilliant; another star in the deep space humanity had begun exploring. The voice of the Captain crackled across to the control tower satellite:

"SL-one set for take-off. Destination planet earth. Thirty-five passengers, all for Earth," the disembodied voice stated within and

without the sleek Space-Liner. A minute later, another disembodied voice responded over a distant alarm sound; the auto-alarm ensuring all staff were clear of the take-off dock:

“SS-seven to SL-one. You are cleared for take-off. You have priority clearance for all docking stations within five minutes. Safe voyage SL-one. SS-seven over and out.” There was a smooth bump as the docking station unlocked and the space-liner hung under its own anti-gravity drive. Moments later the laser tubes glowed. A terrible white light burst for a second from the exhausts and the exquisite craft swept out and on through the vacuum of space on its journey to the home planet.

In one of its luxurious apartments sat two men - one an interstellar reporter, the other, a very old, dignified-looking and well-dressed gentleman. The reporter switched on his com device, tested levels and vid-image and began the interview with his esteemed companion.

“Mr. Prime Minister, can you tell us what impressions have you gained on your interplanetary visits?” he asked. The older man spoke slowly, carefully measuring his words.

“Well, nothing exceptional really. After all, we on Earth can still show them something since our Equalisor Plan was put into practice,” he said with some evident pride.

The reporter nod and continued. “Yes, I’ve heard about the plan, and that you personally had a lot to do in the formation of it. Could you give our listeners a brief description of it perhaps?” he asked...

Chapter 4

A fear exposed

The older man was silent for a while, but the reporter wait patiently, knowing the unique, three-term, octogenarian PM was

gathering his thoughts, as he was wont to do before speaking publicly about anything.

"Well, I guess it was the study of the masses that formed the idea. I used to study the people: our people; their reactions in certain circumstances," he explained slowly into the almost eerie silence of the wonderful craft that bore them home.

"I found that humans in general, despite their often self-centered, negative traits, were really willing and generous in emergencies. This was especially evident in cases of disaster such as flooding, fires or cyclones. You would find they were ready to help in almost every way," he explained, spreading his arms in a gesture of happy wonder.

"So, I asked myself; why then was there so much bigotry, violence, hatred and such like in normal times?" the aged PM said distractedly, perhaps thinking back on that time of revelation, before he continued. "Peeling away the layers and getting down to basics, I came to the conclusion that behind it all was a subconscious fear; fear of an unknown future. This little stumbling block seemed to be a major cause of the opposing negative emotions that our society was in desperate need of," he said, continuing before the reporter could jump in.

"Look!" he said, in a manner reminiscent of his father's voice. "The rich accumulated because of it. The poor struck out because of it; fought because of it. We, ah, I, found it was in any and every way, a major part of a violent seething, jumbled mass of anxiety that came out as these negative emotions," he told the reporter.

"Remove that fear and the rest would take care of itself," he explained simply, continuing his explanation.

"Now, three things helped us tremendously in this line of thought and action," he said, holding a steady but skin-wrinkled hand up; one finger up for the first point. "First there was an upsurge in

production in our own Queensland..." he began. The reporter, looking confused, interrupted. "Queensland? Where is that?" he asked never having heard the term before. The old PM grinned and laughed.

"I'm sorry," he said, still grinning at using the old name of his home State. "I still think of it as Queensland, even though they changed the name to Space Central many years ago," he explained, gaining a nod from the reporter who remembered that name now it was mentioned.

"Anyway, as I said, we had a huge production increase in all spheres of industry including foods, and instead of wasting the surplus as had been done previously by governments, growers, transport and retail, we built those huge plants on our arid, formerly wasted lands and snap-froze all surplus right across the nation," he told the young reporter, whom had only known such government' and entrepreneurial-managed abundance as the norm in his young life. "What happened then?" the reporter queried, openly curious about the first-hand information from the aged PM. "Well I think that was then that the plan of equalization began to form," he explained. "If everyone had sufficient: same privileges, where he wasn't a slave to work or rather, he never worked for reward but his work was his reward, his chance to expend his energy, to show his ability, it would put his thinking in the right perspectives," he explained simply.

"Then we travelled our world seeking a working hypothesis. We examined theories of different orders: Democracy, Communism and any other 'ists' and 'isms'. Some were very good in theory but in actual practice they were almost all the same; all lacked something," he told the reporter.

"also, the world had reached a great economic crisis: millions were out of work. The world was becoming a desperate place to live in. It almost amounted to survival of the fittest."

"Sounds terrible," the reporter interjected, too young to remember the social upheaval of the time.

Chapter 5

Equalisor

"It certainly was," the old PM agreed wholeheartedly. "But, as I said before, we had in Queensland, or Space Central as we now call it, reached this peak in production and something had to be done and quickly. We put the Equalisor Plan into practice: first a small community then towns and cities until all our own State was working to the Plan," he explained and nod at the memory. "Nothing was wasted. That which was not required at home or for export was either frozen, dehydrated, tinned or cured and everybody had enough. Everybody worked, and willingly, because he knew that whatever was produced was going to benefit his community and his country, himself and his family as well. So, we had the whole State working to the Equalisor system," he said, obviously proud of the achievement.

"It must have caused an upset to the rest of the country," the reporter remarked. The PM grinned cheekily. "Not only our country, leaders of the whole world were against it. We were completely isolated," he told the reporter, who thought for a moment before following that line of reasoning to a more personal level.

"How did this affect you?" he asked. Once again, the old PM grinned. "well, not much. Our people were happy and care free. That bagging fear of the future was wiped out. All men were equal, and women too, naturally," he finished.

"Sounds pretty good to me," the reporter agreed wholeheartedly.

"It was. Although the world cut us off, they couldn't stop the individual travelers. They came, they saw. Some stayed, some went back and spread the news and soon everyone was wanting to

emigrate to Queensland. We were drawing the best brains in the world, and eventually they had to notice. It was then that the other break came from the University of Queensland," he said, awe still obvious in his aged voice at the huge leap that discovery unleashed.

"Your Antigravity Reactors," the reporter finished for him; wonder evident in his own voice. The breakthrough had been scientifically stupendous after all; a 'game-changer', the reporter remembered.

The PM smiled warmly. "Ah! I see that even in Interstellar you have some of our history," he said, continuing...

Chapter 6

Change gonna come

"It's marvelous! When you take fear from the mind, what wonders it can achieve. You see we gradually got away from old standards. Instead of gold standards we made production standards. The old bits of paper and coins we'd used were completely finished with, and in so doing, we'd done away with old vices: stealing, lying, sickness was rare; murder and robbery were very, very rare," he explained and rushed on, animated by the memories.

"Work became a pastime and pleasure. Old modes of transport became obsolete; old four-wheeled vehicles called motorcars that were a grave source of danger but a necessity in those days, were placed on scrap heaps and recycled. Old buildings of iron and steel and concrete were done away with and new types of plastics were used instead. Men were taught to see that safety instead of antique design and ideas was much more desirable," he told the reporter, who held up a finger.

"By the way, what are those iron and, what was it? Con-crete? And steel things you mentioned?" he asked not knowing the terms.

"Oh well, they were heavy, cumbersome materials that could maim and kill when they collapsed," he explained quickly. "However," he said, eager to continue, "to get back to our story, the Antigravity reactor gave us a great lead over the nations, followed quickly by the laser-tube drive. The world began to take notice and adopt our plans," he said softly but proudly.

"That must have been a great day," said the reporter.

The PM smiled again. "A real Jubilee day now; as a matter of fact, I'll just be in time for the Jubilee celebrations," the PM said happily.

"And is that all the Equalisor plan has done?" the reporter queried, knowing there was much more to the plan.

"Far from all," the Prime Minister answered. "We were then able to go forward with our plans for a greater Earth," he said, obviously thinking back to those days. "Would you please explain, Mr. Prime Minister?" the reporter duly asked.

"Well, we'd formed a plan in our universities of placing manmade suns, coupled to Antigravity reactors of course, above our polar regions. They were huge mirror-like devices orbiting our poles that absorbed and reflected the rays and heat of our main sun that just rose above the horizon during summer months in those polar regions. This proved a real success. A deal of ice and snow were melted and the surplus water was drained into our deserts, and in this we had full control," he told the reporter, taking a deep breath to continue...

Chapter 7

Hidden treasures

"And what a wealth of treasure lay hidden beneath the ice and snow, and millions more acres of really productive land, especially in our North Pole; enough for many generations," he explained,

sipping water for a parched throat. "The South Pole was largely very deep caverns, but still a whole new wonderland; the geologist's dream, the archeologist's playground," he said, pausing for breath.

"It's small wonder then that you are so honored among the planets," the newsman remarked. "But you've only given me the natural physical side: how does the plan affect people, say... ah? Morally?" he asked, knowing his listeners would be similarly wondering at that aspect of the plan.

The old man sat silent for a long time, his fingers tapping gently on the table-top. At last he answered. "It has taken many long years of careful study to remove and keep on removing all the obstacles in the way of equality in the moral make-up of the human," he said slowly. "Again, we had to find a new, quite possibly more difficult working hypothesis," he began to explain. The reporter nod enthusiastically, drawing the tale out.

"Basically, to the huge majority, religion was found to be the deciding factor in the moral make-up; marriage, the home life, the family, the community and so on," the PM said, remembering the research. "So, we investigated religion in all its forms," he said, as if it was a normal Government action; a duty even.

"We found there were literally thousands of religious beliefs and ideas, and these thousands meant thousands of gaps in human society, and these gaps were the hardest to bridge," he said softly, lost in thought for a moment.

"Some are not yet fully filled, but we investigated until it finally came to one focal point. It all reached out to a God, a power above all human societies," he explained, pausing again to sip water and rubbing his hands together as he continued his train of thought.

"The rich, the poor, the learned, the ignorant, the civilized, the barbarians; everyone sought it in some form or other, but the crucial point was that each section - or whatever you want to call it

- wanted it or Him for their own little tin God, to take him to this church or that, to set him up as idols or images, until the whole became just a stupid distorted meaningless mass of hysteria," he exclaimed passionately.

"And we had to find a solution, a working hypothesis. Here again we came across a simple solution, a book called, The Bible," he explained. "It started out with a declaration that God, this Power everyone was seeking, made the world. Thus, a living universe, a living planet and a living God. To us, this was logical and sensible, so we investigated this book further," he said, looking directly at the reporter.

"And, did you find anything worthwhile?" he was asked.

The Prime Minister smiled humbly. "It proved the most engrossing book I've ever read," he stated. "Its thoughts and words were tremendously powerful, personal and practical for honest, dignified daily living," he said, nodding confidently. "I think the declaration that 'this' God or Power, had reproduced Himself in man is what first caught my attention; and caused me to read and study this particular book," he said, catching the reporter's eye once more.

"It had a profound effect on my own life, so profound that I sought to promote it to be read and studied in schools and universities in an effort to solve the religion problem in their search for this God," he told the reporter.

"And have you found Him?" the newsman asked cheekily.

For answer the old man flicked a switch on the desk between them. On the wall, a screen rolled back and one of the ship's Astro-scanners swung into view. Through the inky purple blackness, the Earth's sun hung: a golden orb. Farther out, the Milky Way swept across the heavens like some beautiful silver-studded archway spread over with diamond dust. Pluto, Venus, Saturn, Sirius; all silvered jewels in a purple robe.

Both remained silent as the space-liner rushed on through that gem-studded arch. Then the old man quoted: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," he intoned.

With a sardonic grin, the reporter said: "That doesn't prove a thing. You haven't found this 'God', you haven't seen Him," he said self-assuredly to the PM's budding grin. A raised finger accompanied the response. "Ah, but we have Mr. Reporter, we have. Only glimpses as yet, but they're glimpses all the same," he responded cheerily to the man's obvious doubt.

"Where? How?" the reporter asked immediately. The old PM's eyes smiled, a new light deep within as he responded.

"In happy, healthy, thriving, contented towns, cities, communities and country where every man's hand is outstretched to help his neighbor, and further yet across continents, across oceans; black hands, white hands, yellow hands, brown hands, stretched out in peace and goodwill among men," he said buoyantly as Earth grew steadily larger in the Astro-scanner...

Epilogue

Revisiting the beginning

The evening shadows were blending into dusk as the old man walked slowly along the shore of the vast, man-made inland sea. A successful project from out of his father's fervent mind. For a moment he stood and gazed out to where huge Evacuums lifted the water thousands of feet into the air, then sprayed it out in fine clouds that floated away on the evening breeze.

Behind him the wind whispered fragrantly through the tall forests of pines, while herds of cattle lay quietly or roamed through the tall grass. The aged man turned and walked slowly on through the

dusk. A tall, pyramid-shaped stoned loomed up out of the shadows. Beside it rusted and paper-thin but still recognizable, lay a twisted broken Jeep.

Here, the night winds whispered: 'Boulia, Birdsville, Camooweal, The Alice, a land of far horizons'...

The old man lifted his eyes to where the Evening Star shone brightly, then slowly, reverently, he took off his beaten, sweat-stained old hat and stood with bowed head...

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