

# Sample of 'Independence'

by Alasdair C Shaw

Copyright © 2014 Alasdair C Shaw

All rights reserved.

First published 2015

Dark.

Weightless.

Dark and weightless.  
That's not right.

There's been an accident.  
"Help."

No response.

"HELP!"  
Nothing.

"CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?"  
Silence.

Alone.

Dark, weightless and alone.

#

The bridge was a mess of confusion. The only light came from the few working consoles and the occasional flash of a shorting circuit. A klaxon howled in the background, almost drowned out by the rush of fresh air from the vents. A flicker. In that brief moment of illumination the crew appeared frozen in their tasks. Another flicker. A new tableau was presented. One more flicker then the emergency lights stayed on.

Commander Johnson ran through the priorities drilled into her since she had started Command School. Life support: *Repulse* was leaking air and down to emergency power. Sensors and comms: all external feeds down, internal net patchy. Weapons: the spinal railgun was useless now that the reactor was offline and the control system for the plasma cannon had been overloaded. Propulsion: docking thrusters only, she couldn't even jump.

Not only were they still alive but it looked like they might have taken out a Republic hunter killer. She had been sure they had it but then they'd lost their sensors.

"Get me an external camera. Now." She coughed on acrid smoke from burning plastic that still lingered despite the emergency flush. "Priority over everything bar life support."

She had to know if it was still out there. She had to know if it was coming to finish them or limping off hurt. She couldn't make decisions without information.

Johnson looked to Lieutenant Levarsson. She was slumped against the tactical station. She'd been the one to drop the nuclear mine when she saw the hunter killer about to cross their wake. It had been a reflexive action but had probably been what had saved them. There was a medic kneeling beside her now. He was presumably concentrating on the stats his Electronic Interface was giving him. Although Johnson's EI wasn't giving her anything useful right now, the medic's would be interfacing directly with Levarsson's.

"Damage report, Ma'am."

She had been so intent on watching the resuscitation that she hadn't noticed Sub-Lieutenant Hanke approach her chair. Inwardly cursing her loss of the big picture she accepted the tablet from him. With

the net being down they had fallen back on humans to collate and deliver data.

“Thank you Lieutenant.”

She glanced at the congealed blood on his temple, trying not to make it obvious. He was 16 and he'd just seen his first combat. It was probably minor, scalps bled a lot, but she didn't want him neglecting himself.

“Make sure you get checked out by the medics.”

The Lieutenant turned to leave then paused.

“Ma'am?” he asked carefully, “we shouldn't be alive now should we?”

The demand for replacement officers was outpacing the ability of the academies to churn them out. She could spare him the lecture on defeatist talk this time. A few words in private when it was all over would be more effective anyway.

“Let's just concentrate on staying that way shall we? Carry on Lieutenant.”

The thing was she knew he was right. Given her post she knew more than most how badly they were losing. No destroyer had ever stood toe to toe with a hunter killer and survived. Having to hide the truth weighed heavily on her.

She steeled herself to read the headlines. The central areas had been made airtight. Backup power was stable. Engineering was attempting to re-initiate the reactor. Work was progressing on bypassing the damaged relays for the external sensors. The speed of the response heartened her. They had finally stopped looking to her to hold their hands.

The butcher's bill currently stood at 26 dead, 12 wounded and 15 missing out of a total complement of 394. Several compartments forwards had not yet been reached by the rescue teams. Any crew left alive in them would likely be in the dark, weightless and disoriented.

As the captain she had to remain impassive. She had to appear to be in complete control, undeterred by any setback. The only way she knew to do that was to lock out the horror for now and just focus on running through checklists. Usually it worked its way out later in her nightmares.

Rousing herself Johnson walked over to Levarsson's empty tactical console and logged in. She started running simulations. They couldn't do anything now but she had to assume they'd get *Repulse* working again.

#

Pain.

That's new.

At first it was just the sensation of bruises starting to form on one side of his body. Then he became aware of the burns.

He must have been blocking it out earlier. Adrenaline, that was probably it.

Why couldn't he move?

## LIBERTY (Two Democracies Book 1)

The suns reflected off her goggles as she walked across the dry grassland. Her face was covered by a scarf against the dust from the occasional gust of wind. Her grey robe parted with every step revealing glimpses of the black firmsuit underneath. From the low rise ahead she would be able to see what she had come for.

She stopped on the crest and pulled back her hood. Her long, dark hair escaped and hung around her shoulders. In the distance stood a city, gleaming white through the heat haze.

“It is time.”

She didn’t acknowledge the speaker, continuing to stare across the savannah. With the optical enhancements from her goggles she could make out personal aircraft coming and going between the skyscrapers.

“I cannot protect you if you go any further.”

A larger aircraft arrived and touched down on one of the shorter buildings, a commuter transport no doubt. People going to work, going shopping, meeting friends.

“Does this have to happen?” she asked her escort.

“It is too late now. I cannot intervene.”

The war between the Republic and Congress intensifies. Fleets clash. Entire planets are rendered uninhabitable.

Indie has to find his feet and decide what he is going to do. Is he still part of the Republic or should he follow his own path? Can he be accepted as a conscious being?

If you want progress updates and an alert when Liberty or any other books in this series are published follow *The Indescribable Joy of Destruction* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IndieAI>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alasdair studied at the University of Cambridge, leaving with an MA in Natural Sciences and an MSci in Experimental and Theoretical Physics. He went on to earn a PGCE, specialising in Science and Physics, from the University of Bangor. A secondary teacher for over ten years he has plenty of experience communicating scientific ideas.

He grew up in Lancashire, within easy reach of the Yorkshire Dales, Pennines, Lake District and Snowdonia. After stints living in Cambridge, North Wales and the Cotswolds he has lived in Somerset since 2002.

He has been climbing, mountaineering, caving, kayaking and skiing as long as he can remember. Growing up he spent most of his spare time in the hills.

For more information have a look at <http://www.alasdairshaw.co.uk>.

## FICTION

### **Two Democracies**

Independence – a short story

Liberty – a novel (not finished yet)

Equality – a novel (not started yet)

Fraternity – a novel (not started yet)

## NON-FICTION

### **Science**

[The Best Bits of Physics](#) – explaining the key theories and discoveries of physics in easy to understand terms

AQA GCSE Physics Module 1 Revision Guide – (awaiting release)

[AQA GCSE Physics Module 2 Revision Guide](#)

### **Archaeology**

[A VERY Brief History of Britain](#) – a whistle-stop tour of the types of archeological remains visible in Britain from different periods