

CHARLIE ALICE RAYA

Planet 1: The roots of war

The  
end  
of  
all  
**wars**

Views from around the universe

**CHARLIE ALICE RAYA**

**The end of all wars**, planet one, the roots of war  
extract: The story of empowerment

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# The story of empowerment

The end of all wars, extract

Some days later, one of us said: 'I like our little story about empowerment. Can you read it to us again?'

For some weeks now, we had been inventing stories which followed new narratives. We had heroes who didn't lean on superpowers or super weapons but on their cunning to solve conflicts without resorting to violence. We had stories of partners who were tired of divides and dissected where the divides came from and how to resolve them. We had families who were entangled in a mess of jealousy and competition until one of them suggested to disentangle the mess. We had stories about business people whose work ridiculed the ideas of profiteering and exploitation. We had stories about architects who composed communities embedded in an ecosystem. We had stories of nations who were caught in damaging narratives until a group of people set out to explore new perspectives. We had whole planets who faced threats and found ways to de-escalate the situations and reshape life on their planet. And we had stories for our child where we brought nature's ingenuity to life.

Not all of our stories were good, but the writer among us encouraged us to keep trying and to oil the wheels of our imagination.

'Even if your story isn't a masterpiece,' they said, 'it might contribute to one of the other stories or inspire new thoughts. We all know that thoughts have a funny way of turning up in the most unlikely places.'

These words gave us courage, and by now we all felt at ease to tell or write stories, just to see whether something in a story might be usable. The story about empowerment was still unfinished, the writer said, but we all liked it.

Our writer smiled and crossed their legs while we leaned back in our nests of straw and hay, and closed our eyes.

‘Once upon a time there was a small planet, far away in another galaxy. The people of this planet always sported bruises, their faces, hands and torsos swollen, blood dripping or drying on their skin because they constantly fought each other. The more bruised and swollen a person the more respected they were.

One day, a small person, called Misa, got into another fight on the central fighting hill in the capital.

Blood sprayed far and wide as Misa and their opponent exchanged skilful punches. Unlike most other people on this planet, Misa was cheeky, and they frequently announced foolish sounding challenges, such as fighting after drinking water for as long as it took one person to get to the top of the hill and back down again, or fighting on one arm while grunting like a boar.

Today, after winning the fight, Misa stunned the onlookers with the most ridiculous challenge, yet. “I bet I am capable of not fighting — for longer than any of you.” With this Misa sat down on a heap of straw and smiled at the people around them.

At first, people shrugged. This was, after all, Misa who always came up with weird ideas. Besides, fighting was in the people’s blood. Why would they ever stop?

As that thought gained traction in their minds, the group of watchers looked left and right, their fists twitching and soon several fights broke out while Misa crossed their legs, and smiled some more.

But as the day came to an end, some people began to wonder whether they should let Misa win without a fight, even though the proposed fight meant not to fight.

The next morning another person carried an armful of straw up the hill and put it next to Misa's, and soon others joined.

As the days passed, and more people found themselves a place on the hill, something remarkable happened to those who had stopped to fight: The colours of their skin changed more than usual, their bodies became tired and the constant pain they had known all their lives first changed and then receded — as did the swellings.

These changes revealed faces and bodies, the people on this planet had never seen before.

Soon the news of these developments spread across the planet, and people travelled far to see the transformations with their own eyes.

The visitors were so immersed in their astonishment that they forgot to fight — and they began to change, too.

As time passed, there were still some who sought the excitement of a fight, but more and more people wanted a body of even colour, free of swellings and pain, and a body which could do other things than making a fist or placing a kick.

As more time passed, people discovered that they could use their unswollen hands to touch other people gently. The first touch was always motivated by curiosity: What does an unbruised skin feel like? The second touch, and every one that followed, was driven by an unknown desire to repeat the sensation of a tender touch.

And that wasn't all. Unswollen hands had fingers which could be moved separately. Hands with fingers could pick fruits, and

people no longer had to kneel down to bite into a fruit which had fallen to the ground.

As the people of this planet kept discovering all the uses their hands, legs and minds could be put to, they became wary of challenges to a fight, afraid that the magic of transformation might only work once.

So instead of fighting, they built baskets, bales, bags, bolsters, boxes, buckets. They created robes and sofa nests. They invented knives, hammers and nails, and tried their hand on raising walls for huts, on planting gardens and so much more.

Eighteen full moons into discovering what the people of the planet could use their hands and minds for best, some people began to make lists of all the skills that had been discovered and others invented a system by which each skill was assigned a value and several levels of proficiency.

People enjoyed the ensuing competitions, after all, fighting was something they knew and this kind of fight, to achieve excellence in the most valued skills, had the advantage of leaving their hands and faces unharmed.

Soon parents and community leaders sent their most skilled people to the capital to have them partake in the competitions and bring honour to their home settlements.

Two summers passed in further explorations and many competitions.

It was towards the end of this period, in the forty-second full moon, that the best in the most valued skills began to parade around the capital. And seven full moons later, they assumed the role of leaders and demanded to be recognised for their superiority.

The new leaders established an exclusive club which became inaccessible to most, even to likewise skilled people — unless a



well-proportioned bribe convinced the leaders that one more addition to the club might be acceptable.

A few suns after the foundation of the club, Misa, whose greatest skill was to invent challenges, claimed to be the supreme leader. "I set us free from fighting. I restored our bodies. I saved us from pain. I am supreme."

The other members of the club didn't mind much. Misa was a funny person, easy to steer and obviously determined to protect the club's exclusiveness.

Most people on the planet were still so fascinated by their own explorations and discoveries that they paid little attention to these developments. If the exclusive club ever came up in their conversations, then the people joked about the self-important peacocks in the capital.

Too late did the people of the planet learn that those peacocks had quietly compiled a body of laws which were designed to create a lastingly dominant position for the peacocks and their descendants.

And on hearing the peacock-sneer, the leaders ordered the slaughter of thousands of peacocks to use the wings and feathers as their robes.

Of course, at some point the people of the planet woke up and protested, but by then it was too late. The peacocks had secretly built an army of enforcers. These and a succession of bitter-cold winters helped the peacocks to silence the opposition. What followed were countless winters of frustration, famine and the destruction of much that had been built in the period of self-discovery, which had barely lasted eighty-six full moons.

In the two hundred and eighth full moon, as spring filtered through the capital, Thrim-Asa-Kahi stood on the roof of the peacocks' main palace.

A little more than fourteen springs ago, they and many others had been sent to the capital to partake in the competitions, and Thrim-Asa-Kahi had been recognised as the most skilled clockmaker.

Thrim-Asa-Kahi smiled. They knew how good they were. They knew their place was with the best of the best, here in the exclusive club of the most accomplished. But despite this knowledge, they felt a little pang in their heart. It was the smell of awakening nature which made them long for the hills of their people.

But why not? Why shouldn't they travel home and tell their people about the wonderful capital and all the amazing skills which had been discovered and categorised?

After watching the capital's busy main street for some hours, Thrim-Asa-Kahi went back to their rooms, packed a deer fur as blanket, dressed in their old attire, the robes of their people, and went to the kitchen to get some apples, carrots and dried meat. Not much later, as dusk turned into night, Thrim-Asa-Kahi set off to the hills of their people.

Thrim-Asa-Kahi expected a pleasant evening stroll through the capital. But something was different. No one looked at them, no one saluted them, no one smiled at them. If anything the atmosphere in the streets had something sinister and hostile about it.

A little dismayed, Thrim-Asa-Kahi wondered whether they should return to the palace, dress in their peacock robe and take some guards on the journey so that people would know who they were and not be so tiresomely moody.

But as another whiff of spring filled Thrim-Asa-Kahi's nose, they smiled. Yes, they could suffer the people's strangeness for a little

longer. Soon they would have left the capital and everything would be fine.

It wasn't.

But it got better when Thrim-Asa-Kahi learned to ignore the hungry and frustrated figures along the road as well as the occasional signs of destruction.

The destruction didn't surprise Thrim-Asa-Kahi. One hundred and eleven full moons ago, the leaders in the capital made an announcement: 'Citizens! It has come to our attention that there is too much chaos on our planet. We need law and order. Therefore, beware: Skills are only to be practised as they are practised by the leaders in the capital. And it is forbidden to practise unregistered skills. Disobedience is punishable by death!'

There were stories of enforcers who killed people just on the suspicion that they might deviate from the approved practices, and it was well known that any culprit's workshop and home was burned to the ground to encourage citizens to live by the laws the peacocks had invented. *People should be grateful for the order the peacocks brought to the planet*, the traveller thought more than once.

Whenever Thrim-Asa-Kahi strolled through a town, they noticed with pride that people who practised a highly valued skill did so exactly as instructed by the peacocks: perfect copies of perfection, including some of Thrim-Asa-Kahi's finest clocks.

Occasionally, Thrim-Asa-Kahi was in need of a skill they didn't possess, like crafting a raft to cross a river, mixing an ointment to treat a scratch, hunting or cooking for a much needed warm meal.

As Thrim-Asa-Kahi journeyed on, they became aware of how many essential skills had been labelled minor. To their surprise,

and only in the secrecy of their mind, the peacock realised that these labels made less sense the longer they travelled. After all, no one could build a clock on an empty stomach. No one could cross a river without a raft or a bridge. And why had the importance of healing escaped the peacocks' notice? Surely healing skills must count as valuable.

Thrim-Asa-Kahi decided to learn some of the skills they would need on their journey to the hills of their people and back to the capital.

As Thrim-Asa-Kahi asked the skilled to learn from them, they were surprised how happy and proud people were when they taught a skill they had mastered. And how much these people enjoyed the success of the student. Thrim-Asa-Kahi had never been patted on the back before and was amazed what a wonderful sensation it was.

One and a half moons into their journey, the traveller lost their way and came to a hidden country they had never heard of.

The natural world here was richer than anything they had ever seen, and when they came to a settlement, they were amazed by the beautiful buildings which seemed to merge with the natural world, plants covering the round facades, and the most amazing gardens crawling across the flat roofs. As for the people: they were happy, jovial, playful, their bodies strong, their minds awake, their lives bubbling with activities: trading, teasing, debating, playing, cooking, travelling, telling stories, tending to animals, playing tag, picking fruits, dancing, sharing, swimming, thinking, climbing, lounging, hunting, laughing — and creating.

To the wanderer's horror, they discovered fantastic skills among these people, like building a bicycle or a sailing boat, carving a flute and playing it, making colours for clothes and for astounding images captured on canvases, dancing and writing

poems, making hats and shoes, baking cakes and bread, skills Thrim-Asa-Kahi had never even imagined.

The most humiliating experience was the encounter with three people whose clocks were so stunning that the journeyer looked at them in wonder for hours.

The people of this country seemed unworried by the presence of the stranger and for a full moon Thrim-Asa-Kahi spent suns in uninterrupted amazement, travelled with the streams of people, who went back and forth between their settlements, and came across the richest gardens they had ever seen.

Sometimes the people sold foods or goods in other settlements. But often they simply travelled to spend time with the others and to talk, eat and dance together.

In the seventh settlement, the amazed visited, an elder approached the wonderer, and asked them about their plans.

“I lost my way and came across your wonderful country. I never heard of it. What is its name?”

“Why do you require to know?”

“Oh, I’m just curious.”

“We know what is happening outside, the devastation, the throttling of everything that is good and has potential. We do not wish to have any part in that.”

Thrim-Asa-Kahi blushed, fighting with anger and embarrassment, in equal measures. But an inner voice warned them that it might be dangerous to reveal who they were, or to give room to their indignation. They were probably in danger already.

As if reading the mind of the agitated, the elder nodded and said: “You have a choice: we can blindfold you and take you to a place from where you can’t find us again. Or you can tell us

everything about you, and we will judge whether or not you may stay in our country.”

The agitated swallowed. But with a sudden clarity of mind, they responded: “I will gratefully accept your offer to blindfold me and return me to the other lands. As a sign of my gratitude, I offer you some advice. Don’t let anyone from the outside enter your region. The next stranger might betray you. You’re not safe!”

Again with knowing in their eyes, the elder said: “I see you. I hear you. And I give you permission to carry our country in your heart. May the memories bring you joy and wisdom.”

Thrim-Asa-Kahi felt a strange sensation in their throat and their eyes suddenly filled with water.

The elder smiled. “You are not a bad person. If you allow yourself to use all your senses to experience and understand what is and what can be, then you can evolve.”

That night the stranger was blindfolded and taken on an exhausting journey. Seven suns later, they fell asleep directly after the group stopped. When the captive woke up, their guides were gone and a knife lay in their lap. They cut the ropes that bound their hands and feet, tore off the blindfold and found themselves on a hill under a starlit sky.

The guides had left some food, and a rough map which told the unbound that they still had some way to go before they would reach the hills of their people.

The next morning, deep in thoughts, the wanderer reached a river. Tall fir trees grew along the shore and a large rock overhang the water. The ponderer sat down on the rock, crossed their legs and closed their eyes.

“What purpose do I serve?” they whispered.

“What purpose do I serve?” they asked the wind.

“What purpose do I serve?” they began to chant.

When they stopped, eyes still closed, they said: “I labelled my skills as superior. I protect the superiority of my skills by determining how my skills are to be practised, by ensuring that no one can present skills superior to mine and by restricting the number of acceptable skills. This way I keep people focused on those skills that make me and my fellow peacocks appear superior to everyone else.”

The thinker shot to their feet, eyes wide open, and spat into the river. “Pah! What a despicable purpose! Worse, no purpose at all. Just the gold-lacing of my self-image. Worse, it’s cowardice and stupidity. I deprive my planet of most of its potential only to appear superior. There is little that can be called less inferior than that!”

Angry, the aroused turned away from the river and resumed their journey home, their mind busy with reflecting on everything that had brought them to this point.

The weather seemed to share their mood, constantly changing the colours of the clouds, teasing the senses with warm and cold winds, with sunshine and rain.

When Thrim-Asa-Kahi came to familiar lands, the sky cleared and after another sun, they reached the settlement of their people.

Filled with thoughts of self-reproach, but also with the first seeds of a plan, Thrim-Asa-Kahi called for a meeting of their people and told them about the journey, their discoveries and their thoughts.

Of course, the listeners, including their family, were afraid and didn’t comment. They knew that Thrim-Asa-Kahi was one of the peacocks who had ordered the enforcers to tyrannise the planet.

Thrim-Asa-Kahi was not surprised nor did they blame their people. Instead they used the following suns to make

themselves useful, giving a hand here and telling a story there, hoping to build trust and meanwhile letting their plans mature.

About two moons after Thrim-Asa-Kahi's arrival, enforcers from the capital were sighted in the region, and it became known that they were searching for the missing peacock.

"Have you run away?" their parents asked, suspiciously.

"No. I was enchanted by spring, and it called me to the lands of my people."

"What will you do now?"

Thrim-Asa-Kahi smiled. "With the help of my people, I could issue a challenge."

"Why do you need our help and what challenge?" their parents asked as more curious people gathered around them.

"The challenge I propose is suicide unless you decide to tell everyone on the planet about it. Because if the challenge is known by everyone, then the peacocks in the capital will have no choice but to accept it."

"What is the challenge?" a child asked excitedly.

Thrim-Asa-Kahi smiled. "This is the challenge: I am a craftsman and a peacock, and as such I want to test what happens if everyone was empowered and enabled to use their individual skills to the best of their ability, without reference to anyone, only bound by the principle of doing their best and not causing harm. Thus I challenge superiority, and I say that my experiment will prove that superiority is indeed inferior because it only ever applies to a few while a vast ocean of potentials is buried by those who must be the best. And I will add the following piece of information: unfortunately the leaders in the capital have been taken ill, and I will go with these good enforcers because I have the medicine that will heal my fellow leaders. The medicine teaches us that there is no gain in



superiority. There is only gain in exploration, learning and most of all in living, in feeling the warm breeze on our faces, in inhaling the fresh air of spring, in feeding our eyes on the lush greens of nature, in letting the sun warm our bodies, hearts and souls, and in enjoying each other and everything we are capable of — without causing harm. We were savages once, bruised shadows of our potentials. We erred on our way to live a full life, by elevating some of us. But now, we can find out what we are capable of if we empower each other. Stand tall and see how much we can achieve and thrive if we work hand in hand and marvel at each other's talents.”

By the time Thrim-Asa-Kahi reached the capital, the planet had been roused, and many people lined the streets to cheer the challenger who walked side by side with the enforcers, smiling and waving.

The peacocks in the capital had many faults, but none of them was stupid, and when the news of the challenge had reached them from all corners of the planet, they knew that they couldn't refuse it. Moreover they didn't want to. They had made themselves into peacocks, but they were still the people of this planet, and like everyone else, they couldn't resist a good challenge, least of all a challenge as intriguing as this one.

And so, the peacocks, including Misa, the supreme leader, welcomed Thrim-Asa-Kahi with smiles and praise. And some of them couldn't help pretending that they, too, had been making plans for just such a challenge.

After only a few full moons and with the help of the hidden country's people, many new inventions, flourishing trade, plans for inspiring buildings, thriving people — all of this already indicated that Thrim-Asa-Kahi would win the challenge, even though the clerks, who measured the success of empowerment,

insisted that it would take at least twelve springs before they could be certain whether empowerment really was superior to superiority.

Some suns after Thrim-Asa-Kahi's return to the capital, Misa asked them: "What made you consider the potential of empowerment?"

Thrim-Asa-Kahi smiled. 'Wonder. Wonder, Misa. And love. I came across people who are free to be all they can be. They live in a symbiosis with nature and with each other, and that moved me greatly. I was also increasingly worried that these people might fall victim to our selfish and destructive laws. It was my new-found love for these people that inspired the idea of the challenge. But there was more. When I was filled with darkness and dismay about my presumptuousness and about my actions as a so-called leader, I found solace in thinking about my clocks. And suddenly I wondered: what if we are all part of a clock? So long as the gears are spread across the workbench nothing happens. But assemble the clock, interlock the gears, let every single one of them live their full potential, and you have the miracle of measuring time, each part of the clock contributing to the whole. When we empower the individual, it can be at its best, and it will naturally be a part of the whole, bringing the planet alive in the best possible way. And it will be the individual gears which shape the design of a settlement's clock, not the idea of a few people in a far away capital.'

"That is a beautiful thought."

"That's what I thought. Tell me, Misa, what made you think of the challenge to stop fighting?"

Misa chuckled. "Simple. I am small. I was tired of never winning a square fight. I always had to come up with something impossible to have a chance. And suddenly I had this idea: *What*

*if I never have to fight again?* I loved the thought. And truly, by the rivers of my blood, I didn't foresee the transformations."

Thrim-Asa-Kahi smiled a little. "But why did you declare yourself the supreme leader?"

Misa grimaced. "Same, same. I never wanted to fight again, not with my fists nor with my non-existent skills. What will happen to me now?"

Thrim-Asa-Kahi put their head to one side. "Our world is going through another awakening, embarking on another journey to evolve. Join us. It is not as if any of us could claim to have been very clever in our first trial. However, the harm we inflicted cannot be forgotten. We must make amends, and we must forever be marked as the peacocks who nearly destroyed the potentials our planet has to offer."

It took some decades to work out the finer details of empowerment, but eventually no one on this planet felt the need to dominate, compete or punch any more — and they lived happily ever after.'

Many of us smiled.

We opened our eyes, stretched our limbs, and one of us remarked: 'I love the new bit with the elder. They should get a name.'

Several of us agreed and one of us said: 'You changed the names again, and none of your characters has a gender any more.'

The author nodded. 'I invented names which can't be linked to any of our languages because this isn't a story about a specific nation nor is it a story about people of a specific or unspecific gender. This is a story about humans.'

Like the others, I smiled.

But despite our smiles, we all felt heavy. How many stories would it take to reach the hearts and minds of our many nations? How many narratives could we expose and how many glimpses of alternatives could we offer?

This story is told in the book:  
**The end of all wars, planet 1, the roots of war**

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