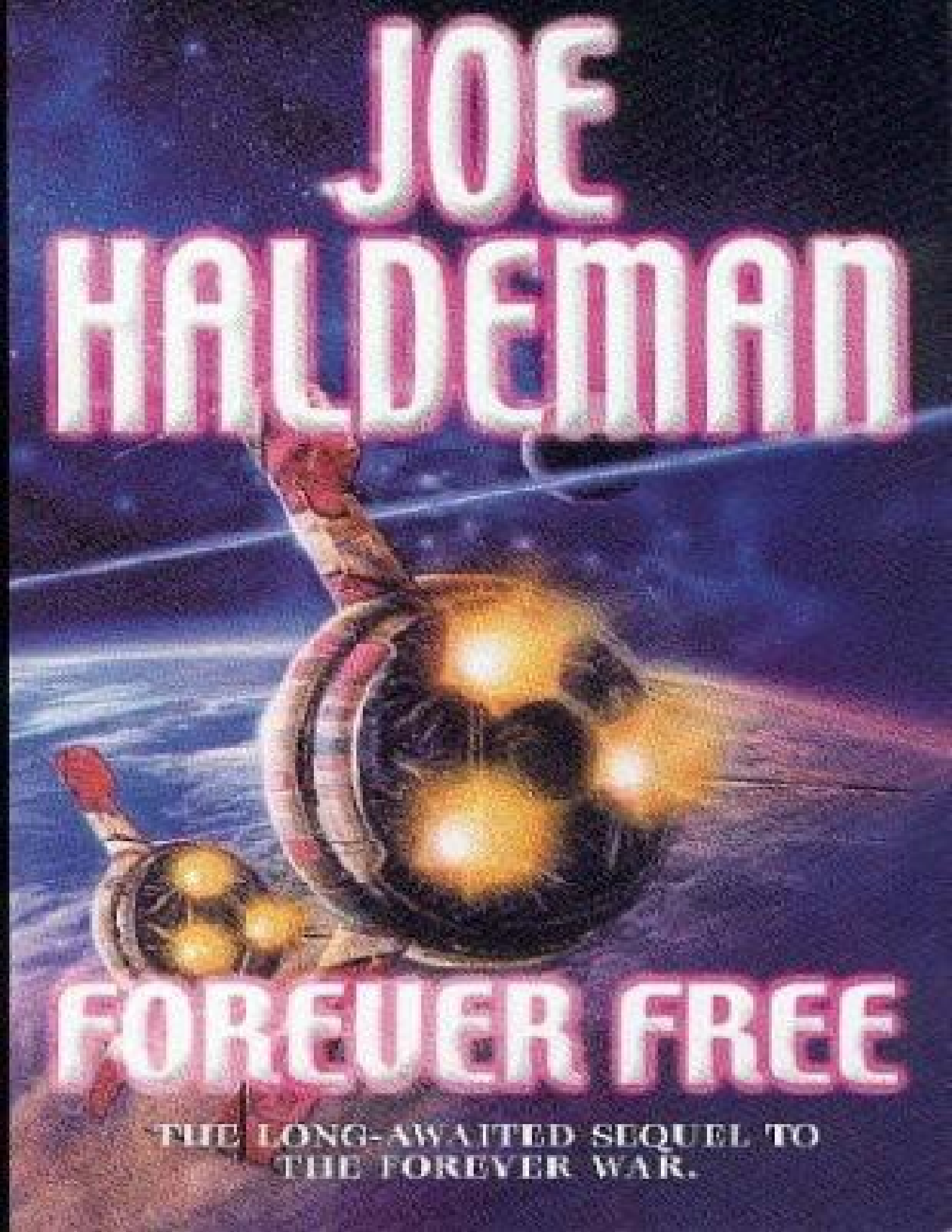
JOE
HALDEMAN
FOREVER FREE
THE LONG-AWAITED SEQUEL TO
THE FOREVER WAR.

Men stop war to make gods
sometimes. Peace gods, who would make
Earth a haven. A place for men to
think and love and play. No war
to cloud their minds and hearts. Stop,
somehow, men from being men.

Gods make war to stop men
from becoming gods.
Without the beat of drums to stop

our ears, what heaven we could make
of Earth! The anchor that is war
left behind? Somehow free to

stop war? Gods make men to
be somewhat like them. So men
express their godliness in war.
To take life: this is what gods
do. Not the womanly urge to make life.
Nor the simple sense to stop.

War-men make gods. To stop
those gods from raging, we have to
find the heart and head to make
new gods, who don't take men
in human sacrifice. New gods,
who find disgust in war.

Gods stop, to make men war
for their amusement. We can stop

their fun. We can make new gods
in human guise. No need to
call to heaven. Just take plain men
and show to them the heaven they could make!

To stop God's wars! Men make
their own destiny. We don't need war
to prove to anyone that we are men.
But even that is not enough. To stop
war, we have to become more. To
stop war, we have to become gods.
-To stop war, make men gods.

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book one

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter one

Winter is a long time coming on this god-forsaken planet, and it stays too long, too. I watched a sudden gust blow a line of cold foam across the grey lake and thought about Earth, not for the first time that day. The two warm winters in San Diego when I was a boy. Even the bad winters in Nebraska. They were at least short.

Maybe we were too quick to say no, when the magnanimous zombies offered to share Earth with us, after the war. We didn't really get rid of them, coming here.

Cold radiated from the windowpane. Marygay cleared her throat behind me. "What is it?" she said.

"Looks like weather. I ought to check the trotlines."

"Kids will be home in an hour."

"Better I do it now, dry, than all of us stand out in the rain," I said. "Snow, whatever."

"Probably snow." She hesitated, and didn't offer to help. After twenty years she could tell when I didn't want company. I pulled on wool sweater and cap and left the rain slicker on its peg.

I stepped out into the damp hard wind. It didn't smell like snow coming. I asked my watch and it said 90 percent rain, but a cold front in the evening would bring freezing rain and snow. That would make for a fun meeting. We had to walk a couple of klicks, there and back. Otherwise the zombies could look through transportation records and see that all of us paranoids had converged on one house.

We had eight trotlines that stretched out ten meters from the end of the dock to posts I'd sunk in the chest-deep water. Two more had been knocked down in a storm; I'd replace them come spring. Two years from now, in real years.

It was more like harvesting than fishing. The blackfish are so dumb they'll bite anything, and when they're hooked and thrash around, it attracts other blackfish: "Wonder what's wrong with that guy--oh, look! Somebody's head on a nice shiny hook!"

When I got out on the dock I could see thunderheads building in the east, so I worked pretty fast. Each trotline's a pulley that supports a dozen hooked leaders dangling in the water, held to one-meter depth with plastic floaters. It looked like half the floaters were down, maybe fifty fish. I did a mental calculation and realized I'd probably just finish the last one when Bill got home from school. But the storm was definitely coming.

I took work gloves and apron off a hook by the sink and hauled the end of the first line up to the eye-level pulley wheel. I opened the built-in freezer--the stasis field inside reflected the angry sky like a pool of mercury--and wheeled in the first fish. Worked it off the hook, chopped off the head and tail with a cleaver, threw the fish into the freezer, and then rebaited the hook with its head. Then rolled in the next client.

Three of the fish were the useless mutant strain we've been getting for more than a year. They're streaked with pink and have a noxious hydrogen-sulfide taste. The blackfish won't take them for bait and I can't even use them for fertilizer; you might as well scatter your soil with salt.

Maybe an hour a day--half that, with the kids helping--and we supplied about a third of the fish for the village. I didn't eat much of it myself. We also bartered corn, beans, and asparagus, in their seasons.

Bill got off the bus while I was working on the last line. I waved him inside; no need for both of us to get all covered with fish guts and blood. Then lightning struck on the other side of the lake and I put the line back in anyhow. Hung up the stiff gloves and apron and turned off the stasis field for a second to check the catch level.

Just beat the rain. I stood on the porch for a minute and watched the squall line hiss its way across the lake. Warm inside; Marygay had started a small fire in the kitchen fireplace. Bill was sitting there with a glass of wine. That was still a novelty to him. "So how are we doing?" His accent always sounded strange when he first got back from school. He didn't speak English in class or, I suspected, with many of his friends.

"Over the sixty percent mark," I said, scrubbing my hands and face at the work sink. "Any better luck and we'll have to eat the damned things ourselves."

"Think I'll poach a big bunch for dinner," Marygay said, deadpan. That gave them the flavor and consistency of cotton.

"Come on, Mom," Bill said. "Let's just have them raw." He liked them even less than I did. Chopping off their heads was the high point of his day.

I went to the trio of casks at the other end of the room and tapped a glass of dry red wine, then sat with Bill on the bench by the fire. I poked at it with a stick, a social gesture probably older than this young planet.

"You were going to have the art zombie today?"

"The art history Man," he said. "She's from Centrus. Haven't seen her in a year. We didn't draw or anything; just looked at pictures and statues."

"From Earth?"

"Mostly."

"Tauran art is weird." That was a charitable assessment. It was also ugly and incomprehensible.

"She said we have to come to it gradually. We looked at some architecture."

Their architecture, I knew something about. I'd destroyed acres of it, centuries ago. Felt like yesterday sometimes.

"I remember the first time I came across one of their barracks," I said. "All the little individual cells. Like a beehive."

He made a noncommittal noise that I took as a warning. "So where's your sister?" She was still in high school but had the same bus. "I can't keep her schedule straight."

"She's at the library," Marygay said. "She'll call if she's going to be late."

I checked my watch. "Can't wait dinner too long." The meeting was at eight and a half.

"I know." She stepped over the bench and sat down between us, and handed me a plate of breadsticks. "From Snell, came by this morning."

They were salty and hard; broke between the jaws with an interesting concussion. "I'll thank him tonight."

"Old folks party?" Bill asked.

"Sixday," I said. "We're walking, if you want the floater."

" `But don't drink too much wine,' " he anticipated, and held up his glass.