

# FOOLS' HARVEST

ERLE COX



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# **Fools' Harvest**

**Sci-Fi Novel**

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# Prologue

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In presenting this transcript of the Walter Burton manuscript for publication, the editors desire to remind the reader that its main value lies in its being the longest of the fourteen authentic personal narratives extant descriptive of the Australian debacle of 1939. It should be regarded as supplementary, only, to Major General Marsden's "Australian Tragedy," in which the military story of the invasion is dealt with, and to "The Struggle for the Pacific," by Peel and Everard, who treat the subject from the viewpoint of international historians. It must be remembered that, at the time he wrote, Burton was almost entirely ignorant of the great events that were taking place outside of Australia. His conjectures were governed largely by local conditions, and coloured by an appalling environment. His assumptions were, therefore, at times either partially or totally inaccurate.

Taking into consideration his obvious handicaps, however, it is remarkable how nearly Burton's conjectures do approach the facts. Moreover, in every instance in which it is possible to check his narrative in detail, his statements are fully supported, though in many places his dates are open to correction. This chronological haziness is due, probably, to the difficulty he experienced in writing up his diary regularly. That he succeeded in keeping a continuous record of his experiences at all, in the circumstances, reflects the determination of his character. We have allowed



his dates to stand as written, rather than make corrections that may distract the reader's interest from his story. For this reason, too, explanatory comment has been inserted in the text in brackets.

Much difficulty has been experienced in tracing the history of Burton's manuscript. There is no doubt it was begun, if not completed, while he was an inmate of the notorious concentration camp at Carrington, the suburb of Newcastle, in 1948. It came into the possession of Mr. Rex Graham, Burton's nephew, on the death of his father, Fergus Graham, in 1967. Mr Graham, however, states that he can barely recollect his uncle, Walter Burton, and has no idea of how his father obtained the manuscript. His only memories of Burton are of a big, dark man who used to tell him stories and make him laugh. He was at the time no more than six years of age. Following the policy of the "Paramount Power," he was separated from his parents when he was ten years old. By then, however, his uncle's visits to his parents had ceased for some time. When, after the Pacific War of 1966, he again rejoined his father, his mother had been dead for several years, and Fergus Graham was a broken man. Suffering had made him morose and uncommunicative, and beyond telling him that Walter Burton had been shot, he does not remember him making any other reference to his brother-in-law.

It can only be assumed that, by some underground means, Burton succeeded in having the manuscript passed on to Fergus Graham before his execution, which probably took place in 1952. Such an incriminating document would, no doubt, have been jealously guarded. The habit of secrecy

that became second nature with those who lived under the iron rule of the "Paramount Power" may account for Fergus Graham's reticence with his son in connection with the documents, Mr. Rex Graham relates that he was entirely unaware of the value of the bundle of papers until, when examining them, he came across the few disconnected pages of the diary that were written in longhand. The lines he was able to decipher with great difficulty impressed him with their importance, and prompted him to hand the manuscript to the authorities of the University of Canberra.

Why Burton retained these longhand pages must remain an insoluble mystery. They suggest that Fergus Graham could never have examined the papers carefully, or he would certainly have destroyed them. Although economy of space in using shorthand in writing his story may have influenced Burton, there can be no doubt that his primary motive was secrecy. His training as a journalist enabled him to use a script that would be most likely to baffle any agent of the "Paramount Power" into whose hands the story may have fallen. It is evident from the first chapter of the narrative that, in 1948, Burton was engaged in "subversive activities"—that comprehensive offence that filled so many graves. The ruthless methods adopted by the "Paramount Power" in preventing the truth of conditions in Australia reaching the outside world must have made either the writing or the possession of the record a perilous undertaking.

The condition of the manuscript itself bears grim evidence of the days of its origin. There are more than twenty different kinds and sizes of paper, which was

probably filched by Burton from any available source. It varies between common wrapping paper and some fifty leaves that were evidently torn from a ledger. With the exception of some half a dozen pages in ink, the entire story is written in pencil. This is so faint in places that chemical means were necessary to restore it for transcription. Burton used, evidently as an extra precaution, three systems of shorthand. This, and the condition of the papers, greatly increased the difficulty of transcription, and we are deeply indebted to Mr. J. H. Stevens, the Government shorthand expert, for the care he has taken in the long and arduous work.

Unfortunately, the inferior quality of some of the paper used by Burton, Burton, combined with time and dampness, have damaged a few passages of the script beyond repair. In these instances we have filled in the blanks as carefully as possible by following the reading of the text. After careful consideration, we have decided to suppress several passages of Burton's narrative. These, however, with one exception, are short, and at most do not exceed two paragraphs in any one abridgment. In taking this step, we are influenced by our opinion that the appalling character of the disclosures may cause great distress to people now living. This opinion applies particularly to the longest omission, some 2,000 words, in which Burton tells of the conditions in the women's concentration camps at Carmel and Mundaring, Western Australia. In so doing we follow the example of Peel and Everard, in "The Struggle for the Pacific," in which they say, in reference to the same subject, that while there are some episodes of the struggle that must

never be forgotten, there are others which, for the sake of humanity, must be obliterated from memory.

As in so many other instances, biographical detail regarding Walter Burton, other than that obtainable from his narrative, is almost non-existent. It is a tribute to the thoroughness of the efforts of the "Paramount Power" that, after two decades of occupation of Australia, documentary records are almost as scarce as they are of Rome or Greece after twenty centuries.

As he was married, and had an infant son in 1939, it may be assumed that Burton was then, at least, 25 years of age. His reference to the first Great War, of which he remembers nothing, tends to confirm the belief that he was born about 1914. Of his parentage nothing is known, though there is record of a pastoral family in the Victorian Western District, the head of which was a Walter Burton, that suggests some connection. Even the date of his death is uncertain, but as the events he records do not go beyond 1952, it may be assumed he became a victim of the tragic and ill-advised attempt at rebellion in that year. There can be no doubt that in 1948 he was a member of one of the many underground organisations that were actively plotting against the "Paramount Power." Evidently he was, so far, not a suspect; otherwise he must then have shared the fate of his friend, Clifford, which is an example of the policy adopted by the authorities that suspicion and guilt were synonymous.

However, it is apparent that Walter Burton became one of the thousands of desperate men who held that death was preferable to life under the "Paramount Power." The loss of his wife and child had converted him into a fierce and



relentless enemy of the oppression. His life in the labour camp at Carrington added to his hatred. Apparently, for several years he had disassociated himself from Fergus Graham, and his dearly loved sister, Lynda Graham, so as to save them from any suspicion of being involved in his patriotic and dangerous plots. He must have been lonely as well as desperate. One cannot but feel that, in the end, he must have welcomed death when it came. At that time, Australia had still to -undergo another 14 years of humiliation and abasement, before its relief by the Pacific Protocol of 1966, when a bare 2,000,000 of its former population of 7,000,000 white inhabitants survived to face, undaunted, the task of rebuilding the nation.

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July 15, 1975.

# Chapter I

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"And were there really shops full of lollies and toys once upon a time, Uncle Wally?" Rex asked dubiously.

"Plenty of them, towhead," I told him.

He raised his head from my shoulder against which he had been snuggling, and turned for confirmation of the amazing statement to Lynda. As such an idea belonged to the realms of fairy tales in his mind, his appeal to his mother was to unimpeachable authority.

Lynda, looking up from her knitting, nodded her head and added, "And perhaps we shall have them again sometime, darling." Then seeing the few wretched little sweets I had given him, she charged me with spoiling her son—unconscious of the pathos of the indictment.

"What's spoiling?" He was at the age when every new word demanded elucidation.

"Something you, at least, will never suffer from," I told him.

Just then the long-drawn wail of a steam siren came from the mills by the distant wharf. To a thousand men it was a summons to another night of toil. Lynda put aside her knitting and stood up.

"Eight o'clock, REXY boy, bed time!" She held out her hands. With an obedience that was part nature and part training, he slipped off my knees. He bestowed rather a sticky kiss, first on his father and then on me, And turned to

his mother. Fergus and I watched them until Lynda closed the door of the next room behind her.

We sat staring at the smouldering heap of smoky coal slack on the hearth that scarcely took the chill from the room.

I spoke my thoughts aloud. "Spoiling him! Think of it, man! Half a dozen miserable little sweets one wouldn't have given to a beggar child a few years ago! That's spoiling him! The tragedy of it!"

Fergus stirred uneasily in his creaking home-made chair. "Luxury is relative, although we have only learned it lately," he said. "But don't let it get you down, Wally."

"But it does get me down!" I retorted. "I know you and Lynda have carved out some strange kind of paradise for yourselves in the common hell we live in, but I cannot help wondering what Rex and a few thousand kiddies like him will think when they are old enough to know what we have done to them."

"We?" Fergus sounded argumentative.

"Yes, we! You, I and everyone else who survives. We asked for it, and got it. But it's so infernally unfair to them. Dash it, Fergus! it was their heritage more than ours."

"That conscience of yours must be a nasty companion," Fergus grinned. "Don't let it prod you, old boy. Be reasonable, and recognise that neither you nor I, personally, could have altered things one hair's breadth. Kismet!"

"Kismet be blowed!" I came back. "I doubt if in another twenty years the children who are growing up now will accept that explanation."

"Arguing can't help us, Wally—or them." I knew he was trying to turn me off the subject. It was a settled policy of both my sister and Fergus not to let me dwell on the works of the "Paramount Power."

But I felt I had to talk, if only for once. "Sorry old man!" I replied, "but it was the thought of the boy that set me going. This room, your shack here, epitomizes everything. That waste coal you are graciously permitted to buy; this chair you have made yourself; that table—and we stole the wood it was built from; that synthetic muck that Lynda is using to knit undies for the boy, while they take all our wool; and you, mind you Fergus, are lucky in this luxury because you had the good fortune to have trained as a metallurgist, and they want your brains."

"It's you who have the right to grouse, Wally. Lyn worries about your camp life.

"Pah! what matter about me," I said. "We men can stand it, though the yoke does gall. I'm on day shift, not as an act of mercy, but because I have a certain value in these as a working animal," and I held out my blackened and calloused hands. "No, it's the Lyndas and the Rexes of our world who do the suffering. I tell you Fergus—"

Lynda's re-entry cut me short. She went to her chair quietly and took up her work. Then before her fingers began to weave she looked from one to the other of us. Then she smiled. "What is it that is so important I may not hear it?"

Fergus turned a sympathetic eye on me. "Sorry Lyn," I said, "We got talking about twenty-eight south and one hundred and twenty-nine east, and all that."

"Wally, why will you talk of it?" she gently, "it only hurts."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "Don't I know how you two try to help. I do understand, and God knows I am grateful, but my dears, if I don't talk, do you imagine I don't think? That first day is with me in every waking hour."

Fergus looked, and I have no doubt felt, uncomfortable. He hates it to be known that he has been helping anyone. Lyn stretched out her hand, and patted my patched dungaree knee. "Talk of something else, Wally," she pleaded.

"I am sorry Lyn, for letting myself gob," I said contritely. "But it was thinking of Rex and you that started me off. I was wondering what he would think later on."

"He'll stick it out, like two other men I know," she smiled.

"Well," I announced, "one thing I am determined on is that Rex will know the truth when he gets older. I have made up my mind to write the whole thing just as we saw it. If ever we get out of this mess it may be a lesson to remember."

They looked at one another, and I almost smiled at the concern in their faces. Their comment was characteristic of each. Said Lynda, her voice deep with feeling, "Why crucify yourself again, Wally?"

"A small price to pay if the lesson is learned," I replied.

From the practical angle Fergus put in, "And need I remind you of what the P.P. would do if they got hold of your literary efforts. Three minutes trial, three minutes to the nearest wall, and then—phut! Don't be a mug, Wally."

I laughed. "The case hi a nutshell!"

"Besides," he went on, "Suppose you did write it you wouldn't have an earthly hope of doing anything with it."

"It would be worth doing even for the faint chance of getting it through to the next visit of the United States Commission of Inspection," I contended.

"You're right about it being a faint hope," Fergus growled. "Lord! It makes me sick to think how the P.P. hoodwinks those futile Commissions. And then our lords and masters have the nerve to publish their reports to tell us of the 'broad humanity of their administration.' I'd like to have five minutes up a dark lane with the American gent who wrote that phrase."

"Do you think they are really hoodwinked?" I asked Fergus. "They might be playing possum. You know the Yanks are not fools exactly, as a rule."

"If they're not," he retorted sourly, "those reports must be a salve to the national conscience. Anyway, it wouldn't make any difference to us."

Then Lynda returned to the attack. "Listen, Wally, why take the risk now. We have only twelve years to endure before the evacuation. You could do it then."

"Evacuation!" I snorted. "Lynda, we've got to face the fact sooner or later. There is not going to be any evacuation."

"But the Treaty of Berlin!" she gasped, her glance going from me to Fergus.

He nodded his head. "I'm afraid Wally is right."

"But how could they—" her voice broke.

"Lyn, old girl," I said, "we must recognise now that so far as Australia is concerned, the Treaty of Berlin was a complete washout. At the time the Powers gave the P.P. twenty years' right of occupation during the period of



rehabilitation, each of them knew it would be permanent. The clause was a sop to their consciences. Think for a moment! Who is going to enforce the evacuation obligation? Not Berlin or Rome—their people wouldn't allow another war, for one thing. Can Britain, even with the best will in the world? Russia has too much internal trouble to bother about anything else. And, as for the United States, they'll utter pious platitudes, and fall back on the national policy of non-intervention. No! we're finished!"

[Burton did less than justice to the United States. Washington was fully aware of the danger arising from the twenty years' occupation clause. It was with the object of ultimately enforcing it that the Pan-American Confederation was formed, which made the evacuation of Australia the leading plank in its policy of control of the Pacific—a policy that bore fruit in 1966.—Eds.]

"Yes," added Fergus, "and the deuce of it is that the P.P. can use the evidence of the American Commissions of Inspection to prove their justification for sitting tight. They are treating us with kindness and generosity, and we are repaying them with savage hostility, and are totally unfitted to govern ourselves."

"I'm afraid this is a nasty shock for you, Lynda," I said.

She smiled up at us both. "Not so much as you would think. I suppose we all thought it before, and have not put it into words."

That was like my sister. Her pluck was always unconquerable, and I never knew her try to dodge an issue, however disagreeable. I think the hard knocks only welded her closer to Fergus.

"I'm afraid," I said, "I'll have to make a move to the camp. My permit is only till 10.30, and the blighters will cancel it for keeps if I'm late."

"Wait," Lyn said, jumping up. "I have some scones."

"Not on your life," I laughed. "I'm not eating your scones. You two would give your hides to feed me, but you're not going to!"

"Oh! Wally!" she was a little hurt at my refusal.

"Don't be sore with me, Lyn," I protested. "I know you want me to have them. If you and Fergus won't have them Rex must. He is more important than I am."

"But I made them for you," she pleaded.

"And I am sure you did. But—" my eyes fell on her knitting, "How many meals did you go without to buy that wretched wool substitute for towhead's undies? Now, the truth!"

Lyn looked guilty. "He must have his clothes."

"Surely!" I answered, "and therefore you and Fergus must develop a streak of lean in your physical bacon, and yet you want me to eat your scones. No, my dear girl! Honesty before social polish is my newest motto."

Fergus grinned at me, understanding. "He's a dour dell, Lyn, and it will take more than you to move him."

"Oh! You men!" She resigned herself to the inevitable. "But Wally, please don't write anything," she asked, returning womanlike to another problem. "I'll give no promises, clear."

I stood up, nerving myself for the real reason of my visit. "Lyn, I've something to say that will hurt a bit."

She stood silent, and waiting.

"I'm afraid I will have to cut out my visits to you—at least for a while."

She put out her hand in appeal.

"You know," I hurried on, "I'm mixed up in things we don't talk about, and the risk of bringing suspicion on you and Fergus is not fair. My coming here is too dangerous for you."

"But you're not suspect?" Her voice caught, and fear came to her eyes.

"Honestly, Lyn, I think not." I reassured her. "You know how careful we are, and the precautions we take. If they suspected me I should have been picked out before now. But the risk is always there. Sooner or later—well, we can't afford to take risks."

"Were you followed?" asked Fergus anxiously.

"Yes," I laughed, "but that is mere routine. Every man who is given leave at night has a trailer. Mine's cooling his heels outside, and, by hove! I'm going back through the swamp, and I'll make them cooler before he has finished with me."

"Well, perhaps," Lynda said wistfully, "you can send us messages through Bob Clifford."

I was afraid of that, but I had to tell them. "You will have to know sooner or later, Lyn. They got Clifford this afternoon."

Fergus rose to his feet with a curse on his lips, and he was a man who seldom used "language." Lyn covered her eyes with her hands. "Has he been—" The word would not come to her lips.

"No," I replied, "but it's almost worse. They have drafted him for the Yampi mines."

"Have you seen anything or is it hearsay?" asked

"I saw him in the gang as they were being marched to the transport. We just looked at one another. It was too dangerous to give any sign of recognition. But I feel certain he knew that I understood," I explained.

"Did you hear what happened," asked Lyn. There were tears in her eyes.

"Just the usual thing. He and about twenty-five others were called out at afternoon muster, and were marched to the transport direct. No trial or explanations. The yard Commandant announced to the muster that they had been drafted for Yampi."

"That cruiser business last week, I suppose," said Fergus, thoughtfully.

"Most likely," I replied. "But of course they never admit anything. Still, when a hole thirty feet long is blown below the waterline of a perfectly new 15,000 ton cruiser while she is lying at her moorings, we mustn't be surprised if some nasty-minded officer of the P.P. tries to connect us with the joyful event. Have you heard anything about it, Fergus'?"

He shook his head. "You know I don't hobnob with the P.P., but I have picked up enough of the language to overhear that they are boiling with rage about their beastly ship. I think they must have lost about seventy men as well, from scraps of indignation I hear."

"And we'll pay the price, more or less," I added. "But it's worth it."

Lynda put her hand on my arm. "Wally were you—"

But Fergus cut her short. "No questions Lynda. now or ever. By heaven! Wally I'll help—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," I interrupted. "Remember the rule, and it is cast iron, we'll have no married men in the game."

"But—" he began.

"No 'buts' old man," I persisted, "It is too unfair to the women to let you in. Remember what they did to Harry Bell's wife to make him speak, and they say that until she lost consciousness, she screamed to him not to tell."

"Ann Bell only did what any of us would do," said Lynda softly. "Harry did a braver thing by keeping silent." Then she placed her hand through Fergus' arm and looked up at him with a queer little smile on her lips and went on, "Darling, if you ever bought my life at that price I would spit in your face before I died of shame for my husband." And we both knew she meant it. But that is what the P.P. had made of our men and our women.

"Anyway Lyn, dear," I said, "You must see that I have to keep clear of you both."

She nodded. "I'll have to practise what I preach. Good-bye, dearest, and God guard you." She put her arms about me and kissed me.

Fergus came to the door with me. "About that trailer of yours," he whispered, "You won't—" he paused.

"No," I reassured him. "I had thought of it, but it would be too obvious. Not to-night at any rate. I know who he is, and we can do it some other time. I'll take him a dance in the swamp, and with luck he might get pneumonia. Anyway, we have him on the list of pests, and it's only a question of time before his name is struck off."

He wrung my hand. "Good night and good luck old man. Try to get news of yourself through to us."

"It's a promise," I replied, and walked off slowly towards the camp to give my follower time to sight me. It is a remarkable coincidence that four evenings later he was accidentally run down and killed by a motor lorry on the Maitland Road.



# Chapter II

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When I made my boast that I would put the story of our tragedy into writing I had no idea that the job would prove so strenuous. Dodging the "blowflies," as we call the P.P. spies in our camp home at Carrington, with its barbed wire walls and primitive housing, has been the least of my troubles since I began. Although the average camp population is 5,000 men, the authorities did not include a writing room among its amenities. Much less did they consider a supply of writing paper necessary. Letters from without are not regarded with favour by the powers that be. The few that reach us are carefully read and tested with chemicals for unauthorised communications before they are handed over—if ever. Letters outward bound are subject—few as they are, to an even more rigorous scrutiny. Such paper as I have collected so far has been obtained by methods which, in the early part of 1939, I would have regarded as criminal. To-day I look upon its acquisition as a game of chance with the odds against the player.

Now I have sufficient paper with which to begin, and two extremely illicit lead pencils, the problem arises to find a place in which to use them with any approach to comfort. Fortunately, I can trust my shack mates, though my excursion into literature does not add to their comfort—or safety for that matter. Perhaps a description of the camp will better explain the difficulties. Our shacks are laid out in orderly streets on low ground, that is a bog in winter and a

dust pile in summer. Each iron shack is 10 ft. by 10 ft. and 8 ft. high. On the walls on either side of the door are fixed three superimposed bunks, 3 ft. wide. The 4 ft. space between them is bare. Since we own nothing but the clothes we stand in, the absence of wardrobes is no hardship. Although there are six bunks in each shack the registered inhabitants number twelve. They are conducted on the Box and Cox System. The day shift sleeps in them at night and vice versa.

To the north we would have had a fine view of the Hunter were not the wharf that forms the boundary occupied by a barbed wire protected platform decorated with machine guns. They added a wire netting screen after some choice spirits among us knocked out a few of the machine gun guards with stones during the hours of darkness. To the east a similar platform screens the town of Newcastle from view, while the machine guns provide for a cross fire down the streets of the camp should the need arise—as it has on three occasions. The south side is built up with a maze of electrified wire, and on the west are the works once known as the Broken Hill Proprietary Steel Mills. The 200 yard passage between the camp and the mills where we work is also heavily protected on both sides by barbed wire lest we lose our way between the works and our camp.

However, I have found that, by leaving the door of our shack slightly open at night, a ray from the guard light nearest us gives sufficient light by which to write. Beyond inventing new adjectives to qualify the word "fool" my shack mates raise no objection to my writing. Anything done against rules is something of an entertainment to them, and