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Content Writing — Feature Article

Excerpt from a reflective lockdown article

It was a crisp day in March when everything changed. The air was light, and the fresh winds were softly breezing through the rows of apple trees that stretched as far as the eye could see. The sky was warm and cloudless; its blue hue resting along the jagged mountain peaks off in the distance. From the valley floor, the orchard offered a breathtaking view from atop its lush canopy. The farm was quiet, save for a few fantails trilling their morning song. Despite the headlines rolling in from around the world, I felt safe in this remote pocket of New Zealand's South Island. I'd only meant to work a few weeks before continuing my travels across the island. Naively, I assumed New Zealand's vast oceans would keep danger at bay. A week earlier, the British government — and my family — had urged me to come home while I still could. I took it seriously. In a crisis, you turn to family. But I kept circling the same thought: every airport would be a relay of risk. Why run towards it? Here, fear hadn't reached us — yet. The serenity broke with a bellow from beneath the canopy. A rumbling voice carried from the treeline that met the farmhouse. I thought it couldn't be for me. Then it came again. With the sack of apples dragging at my shoulders, I waddled towards a gap in the trees. Henry, my travelling companion, loomed a few metres ahead, equally bemused. At the end of the track, the farmer — wiry, red-cheeked, beard like steel wool — gestured frantically for us. His urgency clashed with the slow rhythm of our day; Henry even fished an apple from his bag for a snack. The farmer roared once more, louder than before. "DROP THE SACKS!" We shared a look. He'd never told us to dump our haul — his livelihood — on the ground. He hated to see an apple wasted. Something was wrong. We let the sacks fall. Red fruit rolled into the lush grass and down the track as we ran. By the time we reached the courtyard, a static hiss crackled from behind the barn. An old radio perched on a broken red tractor; the farmer hunched over the engine, fiddling for a signal. The scene looked like something from another decade. Then a voice cut through the interference — New Zealand's Prime Minister. I stood, breath held, as the announcement grew clear. The message was simple, unmistakable: prepare for lockdown.

Research & Analysis — Transitioning International Systems: Has Sino-US Foreign Policy Provoked a Shift to Multipolarity?

Excerpt from postgraduate dissertation (neorealist perspective)

The twenty-first century international stage is arguably becoming increasingly unstable, with rivalries between great powers returning to international politics for the first time since the end of the Cold War in 1991. Whilst the Cold War era saw the presence of two great powers locked in a security competition, commonly referred to as a system of bipolarity, one can infer that the resulting American victory over the Soviet Union ushered in a new era of American global dominance. This liberal world order cemented America's position as sole superpower, thus simultaneously providing America with the hegemonic status that has ensured its survival since. In fact, this pursuit of global dominance, as well as the additional effort in keeping "other great powers from controlling either Asia or Europe" (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.368) ushered in an era known as unipolarity. A system of unipolarity refers to an international system where one state holds power unrivalled by others. The unipolar state benefits from asymmetric capabilities which, as with the United States, often coincides with a period of relative peace among major powers. However, the twenty-first century has seen the relative decline of American power and a diffusion of influence to rising states — most notably China — suggesting a shift towards a multipolar environment characterised by renewed security competition. Assessing this transition through a neorealist lens highlights how the distribution of power, rather than regime type or ideology, shapes state behaviour. In this context, foreign policies in Washington and Beijing not only reveal the changing structure of the system but may also have accelerated that shift.

Narrative Writing — Novel Excerpt

Debut manuscript

It had been some months since Madeleine scrambled ashore in Greater England with her mother and father. The blustery autumn winds had swept away the blanket of brown mahogany that once covered the horizon, leaving behind crystal-tipped soil and bitterly cold nights. Madeleine had never known cold like this. It seeped into her bones, slid beneath her blankets, and robbed her of sleep. It haunted her at dawn and lingered long after dusk. Even her mother's attempts to warm her seemed futile, though Madeleine thanked her nonetheless. She often wondered how much worse it might be without her mother's increasingly bony embrace. Madeleine was not happy. She was young, and still naïve. She clung to the lies she had been told before the crossing: promises of school, friends, peace. None of it had appeared. With each passing day, she began to believe it had all been a dream. And sure enough, that dream eroded piece by piece. She missed the hope that once followed her family everywhere. But she missed her father most of all. She often drifted into a trance, dwelling on the last moment she saw him. Each tear she shed stung as it ran down her cheek, the cold conspiring with the men who had dragged his body away. The bite of the wind turned her grief into anger. Anger at her father for leaving. Anger at the men who denied her a goodbye. Anger at her mother for doing nothing. And most of all, anger at herself. Guilt clawed its way from within. Was it her fault they had ended up on that beach? Was her father's death because of her? Each day she remained frozen in the past, as if the ice had trapped her beside his body. For all her mother's best intentions, life had become a living hell. She could not disguise the barbarism and oppression inside the camp. Officers and guards despised the prisoners. They treated stray dogs and diseased rodents with more respect than the "foreign scum" they watched over. Madeleine's English improved quickly out of fear of reprisals. Her mother had been warned by a sinister officer that her place was secured only by the timely hanging of another. She did not dare ask him what he meant, but the women in their cabin told her. A woman had been hanged for refusing him when he forced himself upon her. Her thick German accent had sealed her fate. It was a grim reminder: men were cruel everywhere. Stay out of sight, give them what they wanted, and teach Madeleine to speak English clearly — and only when needed. Survival depended on it. The camp stretched along the coast, one of many strung westward as far as the eye could see. Women and children lived in crowded wooden cabins near the shoreline. The huts were basic and offered little defence against the gale-force winds rolling over the dunes. To the west lay the washing and dining areas, long narrow shelters exposed to the elements beneath thin corrugated roofs. At the camp's centre stood a larger concrete building. Its crumbling walls betrayed its age, yet it remained in use. No one knew what happened inside. Only women were taken there, always under armed guard, and none ever spoke of it. Even her mother, usually honest to a fault, gave vague replies when questioned. "Don't worry about it, sweetie." "It's just a factory where we work." "I'll tell you when you're older." The evasions only sharpened Madeleine's curiosity. Sometimes convoys of lorries arrived in the night, working under floodlights before vanishing west along the coast. Twice she had seen it happen. When she asked her mother about it, the response was uncharacteristically sharp. Her mother seized her wrist and pulled her close. "Enough now, Madeleine! You must leave it. I mean it!" Her mother walked away, leaving Madeleine to cradle her sore wrist. It wasn't anger that had fuelled

the grip, but fear. A fear Madeleine had never seen in her before. It unsettled her more than any honest answer would have done. She began to sense the same fear among all the women in camp — fear like hens awaiting a fox. One thing was clear: the answers she sought would not be given. She would have to find them herself.

Board Game Design — Space Conquest: Grimnir's War

Excerpt from published rulebook (objective, setup, core loop, endgame)

Objective Conquer all eight planets to secure victory before Grimnir's black hole consumes the system. Components • Planet cards (8), resources (Hydrogen, Titanium, EPS), action cards (Conqueror, Trade, Diplomat), Bandit Base and Alien Contact decks, battleships, motherships, dice. Setup 1) Place the board at the centre. 2) Each player selects a home planet and takes its card and mothership. 3) Deal action cards: 3 Conqueror, 3 Trade, 2 Diplomat to each player. 4) Give each player 1 Hydrogen, 1 Titanium, 1 EPS. 5) All generals start on Grimnir's Void. 6) Place Bandit Base and Alien Contact decks beside the board. Turn Order Highest roll goes first; play proceeds clockwise. Passing through Grimnir's Void grants one of each resource. How to Play (core loop) • Move: Roll and advance your general. • Gather & Trade: Collect resources to build fleets (trade 3 Hydrogen + 2 Titanium + 1 EPS for 1 battleship). • Planets: On an opponent's planet, declare war or pass; on your planet, collect its resource; on an unowned planet, purchase or go to auction. • War: Up to 6 battleships per side; dice resolve losses. Defending motherships may deploy when fleets are destroyed; they are defensive only, with two lives. Endgame Eliminate rivals by winning wars or through decisive planetary control. The game ends when a player owns all eight planets.