

Karma Foxx – Part 2

Karmah Foxx

PART 2

Four years after her confrontation with her history teacher, Karmah stood on stage behind a lectern, indisputable valedictorian of her graduating class of 338 students. She looked out over the neat rows of chairs on the gymnasium floor at her fellow classmates, all human. Her accomplishments in the program read like the bio of the honoree at an awards banquet: 4.0 GPA, Honor Society, Volleyball team captain and MVP, black belt in Shito-Ryu, Editor of the school's paper ("The Eastsider"), founder of the student chapter of the United Minority Rights Action Coalition, a litany of volunteer community service projects, and numerous other academic and athletic awards. But the accomplishment of greatest pride to her personally was publishing The Corrected History of Recombinants in America and subtitled "An Analysis of the Treatment of Human/Animal Genetic Transmutation in Public High School Curricula." It was a book that took her nearly three arduous years to write and that won journalism award. It was also instrumental in Mrs. Stein's decision to hand in her resignation at the just prior to the start of Karmah's senior year.

On her graduation night Karmah stood before the school, despite all odds, the top of her class. The dubious presence of Mrs. Stein sitting in the audience on the front row of the bleachers made her uncomfortable. Mrs. Stein wasn't smiling. When others clapped after Karmah was introduced, Mrs. Stein sat on her hands and scowled. When the audience got quiet in anticipation of Karmah's speech, Mrs. Stein broke out in a coughing fit. Karmah began speaking, clear and strong, and Mrs. Stein dropped her handbag with a startling thud. She fumbled with it on the floor. Something metallic rolled out

noisily across the floor toward the rows of students in the center of the floor. Karmah spoke eloquently, refusing to allow Mrs. Stein's antics to ruin her moment of victor. Mrs. Stein chased what she had dropped clumsily out into the gymnasium. Karmah thanked her parents for standing behind her and extolled the support of family. Mrs. Stein tripped and fell into the Jason Haige on the end of the third row. Karmah complimented her classmates, praised them for looking beyond their differences and embracing individual strengths, and challenged them to carry their open-minded attitudes with them into the world. Mrs. Stein returned conspicuously to her seat, laughing nervously at her seatmates, snorted, and laughed again. Karmah invited Principal Waller to stand and thanked him for fostering a safe educational environment for all people of all races and creeds. The audience applauded. Mrs. Stein threw something toward the center of the room. Smoke rose thickly from a teargas cylinder. Several young men in gas masks ran into the gymnasium. Students coughed and sputtered. Parents rose and tripped over one another to get down the bleachers to their children. Karmah stood frozen in shock at the chaos blossoming below her on the floor, watching the men fearfully, ready to fight or flee. But the men rushed upon Principal Waller instead and knocked him off his feet. They followed him to where he tumbled and one of them kicked him. Mrs. Stein put on a gas mask and bounded up the bleachers to the top row. Karmah's parents circled around the expanding cloud of gas toward the back of the stage, presumably to protect Karmah from the attackers who were assaulting Principal Waller. Karmah snapped into action, leaped off the stage, and sprang through the stinging cloud of gas toward Principal Waller. Several security guards entered the gymnasium. Mrs. Stein pulled a revolver from her handbag. Karmah shouted for her parents to get down and planted a fist in the lower left back of one of Principal Waller's attackers. She stood over the Principal, the tear gas burning in her eyes and shrouding her from Mrs. Stein's frustrated aim. Karmah stepped into Waller's second assailant's attack on her,

blocked his wild swing, and drove her elbow into his sternum with a crack. The third swung his fist at the same time and missed. Karmah executed a graceful yoko geri to his mid-section as he leaned off balance from his impotent swing. The security guards entered the fray, dragging the men Karmah had disabled toward the door. Karmah darted out behind the stage to cover with her parents. Mrs. Stein, her plan foiled, rushed down the bleachers and out a side door. She was never seen in Greenville ever again. Police and ambulances arrived. Everyone went home. Karmah never got to finish her speech. Diplomas were all mailed to students.

END OF PART 2

Karmah Foxx – Part 1

Karmah Foxx

PART 1

“Karmah Foxx.”

Karmah casually raised a paw to confirm her presence in Mrs. Stein’s 9th grade Eastside High history class. Gossip whispered behind her to her left followed by a snicker. The teacher swept the class with a glance for quiet, but said nothing. Karmah’s ears slunk and she pretended to be distracted with a bent loop in her notebook’s spiral binding.

On her way out of the room after class, Mrs. Stein stopped her.

“Karmah,” she said, “may I speak with you for a moment?”

“What is it, Mrs. Stein?” Karmah replied respectfully.

Mrs. Stein's tone was officious. "I've found it best if Recombinants confine their desk choices to the back of the room. It's less distressing and that makes the environment more conducive to learning for everyone." She smiled pleasantly throughout her well-rehearsed enjoinder. Karmah's ears perked forward and her tail tensed with teenage indignation, but she kept her voice calm.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Stein, I didn't know your class had assigned seating."

"I don't," Mrs. Stein said quickly. "It's just that the other students often get distracted by ... well, you know."

Karmah's eyes flashed with the insinuation. "No," she replied feigning ignorance, "I don't know. Why don't you enlighten me." She subtly bared her fangs and snarled over the "l" in "enlighten."

The threat was not lost to Mrs. Stein, who fidgeted anxiously, but recovered her composure quickly. The classroom was her territory, and the school trained all its teachers on proper handling of Recombinants. Mrs. Stein's training had taught her the importance of making the pack hierarchy clear to canids from the start. She stiffened authoritatively.

"Animals, Karmah," she said, sneering. "Animals running loose in the class room make the human students nervous. You will need to find a seat on the back row from now on."

"I am not an animal!" Karmah countered defiantly, her hackles bristling down her spine. "I am a Recombinant, and I have the same rights as everyone else in the class – pure human and not."

"No, you do not!" Mrs. Stein retorted. "Not in my classroom!"

"We'll see about that!" Karmah shifted her backpack on her shoulder. "Let's go see Principal Waller right now!"

Mrs. Stein glanced nervously around the empty room, afraid the situation might slip from her grasp. Her control and position as head of the pack felt tenuous.

Karmah's parents had already prepped the principal in case of trouble – their daughter was the only Recombinant in 9th grade and one of the only three in the entire school. Karmah could sense Mrs. Stein's desperation and did not miss her instinctive glance around the room that betrayed her mental search for an escape.

Suddenly Mrs. Stein's expression changed and softened and her shoulders relaxed. Karmah braced herself for something coming and felt her own fight instinct coursing in her blood.

"There's no need for that," the teacher replied. "I'm sure we'll come to a resolution tomorrow. I don't want you to be late for your next class. You're dismissed."

The next day, Mrs. Stein announced her new assigned seating policy to her history class. All the students moved obediently as directed when their names were called. When Mrs. Stein had finished rearranging her classroom for the year, Karmah glared at her from where she sat alone in the back row. Mrs. Stein met her scowl with triumphant smugness.

"Today," she announced to the class, "we are going to discuss Recombinant history in America and the importance of legal bans on human/animal genetic transmutation to the stability of ordered society." Mrs. Stein turned toward the whiteboard. Karmah prepared to take detailed notes of every distasteful word her teacher uttered. If the woman wanted to turn her class into a kind of transgenic fox chase, Karmah was prepared to run her a race she'd never forget. "The game is afoot!" Karmah wrote on the top of the page.

END OF PART 1

Feran Wolfpaw – Part 6

Feran Wolfpaw

PART 6

Several days later Feran woke early as usual and checked a board in the lounge just off the barracks for the final duty rosters and passenger manifests for the arks. There were twelve of the giant interstellar transport ships built to carry Earth's entire population of 1,189,732 Recombinants to a planet unimaginatively named "Terraformed Earth One." Each ship was equipped to carry 100,000 passengers in deep, low-metabolic sleep. The assignments of passengers to ships based on species by "complimentarity of biological need" was supposed to be posted any day. Alongside the general passenger distribution manifests, the arks' contingency team assignments were to be posted on "duty rosters." It was the duty rosters that inspired trepidation in Feran and slacked his tail with worry as he approached the peg wall hung with fresh papers bound in stacks on clipboards. There were two possible roles Feran, with his flight training, could be assigned: pilot or co-pilot. He wanted neither – "Responsibility" had become a distasteful word to him – but if he had to fill one, he hoped it wasn't "pilot."

He thought of Allaria. The duty rosters were bundled together on a clipboard by themselves, one sheet per ark. The rest of the assignments were clumped on clipboards alphabetically by Recombinant last names. He picked up the "K" sheaf of papers and flipped through the pages. Allaria wasn't there. His eyes watered and he put the clipboard away quickly.

Feran took down the duty roster clipboard and pawed through it

looking for his name. On the eighth sheet he found it. His ears and shoulders drooped. He had been assigned pilot on the Romulus.

“Dang,” he said. He took consolation in the fact that the probability of something going wrong was near 0, so the only thing he’d likely have to pilot was a shuttle to carry settlers to the surface of Terraformed Earth One. He read the rest of the Romulus’ roster and lingered over one name that made his tail involuntarily sway softly:

“Co-pilot: Karmah Foxx”

“You’re welcome.” Feran started at the voice behind him. It was Donald, peering at him over a cup of coffee.

“What do you mean?” Feran asked.

“She was assigned pilot of the Remus. I pulled some strings and got Shock ‘promoted’ and Karmah re-assigned as your co-pilot. I figure after 20 years in hibernation, that would be a pleasant sight to wake up to. Call it a graduation gift. The rest is up to you.”

“Always watching out for your students. What a guy.” Sarcasm had become Feran’s way of thanking his instructor who had incidentally become as much a friend as he could think of from a human over the past three months.

“Also, I smuggled you a case of bourbon aboard. It’s marked ‘cough medicine’.”

“Thank you, Donald,” Feran said, appreciatively.

“You might need it if she turns out to be a ... well, you know what I mean.”

Feran smiled and then looked serious. “Why do you even care what happens when we leave this rock?”

Donald sighed and looked at his feet. "Repaying a debt, I guess." Feran was expectantly silent, so Donald continued. "Oh, what the heck," he said. "When I was a kid – 5 years old – it had been raining for a week. There was flooding and we were cooped up in the house. When the sun finally came out with no rain in the forecast, my mother took me and my brother to a park to get us out of the house. The park was near a river, and we were fascinated because of all the debris floating in it. We were right along the shore, watching the river, and my mother told us not to go near it, but I was five, what did I know? She turned her back for a moment, and I was at the river's edge. I stepped in the water – you know, just to splash, like little kids do in a puddle? But it was deeper there than I knew. I stepped in and went to my knees. The current was fast and pulled my feet out from under me. Next thing I know the shore is rushing by and I'm getting further and further out from it. The water was rough and fast, and it kept rolling me and pulling me under. I coughed and couldn't swim in it. Once when my head was up I heard my mother screaming my name. I cried out for her, 'Mommy! Mommy!' but the water was in my throat and I couldn't make the words. I was terrified. I was so scared.

"And then, all of a sudden, I feel these strong arms around me and I'm rolled over on my back, looking up at the sun in the clear, blue sky and a voice says, 'It's OK. I've got you. You're safe now. I've got you.' And then I'm sitting on shore, trembling and coughing, and this otter-man gets down on my level and smiles and touches me on the head, really soft. He says, 'Don't worry. My name is Father Benson. You just rest a minute. When you're ready, I'll take you back to your mom.' He sat there with me and looked at the river and talked about the sky and the sun and how good it felt and other things that made me feel happy. And then he stood up and held my hand while we walked back to my mother.

"At first my mom looked angry when she saw us – I think it was

seeing me with a Recombinant – but then she looked at me, and when she looked back at Father Benson, her face was different: soft and ... humble. Anyway, she thanked Father Benson and asked, ‘What can I do to repay you?’ and he said, ‘You just make sure Donald grows up to be a man of peace.’

“Somehow I grew up thinking that meant being a soldier. I joined the navy, believing the water was important to my destiny in some way. That’s when I learned to fly. Anyway, I guess I thought that a man of peace is a man who fights for peace, and that a good soldier is a soldier who carries peace onto the battlefield. I thought that if I was to be a man of peace, the midst of war was the place it was most needed. Sounds kind of naive, I know.”

Feran shook his head and gestured for his friend to continue.

“So, when the Treaty formed the Resettlement Authority and they asked for volunteers, I jumped at the chance. After you all leave there will be no Recombinants left on Earth, except maybe a few stragglers hiding out in the mountains and such.

“Maybe this whole thing is wrong and I’m just doing wrong for the right reason. I don’t know. All I do know is that this is my last chance to repay a debt. If I can just make sure you are ready – really ready – if there is an emergency, and you save all the lives on the ship because I helped you now, then I think I will be the man Father Benson wanted me to become.”

Feran was quiet for some time after Donald finished. “Anyway, that’s why,” Donald added, looking a little embarrassed.

“Donald,” Feran said fondly, “you may just single-handedly restore my respect for humankind. You are truly the man of peace Father Benson hoped you’d become.”

Donald smiled. “Well, congratulations, pilot!” he said and turned to go.

Feran hung the clipboard back on its hook. "I need some of that coffee," he said.

"No coffee for you. Or breakfast," Donald said over his shoulder. "The terraformer's beacon has been idle-green for 30 days now. They're loading you up today."

Feran frowned and his tail curled to his ankles. "Not wasting a minute, are they," he said, but he had more on his mind than his own departure.

"Donald," he said. His voice was deadly serious. Donald stopped and turned to face him inquiringly. Feran continued, his voice tight. "Are the Recomax inmates going?" he asked.

Donald was quiet for some time, searching Feran's face. He'd gotten pretty good at reading Recombinant body language and Feran was certain he was picking up the depth of his anxiety.

"No," he said. His voice was grave and Feran picked up disgust in his tone. "I'm sorry, Feran. The Resettlement Authority determined they would be too much of a security concern, so they were ... put down." Feran felt nauseous and coughed on the sob in his throat.

Eight hours later, stomach growling and naked to the fur, Feran lay back in his hibernation pod next to Karmah's still empty one. Technicians prepped him with monitor leads and I. V. needles and then opened the valve on the sedative cocktail that would put him in an induced comatose state. The last thing he thought before the sedative made his mind go dark for 20 years was that he'd not buried his bottle of Beam on that island in the Bahamas where they collared him.

END

Feran Wolfpaw – Part 5

Feran Wolfpaw

PART 5

Feran, it turned out to his surprise, was deemed to have an aptitude for piloting spacecraft.

“Your stats are getting worse, not better,” Feran’s flight instructor, Donald, informed him as he got out of the simulator.

“It’s gotten boring in there,” Feran replied. “And anyway, I’ll never have to fly an ark. I’ll be asleep the entire trip and the ship will fly itself on auto-pilot.”

“That’s no reason to fly the simulator in somersaults and ram into moons. Your training is for the possibility something goes wrong, and if such a scenario materializes, you will have to be better than good. You should take it more seriously.”

“Yeah, yeah, I heard all that before. I’m done fighting for other people and their causes. If a ‘risk scenario materializes’ I’m looking out for number one, just like everybody else will. The arks are too complicated to learn enough in years, much less a few months, to deal with trouble. All this training is a stupid waste of time.”

“I know you think so now, but light years from Earth with 100,000 hibernating Recombinants depending on you alone to get them out of trouble –”

“Shh!” Feran grabbed Donald’s arm and looked down the hall.

“What?”

“Who is that?” Donald followed Feran’s rapt gaze to another Recombinant and her instructor.

“That’s Karmah. She’s also in the pilot training program – only she takes it seriously.”

Feran continued to stare. Karmah did not notice, engrossed in conversation with her instructor.

“Huh,” Feran replied thoughtfully. “Arctic fox? Mmm, mmm ... just look at that tail!”

Donald rolled his eyes. “Recombinants!” he said. “Down, boy!”

Feran glared at his instructor. “Humans!” he retorted.

END OF PART 5

Feran Wolfpaw – Part 4

NOTE: Part 3 is REALLY short, so here’s part 4 as a bonus for today.

Feran Wolfpaw

PART 4

Sometime late in the evening the patrol boat docked in Miami, but Feran and the others still spent the entire night aboard ship in the cages. Around midnight a deckhand brought bowls of water and slid them through feeding slots under the cage doors. There were no bathroom trips.

“That’s why they put sawdust in the corner of your cage,” Feran’s surly neighbor said bitterly.

Dawn broke for the prisoners – that is how Feran thought of them – a dusky gray straining out of the dark shadows around the hold.

Several Recombinant Control officers bulldozed in shortly after the light of day made its timid skulk amongst the gloomy corners. The Recombinants were removed from their cages and strung together single file, neck-to-neck with chains, the reptilian in front and Feran stationed at the rear. The officers marched them out, collared, manacled, and shackled, onto the deck and down a gangway. On the dock, they were ordered to line up side-by-side to await the arrival of a truck to take them to the Resettlement Facility.

The wait was long, and several small clumps of dock workers gathered to stare and jeer. Feran figured the officers arranged it all on purpose. Two of them stood guard off to the side grinning. Feran smiled back at them politely and nodded at the crowd pleasantly and panted happily as if he didn't understand what they were saying or what was going on. The other prisoners glowered and snarled, baring their teeth, with the effect of delighting the humans and taking the attention off of Feran, so that when the hecklers threw things, they aimed at anyone but him. The poor, dumb beast was terribly boring to pick on when the crowd had the satisfaction of provoking angry humiliation from others as rational as themselves. Cruelty was far more enjoyable than simple brutality.

After about 45 minutes (as Feran reckoned by glances at his chain-mates wristwatch) two Ryder moving trucks arrived. The reptilian was loaded in the back of one and the rest of them, all feline and canine, were herded into the other. The trucks drove away from the port and through the city, and after that Feran wasn't sure. Judging by the speed they traveled and the sounds of other vehicles, he guessed they were on an Interstate. No one spoke for a long time – the ride was noisy and they were sitting in near perfect darkness, except for a sliver of light that twinkled through a break in the seal along one of the doors. Eventually they exchanged names and a few vital facts, but not much more. Except for Feran, the rest

were as sour as his cage neighbor.

At some point they made a stop at a Rest Area and the Recombinants were let out. A canine by the name of Terrence who, like the others, looked to Feran like he'd just as well bite you as say hello, started hesitantly toward the facilities. One of the officers stepped in front of him and barred his way with a rifle.

"Now, where do you think you're going?" he asked.

"Men's room," Terrence replied.

"Now why would you be going there? That there's for men. You ain't no man. They've got a place for you to go right over there." The officer indicated a direction behind Terrence with a thrust of his rifle barrel. They all looked in the direction the officer indicated.

"Dog walk," the sign said. Terrence turned back toward the officer and growled, his ears sharply back and his tail out menacingly behind him. Feran didn't like where the situation was heading. He slipped up beside Terrence and whined softly to get his attention.

"This may not be the best time," Feran said quietly. "They've got rifles and you're chained between two cats with two more canids in tow. You go feral on this monkey and we won't make it 20 yards before we're all full of lead."

Terrence hesitated, read Feran's pleading ears and tail, and backed down. The group made its way to a line of trees and they all did their best to offer one another privacy and some chance at a little dignity. When their business was concluded, they were herded back on the truck and locked in the darkness.

About two and a half hours later the truck rumbled to a stop and they were unloaded in front of a warehouse surrounded by a chain-link fence topped with coils of barbed wire. Inside the

fence dozens of mammal/human hybrids, shackled and collared in groups of three, stood or sat in the shade. Many watched the newcomers being unloaded from the truck. Feran and his band were led to a gatehouse where they had to give their names, ages, and places of birth and then taken into the warehouse.

Inside, the building had been converted into a gigantic barracks, each Recombinant supplied with a mattress on the floor and a blanket. Feran and the other new arrivals were passed off to a gray-headed Recombinant Control officer with a square jaw and a stiff disposition.

“Welcome to the Cape Canaveral Recombinant Resettlement Facility. Those of you with exceptional aptitude or applicable experience will be provided training in the event a risk scenario materializes during your migration to TER-1. Your stay here will not be long. How long depends on how quickly you can be trained. It’s all up to you.”

He then went on to explain the Facility’s rules and routine, but Feran didn’t pay attention. He was confused, hungry, and tired, and he needed to go to the bathroom.

END OF PART 4

Feran Wolfpaw – Part 3

Feran Wolfpaw

PART 3

Feran looked out of the open door of the chopper at the sea below. They were heading west, away from the islands.

“Where are you taking me?” Feran asked.

“Resettlement Facility.”

“A what?”

The officer that addressed him was seated in front of Feran and looked back over his shoulder, bemused.

“Resettlement Facility,” he repeated. Feran’s blank stare persisted, so the officer continued. “The Resettlement Treaty?” he asked, testing Feran. Feran slowly shook his head. The officer smirked and turned back toward the front. “Boy, are you in for a surprise!” he said.

Feran didn’t ask any more questions. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answers. Instead he watched the sea slip swiftly by beneath them. A pod of dolphins arched freely out of the water and dove back beneath the surface. The setting sun glistened off their backs in gold and orange.

The helicopter flew about another 10 minutes and then set down on a helipad on a patrol boat. Feran was led to a hold by two officers and stuffed in a cramped cage alongside several other identical cages, some of them occupied.

“Another one for the kennel,” one of the officers said. The other officer looked down the line of cages to the end. “I know that’s where we’re taking the furry ones, but what are we going to do with the lizard?” Feran didn’t like the glint in the officer’s eye.

“That one gets shipped to Orlando. They set up a herpetarium for those there kind.” He pointed to the cage on the end.

The occupants of the cages were quiet until the officers left. When they were gone, Feran broke the silence.

“Feran Wolfpaw,” he said, introducing himself and trying to sound cheerful.

“Who cares,” the occupant of the cage next to him replied.

Feran's ears pricked up. "Well, I do for one," he said.

END PART 3

Feran Wolfpaw – Part 2

Feran Wolfpaw

PART 2

Three years later, no longer "persons" under law in the United States, the nearest definition that fit Feran Wolfpaw and his fellow human/animal hybrid Recombinants was "vermin." Purebred humans who beheld Recombinants with disdain wasted no time in treating them as such, and there was little that the animal hybrids could do to stop them legally. The only humans who came to Recombinant aid were the Christians, thanks to Cardinal Booke's Theology of Transhumans, but Christians weren't much better off than Recombinants and could do little more than offer a hot meal and a pillow. So, Feran left the USA in a boat he stole and sank it just off the shore of Gun Cay, Bahamas. From there he managed to beg a lift to Bimini. Bahamians didn't seem to mind Recombinants in their midst, and he found odd jobs enough to get by. He didn't need much. Like most Recombinants, after the Court ruling forced him into a kind of socio-economic exile, he discovered his animal genes made wilderness survival almost natural. Even foraging the urban jungle was simple. Maybe the purebred humans had something to fear after all.

Only the wealthy tourists gave him a hard time, but he played dumb and they'd sometimes be sympathetic enough for the "poor

senseless brute" to hire him as porter. He had left his pride along with his fight on the Supreme Court steps and had developed a shtick that put even the supercilious snobs in a good tipping mood.

He kept a kayak hidden away on the South Bimini coast and spent most clear nights out under the stars on the uninhabited cays. Locals new his habit, and so when the Recombinant Resettlement Treaty was signed, the Resettlement Authority had no trouble locating him when he failed to report to a Resettlement Facility. Feran Wolfpaw, Recombinant-at-large, had turned his back on the world and simply didn't know he was supposed to.

Feran kept a bottle of Jim Beam buried on every cay he frequented. The afternoon Recombinant Control, under orders from the Authority, found him, he had dug up the half-full bottle of Beam on the tiny island where he landed his kayak and lay back on a straw mat on the sand watching the sky. The sound of a helicopter thrummed from across the bigger islands, and Feran watched, his ears laying back low with his growing consternation, as it loomed out of the west and began flying a search pattern over the cays. His instinct for trouble was going off again. The copter buzzed steadily closer, zigzagging over the islands. Feran became increasingly uncomfortable the closer it got. He stood and shook the sand out of his fur and then went down to the water and pulled his bright yellow kayak off the beach to the line of low vegetation that marked the edge of the shore. He hid the kayak as best he could in a hurry, but wasn't convinced it was invisible from the air. The copter was getting close, though, and he still had to hide himself. For all he knew they'd already seen him. He grabbed his mat and his bottle out of the sand, rushed up the beach, and practically dove into the hibiscus, Mangrove, Pigeon Berry, and Hopwood, covering himself with the mat where the foliage was scarce.

The helicopter altered its course, veering from its zigzag

search pattern into a straight line toward him.

“Dang,” he cursed.

The copter thrummed low and slow over the island, turned, and then hovered directly above. The island was less than a mile across, so the chopper’s occupants, equipped with decent binoculars, wouldn’t even have to move to take it all in.

After about a minute that seemed like an hour, the chopper slowly maneuvered toward the middle of the island and set down in a clear flat space of solid ground and Feran, flat on his belly in the sea oats, lost sight of it. That it was still there was unquestionable – the blades pounding the air continued to throb in his ears, and the scent of exhaust wafted on the air.

Even over the roar of the helicopter Feran heard the men approaching before he saw them. Flight was impossible, and he was sure to lose a fight, so he stood slowly, paws high above his head, facing the direction of the interlopers’ clumsy, crashing approach.

Three armed men in characteristic black and yellow Recombinant Control uniforms pointed three semi-automatic, high-power rifles at him. They immediately took up assault stances and the air rippled with the tension of the seriously determined aggression in their body language. To Feran, unarmed, tail relaxed, paws up, in brown shorts, a green Hawaiian shirt casually open all the way down his furry torso, and his tattered straw hat, the situation was suddenly immensely humorous.

“Put your hands behind your head, furbag!” the nearest officer shouted above the roar of the copter.

“My what?” Feran shouted back.

“Put your hands behind your head!” the officer repeated.

"That's what I thought you said!" Feran replied. "But I can't!"

"Just do it!"

"I can't! I don't have hands!" Feran grinned. The officer seemed confused for a moment.

"Turn around and get down on your knees! Keep your hands ... uh, arms ... ah, legs – Just get on your knees!"

Feran turned slowly, his grin spreading across his muzzle, and tried to keep from laughing. He lowered himself to his knees carefully. He knew the drill. A decade of protest demonstration arrests had taught him the routine well.

The officers approached and one roughly forced his arms down and behind him.

"Easy," Feran said, irritated. "I won't fight!"

A second officer wrapped a steel collar around his neck and attached a pole to the hasp. The first officer cuffed his wrists. "Stand up!" he said. Feran stood. The officer frisked him and clumsily removed a flask from his front pocket. Feran glanced at the officer's inquiring expression.

"Gin," Feran said. "You're welcome to a hit."

"I'm on duty," the officer said with a tone of disgust.

"Then could I please keep it? It's my traveling buddy."

"No. Get moving."

The officer with the pole steered Feran around toward the helicopter.

"Paws," Feran said as they made their way to the chopper.

"What?" the first officer asked.

“Paws. I have paws. When you arrest Recombinants, ask them to put their paws behind their heads. We don’t have hands.”

The officer motioned for them all to stop and rammed the butt of his rifle into Feran’s gut. Feran doubled over, but the officer holding the pole attached to his collar yanked back and set him choking as the dull, sickening pain of the rifle thrust spread through his abdomen and into his spine. He coughed.

The officer sneered. “Today they’re hands.”

END PART 2

Feran Wolfpaw – Part 1

Feran Wolfpaw

PART 1

Feran Wolfpaw stole a private moment to peer into the queerly bright sky above the crowds. The deep blue seemed to flash and flare with an energy all its own as it sometimes appears to do between stray late storms on a hot August day.

“Is Allaria coming?” he asked the tiger/human hybrid Recombinant standing beside him.

The tigress hesitated. Her tail twitched. “No. She’s in Recomax.”

Feran continued to watch the sky to let the disturbing news settle. Another storm was collecting in the north. He tried to piece together how long it had been since he and Allaria split and why the time had slipped away so easily. Allaria loved

storms. He wondered if she could see enough sky out her tiny window in solitary to know when there were storms outside. He wondered if she cared, shivering on the concrete cot of the cell, her fur falling out in clumps from the chemical used to kill every hair follicle on the bodies of Recomax life-sentence mammalian inmates. It wasn't necessary, but it was done anyway to break their wills. They were also not provided any clothing or blankets, just some straw. "Recomax," the warden was fond of explaining every time he was featured in a news spot, "isn't for humans." If Allaria hadn't been broken to the point of lunacy yet, she soon would be, and then it wouldn't be long before she found a guaranteed way out. Life sentences were short in Recomax.

Feran swallowed a lump in his throat and looked down the protest line. He frowned. Several demonstrators held "Reco Pride" signs. He told organizers to discourage those – they were too like old 21st century protest signs. Feran didn't disparage civil rights movements of the past, but the Recombinant Equality Movement was something different. It needed to have its own identity. Opponents of the REM were quick to remind people that the movements of the past were about human differences and that the REM was about non-humans. They claimed the past precedents didn't apply.

Others disagreed with him. "Any means necessary," they told him, and proved it with terror tactics employed against friend and foe alike. Feran was no model of morality, but terrorizing innocent people didn't sit right with him. Recombinants weren't going to keep their human rights by behaving like animals. Even if, as he often said himself, cruelty were a uniquely human trait, to be viewed as human they would have to be even more humane and more civilized than the pure humans. Fearfulness might look like respect to some, but it is not the same thing at all. A fear-filled enemy, once regrouped, is a stronger foe than ever, willing even for martyrdom.

Feran, standing on the top of the Supreme Court steps at the

edge of the Protest Zone, watched the people passing by below. Most tried to ignore the protestors, but a crowd of pure human stock had gradually been gathering in the Plaza to stare, and their expressions were not friendly. Tensions were winding tighter. The heat wasn't helping.

Occasionally someone on the demonstration line would get up a little courage or ire and shout a slogan, then the rest would join in. Feran raised a paw every time and halfheartedly added his voice, but it wasn't like the old days. His heart wasn't into it like it used to be. Too many collarings.

"We're people, too!" someone shouted. The line lit up with voices. Feran raised a paw-fist. "Persons! Persons!" he chanted along with the others into the thick, muggy air.

Eventually enthusiasm waned and the shouting faded and broke apart on the torid stillness into the fervent, unintelligible chatter of countless independent conversations. Feran went quiet before the others. Something on the breezeless atmosphere made his hackles bristle. An instinct born of experience gave him an uncanny prescience of trouble on the horizon. The hide on his snout wrinkled in a grimace. A black car slid slowly to a stop at the East Capitol intersection and turned onto First Street. Yellow lettering along the side flashed "Recombinant Control" in the hot sun as it leisurely crawled toward them.

"Go back to the zoo, beasts!" Feran's attention snapped quickly to a husky 20-something in jeans and an old white t-shirt. The man glanced at the car and then his arm went back and he hurled something. It hit a canid on the front line in the head and he fell backward. Several of his fellow protestors nearby either dodged his fall or caught him. Feran didn't care: he knew what was going down. Thunder rumbled and a grayness entered the air. Feran leaped down two steps toward the center of the line. He whirled on the step to face the protestors, ears forward, tail rigid, paws out in front of

him.

“No!” he shouted. Too late. The tension in the air erupted in a ranting rage of fury. The protest line wavered from end to end, its energy building, straining in vain to restrain itself behind the Protest Zone cordon. The courthouse, with the sun sinking behind it and 12 justices inside deciding if Recombinants were really “persons” under law, loomed darkly, dwarfing the steps and the protestors. Feran felt it like a faithless David before a Goliath. Faithless. He’d become almost too cynical to care enough to fight anymore. The sky grew grim. Lightning flashed in the black clouds behind him.

“No rights for non-humans!” someone behind him shouted.

“Stop!” Feran shouted above the rising din. “This is just what they—” He saw a peculiar flash on the bared fangs in dozens of Recombinant muzzles. It spread and washed out the world in a gauzy curtain of white, and voices grew faint – all except his, which he realized was screaming – and then the protest line bulged and broke and paws, some shod and some bare, pelted all around him. He became aware of pain throbbing in the back of his skull and his head began to ache. The storm rolled in, the wind howling, and the blue sky and all Feran’s world went dark.

When he woke, he was on the floor of a paddy wagon, hedged in by furred feet of other protestors sitting along the walls. He tried to raise his head and winced. He put a paw up to feel his skull where it had been struck and found a hasp and a chain at his neck. Collared. He looked down his body where the chain passed under it and followed the dull, gray links to a collar identical to his around the neck of the tigress. She glared – not at him, but to say they’d been had.

“Yeah,” he said. “I know.”

Roughly 24 hours later, Feran and the tigress walked out of the police station. When he stepped out on the sidewalk, Feran

Wolfpaw, duly registered 3rd generation Homo Sapiens/Canis Lupus genetic hybrid, began a new life in the USA, nation of his birth, a "person" no longer.

END PART 1