

SULLIVAN'S THAW

**Being a
Detailed Account
Of the
Continuing
Adventures of
John L. Sullivan
On the
Planet Virja**

**As told to
J. Timothy O'Toole
Faithful Scribe**

July 2018

SULLIVAN'S THAW

This is a work of fiction (duh). All the characters (and some of them are *real* characters) are fictional, bearing no resemblance to any real persons, except Elmo Drubh, who is the role model for all internal control officers.

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0. FOREWARNED

Welcome Back. It's been years since you read the first book in this captivating trilogy (Sullivan's Travels), and at least several months since perusing the second volume (Sullivan's Law) which offered incredible interplanetary adventures of a formerly-frustrated cubicle captive who, on a lark, posted on Facebook "I am willing to be abducted by aliens."

You would think that Twitter would have been a more poetic choice of social media, especially considering the highly intelligent avians featured on the second volume (Sullivan's Law).

Imagine an advanced, albeit boring planet that was politically correct. Having perfected the human genome to eliminate disease and addiction, that society then eliminated racial and language distinctions for all its residents. Dependent on wind and solar energy for electric power (all their fossil fuels were depleted), their human-scale urban planning eliminated the need for private vehicles. Totally vegetarian (almost vegan), they liberated all their captive animals (pets, zoos and circuses) - even goldfish were taboo (though you could eat them).

An egalitarian land free of racism and sexism, war and rumors of war, they beat their swords into plowshares and melted down all their firearms (no need for the other Sullivan Law there).

But all apple carts are destined to be upset at one time or another. And there are those who say Ambassador Bruhker chose Sullivan (and his sidekick Martin - the guitar that is) to be there to throw the spanner into the works (the term monkey-wrench would have been considered insulting and species-ist).

One thing you can take for granted when visiting a distant planet is: you cannot take anything for granted. Even something as rudimentary as toothpaste. But human nature - Virjan nature in this case - is more universal than the Miss Universe Pageant (and no, there will never be any contestants from Virja, male or female - they have their standards).

Be sure to sign the non-disclosure agreement before you reach chapter 51.

1. BEER, NO SKITTLES

Sullivan's Thaw. Why the title? Back from the Forever Wild tundra, Sullivan¹ is finally warming to the place. Virja, that is. A politically correct planet light years from Earth. You'll learn more about it as our story progresses.

It all started when Virja's covert Ambassador Bruhker asked Sullivan to solve a puzzling crime. Crime itself is a puzzle on a planet devoid of violence and greed. No racism or sexism fuels wrongdoing. No addiction or inebriation feeds dysfunction. No religion defines transgression.

Everyone on Virja has equal access to education, employment, health care, nutrition and housing. Everyone works in a climate-controlled, high-tech worker's paradise, free of taxes, debt, mortgages, and all the other nuances and nuisances associated with money. Every citizen benefits from an embedded RFID chip, so no need to carry a wallet or checkbook. No credit cards, library cards, drug store discount cards, supermarket check-cashing cards, frequent flyer, loyal diner, or membership cards of any sort. The Virjan database knows who you are, and where you've been.

In keeping with Thoreau's advice to "simplify", there are only two store "chains" that matter on Virja – Food Store, and BigMart. Each store offers only one generic brand of everything. No need for competition, false advertising and discount coupons. With only one brand, you can be sure you are getting the best.

Food Store provides all the daily commodities of an average supermarket (and everything on Virja is just that – average). **BigMart** offers the rest. And neither store has long checkout lines – just take what you need and head out the door. Computer scanners determine what you've acquired ("purchased" is an obsolete word). "There is enough to go around, as long as no one takes too much."

And thanks to exceptional urban planning, where you live, work, and shop is all 'just a short walk away'. No drone delivery required.

¹ Don't ever call him "Sully"!

Yet on a planet where everything is free for the taking, some people were still driven to stealing. Toothpaste of all things!

“There’s enough to go around as long as no one takes too much.” Ever since Virja abolished money, along with banks, loan sharks, repo men, vending machines and penny jars, people on the placid planet just went around peaceably, living their lives, doing their work, raising their families, drinking good beer.

It was not enough for some people, who wanted to do more than prosper. Like the retro-renegades of Råltown, who turned their backs on the hive mentality of city life, for a tentative and dangerous existence on the edge of civilization.

It was also not enough for Sullivan, whose misplaced work ethic (misplaced by about forty light years) compelled him to do something meaningful with his life. A life already half-wasted with the petty concerns and bureaucratic politics of his natal world.

But let us start with Sullivan’s trip to City 09², source of toothpaste and cold-brewed lager. “To be crisp a beer should be icily light,” the jingle goes. Most of Virja’s breweries were established in northern climes, where the potent product could mature with naturally-low ambient temperature. The manufacturing process for toothpaste also took advantage of chilly nights and crystal clear water for different reasons.

Not toothpaste like you know it, though it tastes minty fresh, and you do squeeze it out of a tube. But think of the tube more as a containment field. Remember the story of the scientist who invented the universal solvent, only to fail because no container could hold it? Virjan toothpaste requires no brush, since its principal ingredient is nanobots. Little scrubbing bubbles that eradicate food particles, massage the gums, clean the tongue and tickle the roof of your mouth. Just remember to spit them out when done. Left to their own devices (and they are devices) those scrubbing bubbles would happily remove all extraneous material from your innards,

² Did I mention that all cities on Virja were assigned numbers at random, rather than names? That way each community was equal to all others, saving billions on sports teams and publicly-funded arenas.

following the immutable law of peristalsis. Not to be confused with Sullivan's Law: **"Life is a crapshoot, but you have to roll the dice."**

With one major roll of said dice, Sullivan wound up on a politically correct planet. One that enjoyed a century free of war, crime and reality TV. We'll give you flashbacks and retrospectives later on, to pad this novel, but first there is the issue of who Sullivan met on his latest journey. And yes, we will get to the crime later on – the great toothpaste heist of 3073 U.E. (Uncommon Era).

We call it permafrost, though that may soon be a misnomer on Earth, where global warming (some call it climate change) is melting glaciers, softening Alaskan highways and upsetting local ecologies. When reindeer run out of lichen, they will skip your house on Christmas Eve.

On Virja "permafrost" is not a misnomer, for they managed to control their greenhouse gases quite successfully. It helped that they ran out of gas and oil, forcing them to rely totally on the sun, wind and rain to power their planet. Virjan air is crystal clear, though that proved to be a liability when their sun took a sabbatical.

Sullivan's Law can tell you more about that little burp in Virja's long history, but this story is about more recent events on a planet that took care of almost all of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Feeding, clothing, housing and educating its disease-free populace was a major accomplishment, but self-actualization didn't make the final cut. No need for self-actualization when you've over-dosed on self-esteem.

Where to begin? It all began with a tour of the brewery. Brewery L17 to be exact.

Sullivan remembered the *Utica Club* Brewery (fondly). The giant copper kettles, and stainless steel tanks. The funny little bar at the conclusion of the tour, where Gibson Girls (dressed in period costume) served samples of their wares to happy tourists. "Their wares" refers to lagerous libations (though their attire undoubtedly concealed other delights). And "happy tourists" refers to visitors to an upstate New York City with two major attractions. The *Utica Club* Brewery (which offered free samples) and the *Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute* (which did not). *Utica* also has a

Zoo³, but it pales in comparison with the State Capitol in Albany, ninety miles to the east.

Free samples are a big deal on Earth, but not such a big deal on Virja, where everything is free. Not to say that Sullivan did not enjoy the free samples encountered during his tour of Brewery L17.

No greater a source than Wikipedia will tell you that **lager** is made from malted barley that is brewed and stored at low temperatures. Pale lager is widely-consumed on Earth, though you have also heard of Pilsner, Bock, and Dortmunder Export. There are also dark lagers, like Dunkel and Schwarzbier. All those German names give you a clue as to their provenance. In contrast, **ale** is brewed at warm temperatures. Also made from malted barley, to which **hops** are added to offset the sweetness of the malt. Some philistines actually put corn flakes in their mash! During the Napoleonic Wars, a tax on malt (fie!) helped pay for cannon balls, muskets and mess kits. British brewers watered down their beer to compensate, until the Battle of Waterloo, then returned beer to its Original Gravity of 1.055° for the rest of the century (follow the money).

Sullivan knew a lot about hops. They were a major cash crop in upstate New York during the 19th century. The State Legislature in its fallible wisdom built a canal from Utica to Binghamton⁴, which operated for 44 years, until obsolesced by the railways. At that time a ton of hops (handpicked) from Madison County (NY) fetched a considerable sum - \$500 in Civil War currency. Think of it as the medical marijuana of its day.

Hops were in demand in New York City, to feed the thirsts of New York City's growing population (including many Irish and German immigrants). Back in the day, a ton of hops fetched a pretty penny⁵, being the medical marijuana of its day. The Chenango Canal was shut down by the State in 1878, though remnants of the canal continued to serve as a pipeline of sorts during the early 20th century, helping bootleggers and pot

³ Home to the Madagascar Hissing Cockroach.

⁴ Long before Edwin Link invented the flight simulator, though his original module lacked a lost baggage component.

⁵ \$500 a ton in 1815. If they had automobiles back then, you could purchase a brand new Cadillac for less.

growers move their criminal cargo past the less-than-watchful eyes of the local gendarmerie.

But enough about New York State. Sullivan would never return to his birthplace – sacrificing his miniscule 401(k), and missing out on a \$47 tax refund. But money no longer mattered. Nor did the New York State Legislature. What did matter is ‘The Case of the Missing Toothpaste’. And who Sullivan met up north.

Time to get started with the story. (So start already! – Ed.)

2. ONE SCRUBBING BUBBLE OFF PLUMB

Like Charlie on the MTA, Sullivan kissed his wife and family, then boarded the bus to City 09, to begin his latest adventure. His wife Ñivu, stepchildren Rågan and Lørn, and their infant daughter Jill were all residents of the retro-village of Rålftown, populated by escapees from the stainless steel setting of Virja's innumerable, planned communities. Well, not innumerable, for every Virjan city had its number (City 09 for example, which could have been labeled City 9, though single digits were frowned on as prideful and egotistical).

You will get a chance to visit Rålftown later in this most excellent novel, with thatched roof cottages, organic gardens, smokehouse, fledgling dairy industry and guard geese. But let us focus on City 09 and the toothpaste. And the beer.

Elmo Drubh, internal control officer⁶ was on hand to greet Sullivan as he stepped off the solar-powered bus (top speed 45 mph) at the City Center. Like all other Virjan cities, City 09 was human-scaled, with everything "just a short walk away." A necessity given the dearth of private transport on a planet which drank up all its gas and oil a century ago. No more suburbs. No more traffic jams, parking meters, meter maids, gas stations or road houses. No homeless alcoholics giving your windshield a spit shine for a handout. Just scaled-down impeccably clean cities, surrounded by miles of verdant farm land, punctuated by wind mills.

City 09 was like every other city (excepting of course City 76, the asymmetrical one, being a port city and major source of sea food to serve the discriminating palates of Virja's almost vegan society). Almost vegan? We'll get back to you on that one. Focus on the toothpaste, will you?

Virjans tend to be hygienic, even those living on the edge of civilization like the denizens of Rålftown. Every citizen has equal access to hot showers, clean sheets, good nutrition and excellent health care (including dental coverage, though their teeth never seem to need it). Part of this is

⁶ He would have been internationally acclaimed, but there was only one nation on Virja. One language, one race, and a none-party system. That part sounds appealing these days.

due to their egalitarian economic system. Part is due to their perfect genome, and the rest can be attributed to their primarily vegan diet – with a little help from those previously-mentioned scrubbing bubbles.

Why then would anyone want to “steal” toothpaste, when it is available free of charge at every local Food Store?

Every civilization contains the seeds of its own destruction. Virja is no exception. Their economic model depends on a “rationing” of sorts. If you take more than you need, an economic counselor will drop by to ensure that you are not hoarding, or using products for “off-label” uses. Virja’s Surgeon General is also quite strict when it comes to blood pressure control. Even with a perfect genome, an individual’s diastolic and systolic (not to be confused with diabolic and symbolic) readings are susceptible to stress – and salt. Sodium chloride to be exact (NaCl).

Hence, when certain yoga devotees went overboard with their purification processes – including salt water emetics and enemas, and nasal flushes – the Surgeon General raised concerns about their bizarre internal application of a substance more appropriately applied externally to garden slugs, icy roadways or ice cream makers.

The yoga disciples’ solution: Toothpaste. Low in sodium, and guaranteed to purge you of all impurities – though “How anyone on an organic, vegetarian diet could have impurities is beyond me,” saith Sullivan. Virjan toothpaste is also guaranteed to purge your digestive tract of harmful and helpful bacteria alike. Were it not for the blood-brain barrier, those scrubbing bubbles would also have removed impure thoughts (something Sullivan’s old grade school nuns would have wished for). Talk about brain-washing.

‘The Case of the Missing Toothpaste’ reminded Sullivan of a Sherlock Holmes mystery – the proverbial murder in a locked room thought to be a suicide, though no murder weapon could be found. No smoking gun. No 18½ minute gap in the Oval Office recording. (“I’ll have the consommé.”)

Crates of toothpaste began showing up at local Food Stores with short count. Then the crates started showing up empty. Then some of the crates didn’t show up at all. Worse yet, some crates showed up with the correct

number of tubes (144 is still a gross, even though that sounds disgusting), but every tube was bone-dry.

While Food Store inventory control specialists puzzled over that last one, local Clinics (they were too small to be called hospitals) began seeing more and more cases of anorexia. Not necessarily of the binge-purge variety (bulimia), though that was considered a possibility. Just lots of skinny, but exceedingly flexible citizens OD-ing on oral hygiene dentifrice.

That was almost as puzzling as the empty tubes, for when Virja perfected its genome, it eradicated addiction, along with small pox, salmonella, botulism, diabetes, halitosis, and even hypochondria. Virja saved billions on health care costs, allowing the Planning Commission to add more windmills and solar panels to power the planet. With money left over for an exceptional public education system.

Did I mention Virja has no army, navy, air force or marines. No war, natch. Not even police actions or economic sanctions. They do have a Coast Guard, charged with protecting Virja's Merchant Marine from the perils of the deep. But all the money saved on war and rumors of war (e.g. CIA, NSA, FoxNews) could be applied to public transportation and free VirjaNet-for-All!

Public transportation was important because Virja used up all its fossil fuels a century ago. The only oil now available comes from whales and extra Virjan olive oil. Energy-inefficient suburbs were leveled, their acres reverting to farm land. The population returned to scaled-down urban communities, with jobs, shops and housing all "just a short walk away". No more personal automobiles, save a few solar-powered runabouts for those whose employment required inter-city mobility. All other transportation was provided by solar-powered buses, BigMart and Food Store delivery vans, not to mention the Merchant Marine (I told you not to mention it!).

Virjan businesses and households were WiFi'd to the max, since cell phones themselves were banned (as carcinogenic, intrusive devices that reduced planetary productivity and disrupted diners' digestion). When a generation of young Virjans required laser surgery (OD-ing on pocket PC

videos) Virja halted the manufacture of handheld displays of any sort (except pocket calculators, which did only that).

How then did people communicate? For the last one hundred years, everyone you knew lived just “a short walk away”, so people did just that. Walked, then talked. What a refreshing concept. People talked to one another at work, in the stores, parks, concert halls (before the show), and on the buses. Making eye contact, exchanging recipes and e-mail addresses. Their thumbs never twitched under the table.

But back to the toothpaste.

Sullivan was a traditionalist. He still used a brush, unconvinced that those petite, persistent nanobots on their own could ever rid his fangs of warm beer and cold pizza. At least he was always sure to spit out the foam, unlike the yoga pretzel sect who yearned to be “none with the cosmos”. That should have read “one with the cosmos”, but there was a printing error in the antique yoga manual purloined from the restricted shelves of City 46’s main library. The manual itself was brought back from Earth 150 years earlier by a covert trade mission of the Virjan Foreign Service (along with two dozen tea plants and one very large ruby).

It was easy to purloin the yoga manual – pamphlet actually – because very few people frequented Virjan libraries in a digital age. Just a handful of throwback scholars like Sullivan’s friend and neighbor Ingrå. You’ll learn more about her as our story unfolds, but for now, let’s listen in to the scintillating dialog between our non-hero Sullivan and his local guide, Elmo.

“I’m so glad you could help us on this one, Sullivan. The powers that be are increasingly irritated by the antics of Guru Bob and his skinny squad of sycophants.”

“Guru Bob?”

“His real name is Baaberian Babatunjian. He had been a greeter at BigMart, which is a polite way of saying he was a behavioral psychologist who ensured shoppers were not under duress or social pressure to take more than they needed. His knowledge of the Virjan psyche has now turned to superstitious spiritualism, which threatens to disrupt the very

fabric of our society.” Elmo Drubh had no jurisdiction over BigMart internal controls, but networked well with others.

“Why are they so excited about toothpaste? Are they afraid that too much cleanliness will lead to godliness?” Sullivan still wondered what all the fuss was about.

“The Planning Commission is quite tolerant of personal foibles, even those that carry a certain health risk. The Virjan Constitution guarantees the right of every adult Virjan to terminate their existence, should they become terminally ill or terminally bored. Dispirited and unproductive citizens place an undue burden on the rest of society. With children it’s another story. Where parents exercise inadequate supervision, they can be removed from the home (the children, not the parents) – but that is extremely rare. There are no orphanages or group homes on Virja.”

Sullivan was glad to hear that. No fan of orphanages (he’d been there, done that), he knew Virja had no one even slightly resembling Sister Constricta Stigmata, with her 18-inch titanium-edged wooden ruler.

“Top legal minds (we only have two) are investigating the possibility of declaring Guru Bob ‘a danger to society’, in which case he could be placed in protective custody. But there is no effective way to deal with his anorexic acolytes, save restricting their access to nanobot toothpaste. Our R&D team is working on a prototype retro-toothpaste that would require brushes. Then there would be the exhaustive reprogramming of the Food Store inventory control system, excluding underweight adults from acquiring the traditional nanobot paste.”

“I imagine ‘protective custody’ on Virja is quite delightful?” Sullivan mused.

“Exceptionally delightful. We’re talking gourmet food, daily massages, hot tub, sauna and pool. Live entertainment and excellent beer. We have only one protective custody facility on the entire planet, and there is a six-month waiting list for misdemeanants. Felons can walk right in.”

“Sounds like you’ve one-upped our own Club Fed,” Sullivan replied. “What about tennis courts and a golf course?”

“Golf course? Oh, you mean ‘the Scottish Game’. We never say that out loud on Virja. Bad luck, don’t you know. And you should know from the last two novels in this most excellent trilogy that we banned competitive sports a long time ago. Bad for the self esteem. For every winner there must be a loser. No tennis courts, handball, volley ball or badminton, I’m afraid. But you really must visit our Protective Custody Pavilion – it’s located between the toothpaste factory and Brewery L17.”

“If you wind up incarcerating Guru Bob near the toothpaste factory, just knowing how close he is to all those cleansing and purifying nanobots should be sheer torture for him.”

“Then he will have to content his innards with Virja’s organic beer. But let’s get you settled in your accommodations. You will probably want to take a quick shower before we visit the toothpaste plant – for one thing, every tube is produced in clean room conditions.”

“We’ll have to visit the toothpaste factory first (sigh). But bear with me. It’s only a short walk from the factory to Brewery L17 (L for Lager). We’ll get there yet.”

The last time Sullivan saw Elmo Drubh it was at the trial of the *Gang of Four*. Four flaky fillies involved in a different sort of love triangle. Killing two innocent bystanders by mistake, before they succeeded in eradicating the object of their disaffection. *Sullivan’s Law* tells that sad story⁷.

Elmo found the final piece of evidence that cinched the case, sending two killers to the Forever Wild tundra for readjustment; and one killer to the Forever Wild desert to aridify her ardor. The last murderess (sounds like a PBS Mystery episode) was “transported” to Earth, where she will live out the remainder of her days as an Afghani weaver (better than her original sentence – recycling).

Sullivan felt right at home in City 09. The accommodations there were a spitting image of his old apartment back in City 46 - a spitting image of every apartment everywhere on Virja. One-size-fits-all does not just apply to clothing. A two room apartment, with an open plan kitchen-

⁷ Some critics think *Sullivan’s Law* itself is a sad story.

living/dining room, plus separate bedroom. And of course a high efficiency cleanette, where Sullivan washed off the accumulated grime and sweat of six hours on a VTA bus. Did I mention that Virjan shampoo also contains nanobots? Just spread it over your soggy skull, then brace yourself for the best scalp massage you ever had (not counting Inga when you went to Oslo to pick up your award)!

Elmo's own on-site man cave was "just a short walk away" – fifty feet down the hall to be exact. When Sullivan was once again fit for public display, he joined Elmo for a quick bite, then it was off to the toothpaste factory for a quick tour, focusing on internal controls.

"We've had to upgrade security measures due to Guru Bob's banana bunch, though I might add that prior to our problem, this plant was a model of efficiency, security and cleanliness." Elmo was a company man, rightfully proud of Food Store accomplishments to date.

Sullivan noted the brand-new iris scanners at the airlock doors controlling human traffic into the facility. "I suppose if you wanted to live up to Earth standards of product purity, you would have to add some homeopathic doses of rat dung and cockroach antennae to the mix?"

Elmo puzzled over that one.

"It's really a very simple operation," Elmo continued, "with double airlock doors separating each manufacturing component. On your left is the Nano Lab, where half the active ingredients are produced in clean room conditions, with exceptional quality control. The nanos are incredibly small, and the conveyor belt must pass under an electron microscope to examine and count each piece. No Virjan could handle that job on a daily basis, so we've rigged up some obsolete cell phone circuitry to process the data.

"On your right is the Bot Lab, where the other active ingredients enjoy similar oversight. It's important that the two ingredients be kept apart, lest they escape, team up prematurely and decide to scour the factory and everyone in it.

"Overhead is where we keep the giant vats of nanobot stabilizer, already injected with organic mint freshener. And straight ahead, the Assembler,

where long rows of triple-walled toothpaste tubes accept the three ingredients.”

Elmo handed an empty tube to Sullivan, who examined it with great interest. “You know, the only time I pay any attention to a tube of toothpaste is when I’m trying to squeeze the last dollop out – usually just before a hot date when all the stores are closed. But this tube is nothing like what I dealt with back on Earth.”

The tube itself was divided into three chambers, to accept the three ingredients which would only unite into one frenzied foam when ejected from the tube into a waiting mouth (or other orifice if you were one of Guru Bob’s bunch).

Twelve tubes at a time found their way under the injecting funnels, where in a split second (more than a nanosecond) they were packed full of product, then on to the crimper which sealed each tube hermetically. The process was repeated a dozen times until 144 tubes were stacked upright in a bubble-wrap carrier. No need for cardboard boxes and glossy colors to advertise and extol the comparative virtues of the product. There was only one toothpaste produced on Virja, only one language spoken on Virja, and only one store in which the product was provided free of charge to every family. On the side of each tube, the simple legend in two-dimensional black-and-white: “Toothpaste”. Actually that’s the English translation. I could have said “Dentifrice” or “Zahnpasta” or “ ” or “tandkräm” if you prefer.

A production supervisor wandered back and forth with a clipboard (actually a very lightweight tablet computer) checking off machine readouts and counters, ensuring an uninterrupted flow of product and packaging. Other staff monitored the packaging equipment. The bubble-wrap carriers were placed into recycled cardboard boxes (some of them a bit the worse for wear, having been reused continuously for the past five years – and we remind you a Virjan year is twice as long as your own).

Then each box went via conveyor belt through a double airlock where positive air pressure kept outside air from infiltrating the plant. The loading dock was another exercise in efficiency – with dozens of waiting solar-powered Food Store vans ready to whisk the product to Virja’s myriad mainland cities.

Closed circuit TV cameras were in abundance inside and outside the plant, keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings. “The plant runs non-stop every day of the week, to keep pace with demand for the product. Demand, I might add that has increased since Guru Bob’s followers started abusing the product. There have even been cases of post-shop lifting.”

“Post-shop lifting?”

“Fleet-fingered felons rifle the reusable shopping bags of honest citizens walking home with their acquisitions. So far the only things taken have been toothpaste. If this keeps up, we may impose weighing-in ceremonies to exclude anorexic Virjans from access to our high-tech dentifrice. Another reason why R&D is working on a retro-paste.”

“Has anyone reviewed all the footage of those video surveillance cameras?” Sullivan knew this was standard procedure on all the cop shows back home.

“One of my middle school interns is coding a routine right now so that we don’t go blind or stir-crazy watching each camera’s recording in real time. It’s unlikely anything could be diverted inside the plant, so our most likely focus is on the delivery vans and local Food Stores.”

“What about BigMart?”

“My stars, no. There is no advantage to wheeling home industrial size containers of toothpaste. Where would you put them in the average home? Especially since every home IS average. No, BigMart does not stock toothpaste, or any other human commodity.”

“I understand Brewery L17 is only a short walk away. Any chance we can squeeze in a tour there sometime?”

“I thought you’d never ask. I’ve never been there, though I have grown to admire their product over many a fine evening at my local Beer Barrel. Were you aware they recorded all your City 76 performances, for virtual, holographic playback all around the planet?”

“I think that entitles me to a free beer, don’t you?”

“Of course, but then, all our beer is free. One of the many benefits of Virjan citizenship. Speaking of which, we will want to grab a table early

this evening. I hear it's Open Mike Night at Beer Barrel 09. Maybe we can sneak in a tour of L17 tomorrow."