

The Debriefing
A Play in One-Act
by Cheryl Ann Costa

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Characters:

Lcdr Garrett Aengus Duncan - 35-45 Repatriated POW
Captain Daniel Roland - 40's Naval Investigative Service
Yeoman Andrews – 20-40 A yeoman {man or female petty officer}

TIME - PLACE: Afternoon November 1945, a compartment aboard hospital ship USS Benevolence anchored near Yokosuka, Japan. The Naval Investigative Service has been debriefing US Navy personal who has been held by the Japanese in the notorious Ofuna Naval Interrogation Camp.

[Lights up – Duncan is sitting alone in the room staring off, distant. Roland and Andrews enter the compartment, Duncan rises.

ROLAND: Good Afternoon

[Duncan responses still thinking in Japanese, stands and bows saying.]

DUNCAN: Konnichiwa

[Roland and Andrews pause and double take, an American speaking Japanese and bowing like a “nip”? Duncan realizing the mistake recovers the moment in English]

DUNCAN: Sorry, I guess I'm still thinking Japanese.

ROLAND: I completely understand. [EXTENDING a hand shake] My name is Captain Daniel Roland and this is Yeoman Andrews. We are here to debrief you.

DUNCAN: That's what I've been told.

[Roland and Andrews get themselves situated, Duncan sits and watches with interest as they prepare. Once the yeoman is sitting with a steno pad and prepared to take short hand. Roland begins.]

ROLAND: Let the record read that this is the official debriefing of prisoner 23874 of the Japanese Ofuna Naval Interrogation Camp, the date is 17 November 1945. Please state your full name for the record.

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DUNCAN: Garrett Aengus Duncan

ROLAND: Please state your rank and last assignment.

DUNCAN: I am a LCDR and I was the Executive officer aboard of the USS TULLIBEE SS-284.

ROLAND: You know Duncan; the Navy officially has your submarine the Tullibee listed as “Lost at Sea,” you look very healthy for a dead man.

DUNCAN: [indifferent] Thank you.

ROLAND: Now that the war is over, we’ve been trying very hard to account for various missing ships.

DUNCAN: [indifferent] I understand.

ROLAND: [reading from a folder] According to squadron records on 5 March 1944, TULLIBEE, commanded by Cdr. C. F. Brindupke, departed Pearl Harbor to start her fourth war Patrol. She stopped at Midway to top off with fuel, and having left that place on the 14th March, she was not heard from again.

DUNCAN: [indifferent] No kidding!

ROLAND: What were your ships orders?

DUNCAN: [very matter of fact] We were assigned to an open sea area north of Palau. A surface group was getting ready to launch a first carrier strike on Palau We had been ordered collaborate with surface forces in that effort.

ROLAND: When was Tullibee supposed to leave the area?

DUNCAN: Our orders were to leave our patrol area on or about 24 April ’44.

ROLAND: On 24 April 1944, a dispatch was sent directing TULLIBEE to proceed to Majuro for refit. She was expected at Majuro about 4 May, but instructions stated that - submarine unable to transmit would not go to Majuro, but to Midway. On 6 May 1944, Midway was alerted to be on the look out for a submarine returning without transmission facilities, TULLIBEE was presumed lost on 15 May 1944.

DUNCAN: Our transmitters were fine.

ROLAND: Obviously the TULLIBEE had problems---

DUNCAN: --Yes—[a bit distant]

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[Roland turns a chair around sits on it backwards facing Duncan, shows a glimmer of compassion]

ROLAND: Garret I know this might be difficult for you. Lets start with the easy stuff. When did the boat first arrive on station? [After a long moment of silence] Garret?

[Duncan loses the distance seems to come to life]

DUNCAN: We arrived on station on March 25th the crew was eager for some good hunting.

[Roland glances at the Yeoman and smiles]

ROLAND: When was your first contact with Japanese vessels?

DUNCAN: The next night, the 26th we made radar contact.

ROLAND: What was the nature of the contact?

DUNCAN: We spotted a convoy consisting of a troop ship, a cargo ship, two medium sized freighters, two escort vessels and a large destroyer.

ROLAND: What did your Capt do?

DUNCAN: After our target party solved the convoy's speed and course, Captain Brindupke made several surface runs on the large transport, but held fire.

ROLAND: Why did he do that that? Didn't they see you?

DUNCAN: Nah, Visibility was terrible we couldn't see the transport due to squally weather. The two escorts had detected the submarine's presence, and dropped 15 maybe 20 depth charges never realizing we were running on the surface.

ROLAND: Where were you Garret?

DUNCAN: I was in rain gear on the bridge with petty officer Kuykendall and seaman Graham; we were trying to get a better visual fix on the targets.

ROLAND: Did you have any luck?

DUNCAN: Hell no, we got the boat within 3,000 yards of the transport, but we still couldn't see the damned target. Finally Captain Brindupke fired the two bow tubes based on our acoustic target solution.

ROLAND: Then what happened?

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DUNCAN: A minute or two after we launched our weapons a terrific concussion shook the boat. [Duncan gets distant again]

ROLAND: Garret, What happened to you?

DUNCAN: I'm not really sure, I found myself in the water disoriented and struggling.

ROLAND: Struggling to swim?

DUNCAN: NO--- No I was trying to avoid the flaming fuel on the surface. I had just one thought "swim as far away from the flames as I could get."

ROLAND: Did you see anybody else in the water?

DUNCAN: I thought that I heard other men in the water as well but I can't be sure I was pretty disoriented not to mention struggling in the water. I must have lost consciousness, had it not been for my life preserver I would have drown.

ROLAND: Do you have any thoughts what caused the explosion that sank the Tullibee.

DUNCAN: You know I've given that a lot of thought. We all knew the range and bearing of escorts. ---- Considering that the explosion occurred within a minute or two of the launch of our weapons [a thoughtful pause] It seems to me that perhaps one of our torpedoes made circular run and caused the explosion.

[Duncan obviously still trying to wrap his mind around the idea]

DUNCAN: I know it sounds far fetched.

[Roland gives the moment a thoughtful pause and sigh, pulling a page from his folder and glancing at it.]

ROLAND: Gunners Mate second class Kuykendall came to the same conclusion, that one of TULLIBEE's torpedoes made a circular run, hit the sub aft.

DUNCAN: Kuykendall's alive? My God that's great!

ROLAND: Yes he's alive he was thought to be the sole survivor of your boat. That is until we found you.

DUNCAN: [with a reserved solemn look] of course.

ROLAND: According to records the Tullibee carried Mark 18-1 torpedoes.

DUNCAN: Yes we had 24 of them.

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ROLAND: Those Mark 18's weapons were known to be erratic. In fact; the tendency for Mark 18's to malfunction this way was confirmed by a survivor of the USS TANG.

DUNCAN: No Shit!

ROLAND: It's almost paradoxical.

DUNCAN: What is?

ROLAND: Captain Brindupke noted in an article in "Clear the Bridge" magazine that in previous war patrols all of TULLIBEE's Mark 18s had function properly while on station. Brindupke referred back to the performance of their first 23 torpedoes with 23 hits as proof of their quality.

DUNCAN: The weapons seemed very reliable.

ROLAND: When did you know there was trouble?

DUNCAN: About a minute after the torpedo was launched, I heard the order from below; 'all ahead emergency' . . . then bam, we got it.

ROLAND: Garret lets move on to after you were in the water. What do you remember?

DUNCAN: I don't want to talk about it.

ROLAND: You were rescued-but not by friendly forces, right?

DUNCAN: [gets quiet] I'm not sure.

ROLAND: What do you remember?

DUNCAN: Like I said, I don't want to talk about it.

ROLAND: It's important that we understand what you think happened to you.

DUNCAN: [struggling] Look! [Pause] I was injured; everything I may have experienced or think I experienced is most likely a product of injuries and shock.

ROLAND: Come on Duncan what are you worried about?

DUNCAN: I'm worried about preserving my Naval career. If I tell you what I really think I remember you'll both think I'm nuts and that will be it, good-bye career and good by retirement.

[Roland shaking his head and with a sigh says]

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ROLAND: Yeoman let's take a break, [roll pulls a couple of dollars from his pocket and hands them to the yeoman] Why don't you go to the canteen and get us all some Cokes.

Andrews: Aye Aye sir. [Yeoman stands and exits the room carrying his/her steno pad with him/her. After the yeoman leaves]

ROLAND: OK Duncan it's time to level with me.

DUNCAN: About what?

ROLAND: You know what?

DUNCAN: I have no idea what you're talking about.

ROLAND: Let's start with your career, for the record your career is already shot, you're used goods.

DUNCAN: Based on what?

ROLAND: How about collaborating with the enemy for starters.

DUNCAN: I didn't collaborate with the enemy!

ROLAND: That's not the story I hear. A dozen men have stated for the record that you have received special treatment ever since coming to the Ofuna camp.

DUNCAN: That's ridiculous

ROLAND: All the other men we found alive in this camp, seem to have been dying by inches. The Swiss Red Cross says that when they entered the camp two months ago that most the men were infected with an inventory of ailments and staved to the point of looking like a walking skeletons.

DUNCAN: What's your point?

ROLAND: Come on Duncan, look at yourself, you look like you've been eating three square meals a day since you left Pearl.

DUNCAN: No comment

ROLAND: You are concerned about your career, well buddy your career is shot. [As an after thought] As a matter of fact under the circumstances I can pretty much guarantee you'll stand court martial with a Dishonorable Discharge at the very least or how about spending the rest of your life in a Portsmouth naval prison, how's that sound for a retirement. [a pregnant pause] Now level with me, Duncan.

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[Duncan stares at Roland there is a pregnant pause]

DUNCAN: Get the Yeoman in here; I want this on the record.

[Roland steps over to the edge of stage and calls for the yeoman, who returns with three open coke bottles. Duncan takes a swig and starts his tale.]

ROLAND: You said that after you swam away from the sinking sub and the burning fuel that you lost consciousness.

DUNCAN: Yes, when I came around, I was floating in a relatively calm sea, the rain clouds had cleared and the sky was clear. It was the strangest sensation--

ROLAND: Elaborate.

DUNCAN: All around me was the calm dark sea, above me was a starry sky, at times it seemed as if I was floating there in the middle of the universe, I felt like I could almost reach out and touch the Milky Way.

ROLAND: Did you have any idea how long you'd been in the water or what time it was?

DUNCAN: Nah, my watch was all busted up from my tumble off the TULLIBEE. [Gets a bit mystical] The only thing that crossed my mind was that this was most likely going to be the last time I was going to see the sky. I expected to be dead before the next night, so I just relaxed in my life jacket and sang to myself.

ROLAND: What did you sing?

DUNCAN: [grins] Oh, I sang some old Scottish and Irish folk songs that my mom used to sing to me. I must have sung Amazing Grace and every hymn I could remember. Then after what seemed like hours of singing I just grew quiet and watched the sky. Then I began seeing lights low in the sky coming towards me.

ROLAND: Seems strange that ship would be showing running lights during wartime.

DUNCAN: No kidding [pause] All I could think was, [struggles] Perhaps it was a search and rescue ship looking for lost flyers.

ROLAND: [Pondering] Near Palau? In early 44? Not very likely.

DUNCAN: As the lights got closer, they seemed to be flying around in quick actions, [gesturing] seemingly darting around and then hovering like dragonflies, only to dart off at immense speed. I know this sounds screwy.

ROLAND: Could it have been St. Elmo's fire?

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DUNCAN: Nah, I've seen St. Elmo's fire before, it usually dances on the antennas and masts of ships in dry air conditions. These lights were free floating; they seemed to be hovering over me. They were as bright as anti-aircraft searchlights ---- so bright they nearly blinded me. Then all of a sudden it was as if I was being lifted out of the water. I guess I thought that I was dead or dying and that these were angels coming for me. I must have blacked out.

ROLAND: What was the next thing you remember?

DUNCAN: The next thing I remember was waking up on bamboo mat in a fisherman's hut on some beach in Japan. There were many people perhaps a dozen sitting quietly and patiently on mats waiting for me to wake up.

ROLAND: They weren't afraid of you?

DUNCAN: At first they were very upset. Some were saying I was a bad omen. They spoke about turning me over to the military authorities as soon as possible.

ROLAND: You understood them?

DUNCAN: Yes a little, studied Japanese at Harvard, but I was rusty.

ROLAND: So they turned you over right away?

DUNCAN: No, not exactly, the next day when the fishing boats returned there was this jubilation.

ROLAND: Jubilation?

DUNCAN: Yah Suddenly everybody was excited, and very friendly and over night they seemed to be quite honored that I was in their village.

ROLAND: How do you know that?

DUNCAN: Like I said, I took some classes in Japanese in college; I had a loose understanding of the dialect, but never got a real handle on why the villagers were so pleased to see me. But suddenly they were bringing me rice and fresh fish. They washed me and gave me a hot bath and gave me clean local clothes.

ROLAND: So when were you turned over to the military authorities and transferred to Ofuna.

DUNCAN: I wasn't, the villagers kept me hidden from the military authorities until couple of months before the war was over.

ROLAND: Did you wear out your welcome?

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DUNCAN: Nah, a soldier came home to the village on leave and saw me and alerted the authorities.

ROLAND: Any idea why a village of Japanese fisher men and their families would keep you hidden for nearly a year, at great personal risk I might add?

DUNCAN: It's going to sound crazy, they had this wacky idea that I was a gift from the gods.

[Yeoman Andrews starts laughing; Roland snickering removes a folder from his briefcase]

Andrews: [Snickers and laughs, then contains self after a stiff look from Roland]

ROLAND: Garret do you have any idea what those dancing lights were?

DUNCAN: No idea what so ever.

[Roland opens the folder, shakes his head as he reads quietly for a moment.]

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan according to a classified report that I have here, bomber crews in Europe and here in the Pacific have been calling those dancing little lights you saw "Foo Fighters." They are reported to have flown circles around bomber formations and can out run anything we have in the air. Allied intelligence reports that even the Germans and the Nips have reported encounters with them.

DUNCAN: What are they?

ROLAND: We have absolutely no idea but we have top people looking into it. It's got a classification high than the A-bomb, so keep it to yourself.

DUNCAN: A-Bomb what's that.

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan while you were in Japan, the world entered the atomic age. An Atomic bomb is a device with the power to wipe out single city with one bomb.

[a surprised pause]

DUNCAN: Sounds barbaric!

ROLAND: Call it what you like, it saved us from having to invade Japan, two bombs did it, flattened Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Pacific war was over with in days.

DUNCAN: What about Europe?

[Roland looking in his folder reading, Yeoman Andrews answers.]

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ANDREWS: The Italians gave up last year and the Germans surrendered this past spring. The war is over, sir, the allies won!

[Duncan looking fascinated Roland comes back to the conversation]

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan, lets talk about your Tullibee injuries and your brief captivity at Ofuna.

DUNCAN: Well, my scalp had a massive laceration, but luckily the village had several women accustomed to cleaning and stitching wounds on the fishermen. One of the villager's realized that I could understand a little Japanese and assured me that I was going to be all right.

ROLAND: After that soldier turned you over to the military authorities----[distracted looking in his folder]-- you were and transferred to Ofuna?

DUNCAN: Yes

ROLAND: Had you been given in training for capture and interrogation?

DUNCAN: Not a bit. We were submariners; we all lived with this "iron coffin" mindset, that we would either get blown out of the water or sent uncontrollably to the bottom or crush depth, which ever can first. We never even considered the possibility. I think this was a great mistake on the part of the military. I was totally unprepared.

ROLAND: You aren't alone, but I doubt any training we had would have helped you. You would have still been unprepared to some extent we trained our people in the Occidental method of psychological warfare and interrogation resistance. All of that effort would have been wasted once captured by the Japs. Their mind-set and perspective are completely different, and we just don't understand it.

ROLAND: Ok Garret let's talk about the hard part, what was your imprisonment like?

DUNCAN: Well, after I was finally turned over to the military authorities, it was hard. We were beaten on occasion, and questioned even about the most ridiculous stuff. Most of the guards were pretty brutal. I'm told that once you learned how to out-think them you could get by. There was one particular interpreter Mr. Sato who used to be a professor at Harvard and a Mason, those associations helped ease my treatment.

ROLAND: Are you a Mason?

DUNCAN: Yes Blue Lodge and Scottish Rite tradition.

ROLAND: Did any other Japanese national help you?

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DUNCAN: Well there was this old Japanese lady whom I worked for in the kitchen at the camp. She took care of me, and I owe her as much as anyone.

ROLAND: Was she the only civilian that was kind to you?

DUNCAN: No there were a number of Japanese civilians who helped us---showed us respect, not hostility.

ROLAND: That's surprising.

DUNCAN: Like the people in the fishing village many of them went out of their way to help us in little ways at great risk to themselves, many of them slipping us food.

ROLAND: Do you hold a grudge against the ones who beat you?

DUNCAN: I guess there are good and bad people everywhere, as far as holding a grudge, NO, that would be silly.

ROLAND: I see your point. [ponders a moment] Did you get any news about how the war was going while you were in captivity?

DUNCAN: Well, the fishing village had a couple of radios, so to some degree I was able to keep updated on the war news. Later at Ofuna, we heard things by listening to the guards. New prisoners were also a great source of information. We knew the war was going badly for Japan, and in February 1945 we saw a massive raid on Yokosuka from our camp in Ofuna.

[Roland flips another page]

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan I guess that will just about do it.

DUNCAN: That's it?

ROLAND: Yes that's about it.

DUNCAN: What about you taking me up on charges? Are we square or what?

DUNCAN: Thanks Yeoman.

[Roland looking at a few pieces of paper speaks]

DUNCAN: So Roland, What's the scoop?

ROLAND: Don't sweat it Duncan you're off the hook.

DUNCAN: No court-martial? Can I return to a command?

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[Roland has a hesitant look on his face.]

ROLAND: anhummm Yes and No.

[agitated]

DUNCAN: Mr. Roland I was square with you it's time for you to be square with me.

ROLAND: Ok Duncan, no court martial, I'm satisfied with your statement but I am going to recommend that you be retired.

DUNCAN: RETIRED!!!!

[Roland looking in his folder, removing many pages stapled together.]

ROLAND: Medical retirement most likely.

DUNCAN: WHY?

ROLAND: Like I told you earlier, you're used goods.

DUNCAN: How? Why? Because I was captured?

[Roland looking in his folder, removing many pages stapled together.]

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan, I have another report here that was filed by the Japanese Naval officer who took you into custody. He told his commanding officer that the villagers were having several very bad years with their fishing. Seems that with the wartime food rationing, things were pretty tough for the villagers.

DUNCAN: So what does that have to do with me?

ROLAND: It seems that one night during the March of 1944, the villagers saw dozens of dancing lights in the sky. At first the villagers thought it was simply bugs until the lights grew larger and larger and came close to the shore. The villagers said that when the dancing lights came close to the village that they lit up the beach brighter than daytime. When the lights left, the villagers found you sleep on their beach.

DUNCAN: The villagers saw the lights too?

ROLAND: At first the villagers thought you were dead. It seems the fact that a round eye American seemingly placed on their beach by the gods was at first viewed as a bad omen. According to this report they very nearly planned to behead you. They were prepared to turn you over to military authorities the next day.

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DUNCAN: That's more or less what I told you, except for the beheading part. Is there anything in there why they treated me so nice?

ROLAND: According to the report, the next day the fishing boats made their morning run. They had the richest harvest of fish in two years. It was at that point that they began thinking that you were a gift from the Kami.

ANDREWS: [interrupting and puzzled] The Kami? What's that?

DUNCAN: [to Andrews]The Kami are a pantheon of Japanese gods worshiped in the Japanese faith called Shinto. [To Roland] So the locals really think I'm a gift from their Gods; and for that you're recommending that I be retired?

ROLAND: No, it's because you were probably rescued by the Foo-fighters that's why we are retiring you.

DUNCAN: What?

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan you're a good officer, but forces unknown to us have touched you, you're considered compromised.

DUNCAN: [upset] Compromised?

ROLAND: Duncan, you'll most likely be transferred into the reserves most likely an intelligence unit. You'll be medically retired. You'll draw a pension. If anything concerning these Foo-fighters ever comes up and Naval intelligence thinks you can be of assistance they'll call upon you. How's that sound for a deal?

[Roland packing up his papers]

DUNCAN: I suppose it's better that nothing...but but....

[Roland looks at Andrews]

ROLAND: Yeoman, you're dismissed.

ANDREWS: aye aye Mr. Roland

[Andrews gathers stuff and starts to leave, stops and looks at Duncan]

Mr. Duncan sir, good luck with everything.

[Duncan nods and smiles stilling puzzled looking]

ROLAND: Any thoughts on what you'll do in civilian life?

DUNCAN: [perplexed] I guess I could get a job teaching some place.

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ROLAND: What would you teach?

DUNCAN: Hmm perhaps English, on the other hand, I always wanted to be an actor, hmmm perhaps I'll become a Drama teacher.

[Roland offers his hand for a handshake, Duncan hesitates]

ROLAND: Mr. Duncan the way I look at it, those funny lights gave you a 2nd chance at life, I'd recommend that you live life to the fullest and have a happy life.

[Duncan accepts the handshake]

Good luck Mr. Duncan.

[Capt. Roland leaves the room, Duncan stands for a few moments turning and looking around the empty room.]

[Duncan; obviously in introspective space begins smiling. Finally he visibility takes on a different persona, He's in character moves about and recites a short passage from Hamlet ACT III, SCENE 1]

DUNCAN: To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
[begin Fade to black]
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache
[by this time full black]
and the thousand natural shocks.

Curtain

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Authors note

Garrett Duncan initially started out as a proposed character for the 1948: Signals LARP* Campaign (Live Action Role Play) While in the process of getting into the character's head for development, I made an effort to conceive a "real" interrogation or rather a debriefing of what the man went through at the end of the war. After role-playing this interrogation and sweating out his answers personally, I decided against playing Duncan in the LARP in favor of a female character.

Later I decided to take advantage of my research, notes and the dramatic role played interrogation transcript. This play is the result of all of it. I hope you like it.

NOTE: Properly paced and thought out this play should take 20-35 minutes , not the a minute per page.

*1948:Signals Campaign - A LARP Universe Game Written & Mastered by Eric Smith, Shane Amerman & Gordon Olmstead-Dean

{**Author's note:** I previously test marketed this script under the name Julia May Parker. }

Cheryl Ann Costa - (American playwright, April 23, 1952-)

The 50 word Bio

Cheryl Ann Costa is in a word, unique! Cheryl has been an airman, a submarine sailor and a talk radio host. Professionally, she is a security engineer for a top Fortune 500 company, vocationally she's an ordained Tibetan tradition Buddhist nun and avocationally she's a playwright.

The 100 word Bio

Cheryl Ann Costa's theater experience started when she was 15 years old –1967–, and mostly on the technical side of stagecraft for nearly 22 years. Then in 1992 she started concentrating on character acting, directing and most of all being a playwright. Since 1993, she has authored over fifteen plays, debuting many of them in the Washington, DC metropolitan and suburban Maryland. Some plays have been produced internationally and translated into other languages. The unique topic matters of her work have been the basis for many high school and college level term papers internationally.