

Ishmael

Chapter 7 - Synchronicity

“Look down on the eight billion inhabitants of planet Earth and you’ll see each individual have dozens of social interactions every day. Even a believer in synchronicity may think that only some of those interactions are important. There is a pervasive idea that a few people are the players, while the bulk of humanity are just there as background noise.

The truth is that it all matters, every single interaction, even just hitting ‘like’ on PopNet. Every conversation, every chance encounter, every unintended catching of a stranger’s eye, every accidental touch of another’s hand. It all matters, all of it, no exceptions.”



Ishmael McGrath had slept on an uncomfortable sick bay bed at the Fifth West offices. Not that he was still suffering the ill effects from the incident on the roof. The building was going to be the centre of the resistance, at least for a while. Not that the public realised there was a resistance movement, amazingly some still seemed to think there was nothing to worry about. Angela on C28 news seemed bemused by it all.

‘...These are the latest pictures coming from Heathrow.....There are reports of a similar attack on Shannon Airport in Ireland, though we’ve yet to receive official confirmation.....You may have power, your phone may work, but we are under attack. Remain at home if you can and conserve food where possible..... Fill up the bath in case the water supply fails.....’

Ish had listened to a phone in radio show in the early hours, full of nutters, the tin foil hat brigade, or people simply refusing to believe what was happening. In a world awash with fake news, a large proportion of the public simply refused to accept what was happening. Earth had gone from being a world where people had once wanted to so badly to believe, to being one where no one believed most of what they were told.

“Why Shannon, it has less flights than Dublin Airport ?” Asked Lianne.

It was just them in the canteen, eating breakfast before the others were up and about.

“It makes sense if you’re an alien tracking flight destinations.” Said Ish. “Shannon is an international hub, linking flights from Europe to America. Much of the traffic is freight. They’re trying to isolate us Lianne, cut off our lines of communications.”

“It looks so chaotic. An attack here, a huge rock landing somewhere else.”

“It isn’t Lianne, we’re seeing them apply a plan they’ve been working on for years, maybe hundreds of years.”

“Why though Ish, what has our planet got that theirs hasn’t ?”

“I have no idea, none at all. I’m not going to find out in London. I need to head north to where they landed, I need to be near Stourbridge.”

“JV won’t like that.”

Lianne wandered off with coffee and toast, leaving him alone. It was a little early to call her, but he was sure Biff would be up and about. His F-Phone managed to connect to her number, but the strange rainbow flaring at the edge of the screen was getting worse. The tin foil hatters claimed it was the little green men, monitoring our communications.

“Hi Ishmael.”

A female voice he didn't recognise. Biff's phone would have told her his name though, one of the questionable benefits of F-Phones.

"Erm.... Is Pandora there?"

"Yes, she was just seeing her mum off..... Dora.... It's Ishmael."

He heard her moving across the room and taking the phone.

"Morning Ish."

"Morning, who was that?"

"Penny from school, she stayed here last night. Everyone is worried after the Heathrow attack, my mum is out buying food for a few elderly neighbours. There have been rumours of panic buyers emptying supermarket shelves."

So in a bid to fight the evils of panic buying, Judy Gray was going out to panic buy. Not that Ish blamed her, she was scared, every sane person should have been scared.

"When are you going to Penrith?" He asked.

"Later today, they're sending a car for me. JV has a private plane not that far away, a small airstrip in Hertfordshire. He says it's just a few wooden huts and a bit of tarmac, nothing worth blowing up."

"Still..... Be careful Biff."

"I will, where are you going?"

Maybe he was being paranoid, but he thought about the tin foil hatters who believed that everything was being monitored. Mass surveillance of everyone on Earth. It sounded crazy, but the aliens probably had the technology to do it.

"I'm staying in London for the next month or so." He lied.

"Good, I love you Ish."

"I love you too Biff."

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Kitty MacLaren really only used her first name with her close family. She'd been christened Kitty by an eccentric mother and loathed the name. To everyone else she was just MacLaren, even to the occasional lover she picked up after getting home at the end of a rotation. She'd ensured Billy hadn't been damaged bringing him inside the main hold of Mordor One. The students were keen and strong, but they lacked experience. MacLaren hadn't relaxed until Billy was inside, refuelled, tanks full of fresh oxygen and there was no more reason for the students to fiddle with him. Like everyone else, she was now enjoying the luxury afforded by the facilities of the moon base.

"You still in the shower MacLaren?" Shouted Pam Rath

"Of course I am, there's no timer and the water is hot. It doesn't even have that odd funky smell all the water has in Albion."

They'd all discovered the pleasures of a long shower with no two minute timer. It was like being home again, but without the pesky journey back to Earth, with the dangerous re-entry and landing.

"We got their AI to trust us, or rather Billy did." Said Pam.

"What did you find out?"

"It's not good, we're meeting in the main lounge."

"When?"

"Now MacLaren, just as soon as you dress and join us."

"Yeah, alright."

It wasn't just the water at Base Albion with a funky odour, everyone there had it too. Two minutes a day under lukewarm water wasn't good enough to get rid of it. For the first time in months, MacLaren didn't wrinkle her nose as she dressed. The room wasn't hers, it had belonged to a female

member of the UniConsortium Moon Base. Might still belong if she was still alive, though that did seem unlikely. Her clothes fitted well enough and it felt more like borrowing than looting.

“MacLaren.....Now !” Yelled Pam.

“She has a full size wardrobe Pam..... A fucking proper wardrobe.”

“Later Kitty, you’re wanted at the meeting.”

Using Kitty, that was low. MacLaren followed Pam along several corridors and into the main communal area, which they were calling the lounge. Everyone was there, over two dozen angry, fed up faces.

“Thank you..... Now I can begin.” Said Richard Martucci.

“Billy isn’t here yet.” Someone joked.

“Billy is our unsung hero.” Said Pam. “He managed to convince their AI to trust us.”

“Does their computer have a name ?” Asked Norma.

“None that we’re aware of.” Said Richard. “Now, please settle down, we’ve made a few discoveries that are a little unsettling. The breach of the outer wall was seen by the AI, but the video images were later deleted. The invaders needed the systems to carry on running, so they left the computer alone. There are no backup images, but the activity log is intact.”

Richard had been talking a little too quickly, everyone knew he wasn’t good with people. He took a sip out of a glass of water before carrying on.

“In total the systems noted four unidentified life forms enter the base. There is quite a lot of bioanalysis data, where the AI tried to make sense of what it saw. We will be sending the data back to Earth as soon as possible. Those four aliens managed to dispose of the entire population of Mordor One in less than an hour. We have searched the base and all their atmosphere suits are here, but they’ve gone. Couple that with the blood stains and we have to assume that there are no survivors from whatever happened here.”

“What do we do next ?” Asked MacLaren.

“Ideally we’d stay here for now.” Said Pam. “There’s enough recycled water and air for a population of several hundred. We found a store full off food, and there’s an entire freezer room full of meat, including a few Christmas Turkeys. We talked about sending MacLaren back to pick up those we left in the Nest at Albion.”

“It’s definitely a lot more comfortable here.” Said Gene.

“There is a problem though, we tried to call Albion.” Said Richard. “There was no reply to any of our transmissions.”

“Fuck, that’s not good.” Said MacLaren. “Looks like our aliens are making the rounds of the lunar bases. Have you tried calling the Chinese ?”

“No reply, or from the Americans, we tried everyone.” Said Pam.

“Fuck !” Yelled Norma, which made everyone chuckle.

“Billy is ready to go.” Said MacLaren. “There might be survivors, I need to go back there, on my own.”

“You’ll need a few people with you.” Said Richard.

“No, it doesn’t make sense putting others at risk. I’ll go and see if there are any survivors. If there are any I’ll bring them back here.”

“You can’t go alone, you need at least one person who knows how to use a MAG74.”

“Fine, I’ll take Gene, he can shoot straight and doesn’t talk all the time.”

“Thanks, I think.” Said Gene.

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It had been a busy morning in the A & E department, though thankfully none of it was to do with the gradually escalating one sided war with whoever was attacking planet Earth. Road traffic accidents were nasty and unpleasant, as were the other injuries dealt with in a busy hospital. The attacks on Heathrow and other airports were talked about over coffee, as was the battle raging near Birmingham. So far though none of it had brought a single casualty into the hospital where Deb Newman worked. Mrs Bouvard winced as she finished cleaning the wound in her thigh.

"Sorry, did that sting a little ?" She asked.

"It did a bit."

"Once it's stitched and I put on a dressing, you'll feel a lot more comfortable."

According to the records Mrs Bouvard was eighty six. Sprightly for her age, she'd gashed her leg playing Shinty with a neighbour's kids. Deb sprayed her leg with an aerosol local anaesthetic. Once that numbed her a little she'd use a syringe to apply something stronger.

"That already feels better, thank you nurse."

"We'll just give it a couple of minutes to get you nice and numb."

"Like the dentists."

"Yes Mrs Bouvard, just like being at the dentists."

Deb prided herself on being efficient, always having everything she might need close at hand. She'd just started stitching the wound when the first loud bangs occurred outside.

"What was that ?"

"Keep still Mrs Bouvard; I'm sure it was nothing to worry about."

There were several more loud bangs and the cubicle partitioning actually moved a little.

"That's the army..... They're firing at something."

"Then you're lucky to be in here." She said. "Just two more stitches, keep still. I don't want to sew you to the sheet."

The patient was agitated, she was agitated, the explosions outside were becoming more frequent. Mrs Bouvard grabbed her hand when the lights went out.

"Don't worry, the hospital's generator will start up." She said.

Only it didn't, even after waiting for ten minutes. A & E was a large windowless area, almost like a bunker. Deb could see nothing, but the darkness wasn't total. There were luminous exit signs over a few doors and arrows pointing to the stairs.

"We have lights, but you'll need to let go of my hand."

"Don't leave me, please."

"I won't, I give you my word."

It wasn't chaos outside the cubicle; the other A & E staff were professionals and trained to deal with just about any eventuality. Near one green glowing exit sign, she knew there was a cupboard containing bright battery LED lamps. A male nurse was already there, muttering about the lamps.

"They don't work, nothing works." He muttered.

"Do you know what happened outside ?" She asked.

"No, I just heard the explosions and the lights went out. Everything electrical stopped.... We're going to lose a few patients in intensive care."

Deb tried her phone and that was dead too, the battery refused to even make the screen glimmer.

"Do we have anything else ? Any other lamps ?" She asked.

"No."

He was becoming moody, so she left him and felt her way back to the cubicle where Mrs Bouvard was still waiting for a dressing on her leg wound. It was unthinkable for a modern hospital to lose all power, it wasn't just the critical patients who'd be at serious risk of dying.

"Is that you nurse?"

"Yes, I promised I wouldn't leave you."

She was holding her hand tight enough for her to feel her shaking with fear. There might be a hospital full of patients needing care, but her first duty was to look after Mrs Bouvard. Action was needed, something outside the box as Matt often said.

"Keep your arms by your sides, I'm going to wheel you out of here."

"Where to?"

"Just to somewhere with daylight, you can't stay here in the dark. I'll put on the dressing once we've got a little light."

Getting the bed out of the cubicle was easy, porters did it all the time. The bed even rolled without too much effort once she had it moving.

"Jeez, go easy."

"Sorry, didn't see you."

"Is that you Deb? What are you doing?"

"Getting my patient out into the daylight, you should think about doing the same."

"Yeah..... Maybe."

There was a consultant somewhere who was officially in charge, but Deb wasn't about to try and find him in the dark. She pushed the bed towards the doors that would take her to where the ambulances dropped off, there was daylight there.

"Not far now Mrs Bouvard."

She was quiet, so she felt her wrist and breathed easier once she found a pulse. The patient was too old for strange adventures in the dark, even if she did play Shinty. Deb pushed the bed into the doors and nothing happened. No use pressing the big green button with 'Open' written below it, but she did anyway. Nothing, the doors should have opened in a total power failure, but they hadn't. She'd moan at building services about it if she got the chance, but it was time for more outside the box action. The lock looked solid, but the doors didn't.

"Hold on Mrs Bouvard, the doors are stuck. Pull your feet back, I'm going to use the bed to break open the doors."

"You shouldn't do that."

"I know."

The bed hit the doors and Mrs Bouvard cried out in pain. No stopping now though, she'd felt the wood flex and she was committed to a course of action.

"This time will do it." She said.

"I want to go home."

She took a longer run at it and used all her strength as the bed hit the doors. The doors crashed open, pieces of wood and broken lock bounced along the corridor in front of them. Her patient obviously felt the worst was over.

"I can see a light nurse." She shouted.

"Yes, almost there."

Good old health service beds, she doubted if using it as a battering ram had even chipped the paint. The corridor took them out to where the ambulances were waiting. As soon as she glimpsed the scene outside, she pulled the bed back down the corridor a little.

“Why are we going back ?”

“Just to here Mrs Bouvard, the light is better here.”

Her efficiency paid off, she still had what she needed to clean Mrs Bouvard’s wound again and apply a dressing. Then she’d brave what she’d seen outside, the ambulance on its side, the burned bodies next to it. There had been an army truck in flames too and quite a few more bodies.

“Please call my granddaughter, she’ll be worried.”

“I will if we find a phone that works. We need to cross the main car park to get to the admin building. It’s not nice out there, you might want to close your eyes.”

“You won’t leave me.”

“No of course not..... Close your eyes.”

Deb pushed her outside and it was worse than she’d imagined. It would have been nice to close her own eyes, but she couldn’t do that. She saw a military helicopter firing at something to the west, out towards Rufforth. It was a sleepy village with a mention in the Domesday Book.

“Why on Earth would they land in Rufforth ?” She muttered.

“Can I open my eyes now ?”

“No, not yet. I’ll tell you when.”

No problem getting into the admin building, the front glass doors had been shattered. There was no one there, but at least there were no bodies and plenty of daylight.

“You can open your eyes now.”

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Kata Malovic watched her brother eat a tin of cold oxtail soup. To him it was all an adventure, though he was pulling a face as he tasted the cold soup.

“Oh, this is..... Shit.” He said.

“Eat it; we might be stuck here for a while.” Said her mother.

They’d arrived home from school after the object had landed, but before their life in Stourbridge had been turned upside down. There was no power at all and they were surviving on water out of the tank in the loft and the cold contents of a few dozen tins. Washing was still possible as long as they didn’t use too much water. No washing machine, they were wearing every set of clothes for at least three days. Kata was beginning to realise she smelt bad.

“We can’t just stay here mum, it’s been days.” She said.

“What is an Ox mum ?” Asked Antun. “This stuff tastes dreadful.”

“It tastes a lot better hot.” Said Inka Malovic. “We can’t move in the daylight Kata and the things come out at night.”

The horrors of the night were bad, but the daylight hours were worse. They’d only caught a few glimpses of the alien craft flying over their town, but they’d seen what they could do. People cut down by some kind of lasers that burned holes in them, their bodies vanishing when the metal men came out at night.

“The metal men come out at night.” Said Antun.

“Yes the metal men.” Said her mum. “They don’t try to enter the houses, but we know how deadly they are in the streets.”

Yes they all knew how deadly the metal men could be, there were still terrible screams outside every night. No bodies when they looked out the next morning, but blood everywhere, lots of blood. There had been an arm on their garden path for a while, an arm wearing the ripped sleeve of an army uniform. Eventually the arm vanished.

“We will run out of food soon.” Said Kata. “And I hate wearing smelly clothes mum.”

"The metal men will kill us." Said Antun.

Obviously some sort of robot, the metal men appeared in large numbers just before dusk became full night. From the top windows of their house they'd watched the robots, until one had killed a young woman with an energy weapon. Her death had been horrific, something they never wanted to see again. Apart from being about the size of a full grown man, the robots didn't look like men at all. Their torso ran across the ground on large spherical wheels and they could move very fast if they had too. No head, just two arms, one with a multipurpose claw on the end. The other arm was the weapon, which brought death by a massive electrical discharge. So far at least, the robots had been content with patrolling the streets.

"We'll stay here until our food runs out." Said her mum. "Then there's just the old lady living next door, she will have food, probably lots of food. I still have a key to her back door from when Ellie lived there."

Her mum was talking about taking over a neighbour's house, probably for just another tank of water and a few tinned beans. Maybe some tinned cat food for when they became really desperate. What surprised Kata was that she didn't care, her thoughts were mainly on what food the old lady might have. Every society is three meals away from chaos, said a quote she remembered from English lit. Written by a Russian she remembered, though she couldn't remember his name.

"There are a lot of houses in our street." Said Antun. "They'll all have some food."

"Maybe, but I'm sure the army will rescue us very soon." Said her mum.

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MacLaren hadn't wanted to use the radio comms, they were probably monitoring them. Burst data transmissions through a satellite uplink were fast and difficult to trace, but old fashioned radio was like announcing your position to the universe. She swatted Gene's hand as he reached for the comms button.

"Not a good idea." She said. "If they know where all the lunar bases are they've been watching us, probably listening to us too."

"The guys in the Nest need to know we're here."

"No they don't, Billy can pop the airlock."

Maybe she was getting a little more paranoid than usual, but all the moon bases going suddenly quiet was good cause for a little healthy paranoia.

"Get suited up, I'm going to land well away from the base. At times like this I wish Billy had been equipped with a rocket launcher."

"I still think you should call them."

"Opinion duly noted, now get suited up."

She actually liked Gene; none of the other students would have dared to question her. She took Billy in a wide circle of the base, allowing his automatic system to try and talk to the Albion AI. All done with short range, very high bandwidth encrypted comms. Just as with Mordor One, Billy was getting a connect but no one seemed to be home.

"I'm getting a really bad feeling about this." She said. "I'll take us out to beyond the hydrogen tanks, there's a nice area of hard rock out there, perfect for Billy to land on."

"That's a hell of a walk back to the airlock."

"Billy is our only ticket out of here; I don't want to risk damaging him..... If.....You know."

He'd understand, they'd both seen the pools of blood inside Mordor One and the hole the aliens had created in the outer wall. An alien race that could do that was quite capable of destroying an

unarmed shuttle. Billy was staying dark, quiet and parked some distance away, even if it did mean a long trudge in an atmosphere suit.

“Our weapons will probably just annoy them.” Said Gene.

Kitty MacLaren clambered into the atmosphere suit and hated putting it on. The new suits were a marvel, a breakthrough in design; the inventor had received lots of awards. Within reason they were one size fits all, or in reality one or two sizes fitted all. Cleaning was never perfect though and there was always a hint of aroma from the pee and crap of the previous wearer. It was unpleasant, but unless you fancied a painful death in the non-existent lunar atmosphere the suits were essential. Before putting on the helmet and gloves, she used the fingerprint on her thumb to open a personal equipment locker. The weapons she brought out weren't standard issue.

“Crap MacLaren, you can't use a military pulse rifle in Albion, you'll blow holes in the walls.”

There had been three of the weapons in their small arsenal in Base Albion. She'd known Richard and Pam were too timid to use them, so she'd liberated them and their spare ammunition. She picked one up and stroked it like a pet.

“Gene, you seem an intelligent guy, what do you think we're going to find in Albion ?” She asked.

“No one alive, maybe a few survivors in the Nest if they got in there quickly.”

“Exactly, so a few holes in the walls aren't going to matter.” She said. “We'll be careful and only fire if we're attacked, but I'm taking the Pulse weapon with me. You can take a MAG74 if you want.”

She could see the desire in his eyes, even if the weapons were dangerous, banned on lunar and broke just about every space exploration safety code. He grinned as he picked one up.

“Have you been trained on using pulsed DC weapons ?” She asked.

“No, but how hard can it be ? Aim at the bad guy and pull the trigger.”

Oh wow, it was definitely going to be interesting if they found an alien to shoot at.

“We haven't got long, but I'd better go through the basics with you Gene.”

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The previous fight with one of the aliens had occurred suddenly, with no time to think about consequences. Sitting and waiting for their Ripley to return was hell, it gave his mind time to think about how far they were from help and the nearest trauma centre. Matt jumped a little when Brenda Grundy tapped his arm. It was there, walking slowly out of the trees. There was the sound of movement as all three of them readied their assault rifles, but nothing the creature was likely to hear.

Through his night vision equipment he could see a light patch on the alien's chest. Probably blood, their Ripley had fed again, somewhere out there another tourist had died. Not that he could see a mouth, but he knew the beast had rows of sharp teeth. Maybe the mouth sealed shut most of the time ? They knew so little, which was why the three of them were risking their lives to get an intact specimen.

The alien walked slowly, its head moving from side to side, probably listening for any sounds that might mean trouble. No ears though, no nostrils, no obvious eyes, though there were several pits where a human would have a face. Maybe it had other sense, maybe it could see them ? Crap, he was panicking a little. Going up against heavily armed enemy soldiers was one thing, but their Ripley was so fucking alien. As the creature walked past a particularly cube shaped rock, he gave the order.

“Fire !” He yelled.

The rock had explosives attached to it, just about all the explosives they'd brought. It was Brenda's job to press the button on the radio detonator. As dozens of AP45 rounds tore into it, the explosives

turned one of its legs into a mess of loose tissue and something resembling shattered bones. Good, they were learning more all the time.

“We’ve hurt it, keep firing, every round we have.” He yelled.

The creature instantly grew another leg and absorbed what was left of the destroyed limb. Matt gasped in disbelief at what he was seeing. There might have been some kind of exclamation from the others, but the gunfire was deafening. There was a slight lessening of the noise as his own weapon emptied a clip. Replace it or use another rifle ? He liked the sights on the one he was using, so he replaced the clip. Their fire was hurting the creature, a steady cloud of bits was flying off it with every hit. There was that sound again, the sound of something in pain. No bellow, no screams, no roaring, it was a plaintiff sound like that of a wounded bird. It was a sound that made you feel sorry for the alien, but Matt kept firing.

The fighting quickly started to go against them. It’s left arm was absorbed back into is body, to be replaced with something long that looked like a weapon.

“Keep down !” Yelled Matt.

It wasn’t an energy weapon, the long tubular affair fired something hard and metallic, which bounced off the side of its spacecraft. It fired again and hit Brenda, though he only knew that by her scream. It was dark, he had no idea how badly she’d been hurt. The alien ran towards the sound of her scream, it wasn’t finished with her yet. Its right arm became squatter, thicker, it was making a club. Brenda didn’t make a sound as the brutal weapon hit her, she was probably already unconscious.

“Keep firing Chris !” He yelled.

Maybe it was some sort of robot or AI controlled drone, it seemed fixated on hurting Brenda. Up came the club like arm again. Matt noticed something when the beast exerted itself. Four holes opened up in its back, like four large nostrils. It breathed air, it needed oxygen, he was learning again. He saw the holes open wide as it took in a gulp of air. It was a weakness, a way into its body, past what had to be an armoured outer surface. Matt picked up a rifle with a full clip and jammed it hard into one of the nostril. As he fired their Ripley seemed to scream, but again it sounded like the scream of a large bird.

Matt knew it was dying when the front of its chest opened up. Tubes fell out, sticky foul smelling tubes. His bullets had gone right through the monsters, ripping apart whatever strange organs it needed to survive. There was silence when his assault rifle ran out of ammo to fire.

“You did it, the fucker is dead.” Said Chris.

Brenda was his main concern, she was a crumpled heap of clothing near the base of the falls. Their Ripley wasn’t quite finished though, it screeched and hit him with the edge of the tubular weapon. Matt went over backwards, hitting his head on the ground. He passed into the peace and tranquillity of unconsciousness.

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The aircraft had only been in the air for about twenty minutes, when the pilot made the announcement. His voice sounded metallic and broken, the electrical problems seemed to be affecting everything in the small private jet.

“Engine one refuses to restart.” Said the pilot. “Engine two keep indicating low fuel, despite the tanks being full when we took off. We may have to make an emergency landing.”

There were only four of them on the plane, five with the pilot. The other three in the cabin were men in uniform, fighters in Fifth West’s private army, JV’s warriors for the coming apocalypse. They

smiled and seemed friendly, but she didn't know them. A crashing plane, or even a potentially crashing plane called for a long hug with someone you knew well.

"Do you know where we are?" Pandora asked one of the men.

"We're normally passing over Stratford-upon-Avon about now."

"Thanks."

The view out of the window told her nothing, just fields intersected by roads. The odd church steeple, but in rural England they were everywhere. The plane was descending, she hoped the pilot was doing it deliberately.

"There's a golf course right in front of us, I'm going to land there. Buckle yourselves in, lean forward. I'm sure you've all read the emergency landing instructions."

Was that an attempt at gallows humour? If it was she appreciated it. Pandora Gray looked out of the window before she leant forward. The golf club was an oasis of green right in front of their aircraft, as it approached the ground at frightening speed. The year she should have taken her finals, but the aliens had decided to arrive and now she was going to die in a plane crash.

"Fuck." She muttered.

The first bump as the plane tried to land on a small golf course with a lake in the middle was quite gentle, the second bump sent her crashing into the back of the seat in front. That might have been a good thing, as the pain in her nose stopped her worrying about the aircraft trying to turn over. The plane spun around, before going off to the left. How long would it take to come to a standstill?

"This is so unfair." One of the men yelled.

Idiot, didn't he realise life was never fair? Pandora knew things were really serious when she looked for the man who been sitting a little to her right and a few rows in front. There were no seats there now, just a ragged blood stained hole in the fuselage. Still the plane kept moving, only stopping when it hit a bunker and dug deep into the sand. There was still noise, the sound of an engine running at speed. She had to get out, everything was telling her to get out of the ruined plane and run for cover.

"Anyone still onboard?" She yelled.

Anyone still alive she almost shouted, but that would have been insensitive. Her left ankle caused her to yell out as she stood up, but she could walk on it. The smell of burning didn't make her panic, it made her walk with greater urgency.

"I think there's just us, the pilot is.....It's just us."

One man in uniform and her, but at least she wasn't on her own. No need to tell him they had to leave in a hurry, the smell of burning had become yellow flames at the rear of the ruined cabin. No point in opening the door, the ragged hole in the side of the plane was their exit point. The water logged bunker was a nightmare to run across.

They were among some trees on the far side of the golf course, when the expensive private jet became a ball of flame and debris. She was covered in dirt and mud, her ankle hurt like hell, but she was alive.

"I saw you limping, can you walk alright?"

"It depends how far. Do you know where we are?" She asked.

"I do, I was originally on the team to come here. At the last minute I was switched to guard duty in Penrith. It's a reasonable walk, but not a huge distance to where the Fifth West science team set up camp."

"I feel guilty, we should go back and check for survivors." She said.

Her new and as yet unnamed friend was shaking his head.

“No, they’ll send someone back to check. You need to get that leg looked at.”

“I’m Pandora..... Actually call me Dora, I feel we’ve bypassed the usual small talk.”

“I’m Peter.”

“Come on Peter, I’m going to lean on you a lot and you’re going to pretend you don’t mind.”

The distance they had to walk was close to three miles. She was glad he hadn’t told her until they’d covered two thirds of the distance. When she finally limped into the where the fifth west vehicles had formed a circle, she was ready to drop.

“I’m going to sit here for a while, I have to sit here. I’m not walking another step.”

“But we’re so close Dora, just a few more steps.”

“And I will take them, after a little bit of a rest.”

She had a good view of the vehicles, motor homes under camouflage netting. There was one truck with a large calibre gun on the back, but the rest of the vehicles screamed civilian research team. What were they researching there ? Crap, where was there ? She had no idea where he’d brought her, and Peter had vanished.

“He could have at least brought me a cup of tea.” She muttered.

A lone figure came out a large SUV and walked towards her. She recognised his walk, his posture as he walked, even the way he slightly favoured his left leg. She even recognised his scruffy Rolling Stones T shirt as he squatted next to her.

“I brought a tin of the fizzy stuff you like.”

“Thank you.” She replied.

“So Biff, why are you in Stourbridge ?” Asked Ishmael McGrath.

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