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(Chapters 1 - 14)

The Samaritan

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Chapter 1 – The Samaritan

Karl wore a typically miserable expression as he entered a newly built but entirely grey business park. He had travelled across London and was apprehensive to start his new job which already offered little promise; a warehouse position sorting everyday parcels for minimum wage. Working as a drone was nothing new to him but that was the problem; he was at the end of his tether three menial jobs ago. Secretly he had a long-standing desire to cancel his own life but after a week of fretting over mounting bills he reluctantly decided to get through the induction.

He had been told to wear casual clothes and encouraged to be clean-shaven. Another reason to be depressed as it exposed his chinless face. It was early in the day and Karl resented not being able to take advantage of the blissful summer weather, but then remembered his past few weekends had been spent playing strategy games indoors with the blinds shut. He watched birds fly freely above him as he passed through the industrial rubber curtains. The humidity inside hit his pasty face as he watched experienced workers busy about between conveyor belts and forklifts. Karl stood by a closed office, hoping he would not be seen or approached.

“Out the way!” A grey-skinned worker shouted as he pushed by Karl in a huff.

A manager jogged over to him with a clipboard in hand, “Y’alright mate are you Kyle Pyle?”

“It’s Karl.” He replied and offered a hand. Then winced at how limp and clammy his own handshake was.

“Alright Kyle I’m Sam, we’re a bit stretched today but it says here you have experience in warehouse work so we’ll give you a proper introduction another time. If you make your way to them roll cages over there you’ll see they’re marked by letter. Just take the labelled package from the belt and place it in the corresponding cage. Once you’ve filled one up seal it with a zip-tie and roll it to the loading bay. Okay?”

Karl plodded off to his work station past the main office where a fat woman wearing a regional manager name tag stood sneering at the workers. The only visible air conditioning was pointed directly at her makeup caked face. Karl witnessed her bark orders at her colleagues below her with contempt. She wore jewellery on most of her exposed flesh and wore long pink fake nails.

“Move!” An Eastern European man with a bushy ginger beard gestured Karl towards the already overflowing conveyor belt. The dry atmosphere dulled his senses as he continued to stare at the woman with a deep hatred. She walked around assessing the warehouse conditions and made her authority known as inferior managers ran around to impress her. After a few hours of intense work the woman disappeared into one of the offices.

“You can have your break now mate.” Sam said as he pointed him through to a canteen. Karl hurried through to the toilet holding his back pocket. An extremely rotund man left as he entered, but only one cubicle was vacant. The lock was broken so he had to hold

the door closed with an outstretched arm. As his cheeks hit the warm seat he shuddered and looked up to the stained ceiling. He sat for a few minutes, relishing the opportunity to be alone before walking back out to the floor. Karl took out a pound coin and bought a condensation-dripping Lilt from the vending machine. The canteen doors opened and the regional manager entered with a hog roast baguette in her hand.

“Right, are you Kyle?” She said. “You realise what you’ve just done don’t you? If you leave your post it affects all of us!”

“I was told to take a break.” Karl murmured.

“No you weren’t! Seeing as it’s your first day you’re getting a warning but I’ll be monitoring your effort throughout your induction. There are a lot of people applying to this job so don’t think you’re irreplaceable.” She swung the canteen door back open and pointed him back to his station, “I suggest you apologise to your colleagues for letting them down!”

To the woman’s surprise, Karl walked by the conveyor belt, past Sam and straight out of the warehouse. He walked for four miles before he calmed down then with a clear head he wandered down a tube station’s steps and purchased a ticket back home. He had used his last shred of optimism to force himself to his new job, but after the induction he returned to his usual dark headspace and decided to fulfill his original morbid plan, starting with the purchase of a makeshift last meal.

Upon arriving in Kennington he entered a supermarket and shuffled forward in a restless queue at a self-service checkout. He kept his head down and stared at the two products in his hands; a selection of processed meats and a king-size bag of chicken-bites. Karl grew increasingly irritated by the shrill sound of a plummy old woman in front of him but he resisted raising his head. After hearing a foreign couple speak in their native tongue it occurred to him that he preferred not to know what strangers were saying. However, in this brief moment of lenience, the man lifted his shopping basket and cracked Karl hard on the elbow.

He left the cramped supermarket, straight into a mob of people rushing in and out of tube stations. He entered a city park and sat on a bench opposite a homeless man, who struggled in the heat. Karl fidgeted and took out the food but he had no appetite. His shoulders slumped back and he stared at the tower block across the road. He got back to his feet, swiftly marched over to the tramp and said, “Here y’are mate.” then offered the unopened food. The long, greasy hair of the tramp swayed as he laughed maniacally through golden-brown teeth.

“Want some spice, child?!” The homeless man shouted in a Scouse accent but Karl was already halfway across the road. At the tower block he pressed several random numbers and waited a few seconds until he was buzzed in by a stranger, then took the lift to the top floor. Karl climbed up rickety steps onto the rooftop and overlooked the city with a deep closing breath. A pink, polluted London sky engulfed the landscape. His mushroom-shaped hair blew in the wind as he stood decisively. Hot air breathed in from an earlier tube journey still lingered on his tongue. Thoughts and memories unwittingly flooded his brain as he approached the concrete ledge.

He removed his rucksack and placed it in the corner; with the hope of leaving some mark of existence behind before becoming at one with the pavement. As he turned back to face the edge he scrunched his bent, broken nose and squinted at the distant floor below; the cars looked like toys from the rooftop. "Ah well, that's it then." He muttered, then dangled an assured leg over the tower's face but before taking his final step, he and the previously bustling London surroundings came to a complete standstill, as if the cogs of the universe had jammed. The entire world was motionless; pigeons froze mid-flight, rage induced drivers remained gridlocked down below and all other signs of life were non-existent.

However, a large figure unshackled by the suspension of time walked single-mindedly towards the building's edge. The man had a bald, wrinkled head that strongly resembled a thumb and he could easily be described as obese. He looked Karl up and down like a piece of meat, "You're in trouble now boy." He reached his hirsute arm into his pocket and retrieved a gold-plated box. The device had a large rotating dial on the front and boasted small amethysts that were fixed to the plate. The surface shimmered silver in the sunlight which revealed scratches and dents. Intact on the sides were small wheels and levers.

With one fluid action he grabbed the frozen Karl by the hood and yanked him back towards the building. The man twisted a dial and restored motion to the world. Karl crashed hard on his back and lay heavily winded for a few moments. He assessed the grazes on his palms then looked up defiantly at the face of his saviour.

"What are you doing?! What right do you have to-You ruined it for me!" Karl stammered, brushing the grit off his clothes. He looked up at the chunky man who wore a tatty red T-shirt riddled with stains. His neck was practically the same width as his gargantuan head. "Just leave me alone, alright?" Karl said, as he steadily got to his feet and skulked away to the roof exit.

"Give me a minute son, you owe me that." A voice bellowed from behind.

"I owe you fuck all, mind your own business!" Karl yelled as he clenched his fist.

"I'm afraid I can't leave you now mate." The man said in a sullen tone. Karl opened the roof door but the same bulky figure took shape from inside. He stumbled back off of the steps and was sure his eyes deceived him. He looked around in the hope that the original man still stood near the ledge, but it was vacant. "Mind your step, Karl." The man said, now casually walking through the exit doors back onto the rooftop.

"How did-? What do you want from me?!" Karl sobbed in a whine of frustration.

Seeing Karl's defencelessness the man sighed, he rubbed his brow with an oily hanky. "Look I need you to stay calm."

Karl only had one thing on his mind and decided there might only be one way to escape. He ran back towards the ledge, moving faster than he had in years and successfully leapt off the tower, arms outstretched. Karl began to feel the sensation of falling in his stomach. The bald man held the device in his palm and strolled over to the parapet, then twisted the dial again, bringing time to a standstill. He peered back down to assess the damage; Karl was frozen mid-air parallel to the seventh floor. The man sighed and made his way back towards the exit and down the stairs.

He arrived at flat seventy-nine then proceeded to pick the lock with a blunt metal tool. Inside the studio apartment were three young men sat on a sofa playing Nintendo, frozen in time. The bald intruder lifted his leg to expel gas, which created a sound similar to that of a buisine in a medieval battle. He turned his attention to the window behind them and reached out an arm but could only grab a shoe, so edged closer and pressed his cheek to the pane. Finally he managed to clasp Karl's ankle then pulled his weightless body into the flat and carried him out of the tower block.

Chapter 2 - The Stranger and the Sock

Karl sunk into a comfortable surface with force, eyes shut tight as his own guttural scream hit his ears. He spluttered a mist of tears, snot and saliva then regained his composure. He opened one eye cautiously and stopped grunting for air then analysed his surroundings; the soft surface he had fallen into was a king-size bed with tiger print silk sheets and a purple velvet headboard. The sight of the pavement rushing up to meet him had been replaced by a tacky chandelier hanging in a large room with high ceilings.

Gingerly he climbed off the bed, a sweet perfume filled the air. Tentatively he made his way out of the room to explore the rest of the house. The furniture and decor looked expensive but unrefined, endless pop art paintings of Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe filled the hallway and anything that could be gilded, had been.

Karl scratched his head in utter bewilderment as he found his way into a mezzanine floor which overlooked a large vacant living area. He descended down floating stairs and noticed mismatched chairs, all pointed toward a grotesquely large television. Neon signs on the walls read; 'I'm in Miami Bitch' and 'Let's Have a Party!' which illuminated a mock statue of David wearing sunglasses with obscenities sprayed on the torso in red graffiti. Karl did not know where he was but he had seen enough.

Karl paced through a long corridor hoping to find an exit at the end. The strange surroundings had distracted him but his spirits were lifted as it led out to a well-lit lobby room. A grand spiral staircase twisted up high next to two giant oak doors. He jogged over hurriedly and gripped one hand on the doorknob but his rare smile faded as he heard a distant clapping sound, coming from a nearby room. Feeling like a slave to his own curiosity he turned to the right to see a shut door with a white light flickering underneath.

Karl approached the room and looked around uneasily; it felt like this was all part of an elaborate prank at his expense. The slapping sound continued and grew louder, so he pushed two fingers on the door and swung it open to reveal an unspeakable horror. The grotesque bald man from his nightmares was enthusiastically masturbating to a TV screen in a Lazy boy recliner; it was the tormenter from the rooftop. Karl averted his gaze and tried to leave the room unnoticed, but it was too late. A loud dry heave from Karl's throat alerted the exposed man, who was even more terrified than Karl. He shot out of the chair and attempted to cover the screen, further exposing his fat wrinkled body with only a sock hanging from his genitals.

Karl glanced up at the screen and recoiled at the content. "Oh dear what is that?!" -

The TV's volume intensified, *"Oh yor hoirtin' meeeeeeee, oh it hoirt soo goood!"*

"I think I'm gonna be sick." Karl mumbled with his fingers on his lips.

"I-I didn't know you were...I must've knocked the-" but before the man could explain, the sock dropped to the floor and both their eyes were drawn downwards. They paused in an unbearable silence. "Well get the fuck out of here!" Shouted the man defensively trying to pull his trousers up and claw at the last remnants of his own dignity. Karl quickly left the room and slammed the door behind him feeling more puzzled than ever. A gruff voice behind him asked, "Shall we just start again mate." Yet again the man stood in an impossible position, he had teleported behind Karl at the foot of the grand staircase. All of a sudden he was fully clothed, wearing a paisley shirt. "Let's stop muckin' about now, I'm B.B and you'll find what I'm 'bout to explain hard to believe but"-

"I knew it!" Karl said.

"You knew what?" B.B snapped with an impatient grimace.

"I'm obviously dead aren't I? That's how you know my name." Karl exclaimed with glee.

B.B shook his head growing more irritated, "Alright fuckface, yeah, you are dead, and I am your reckoning. I'll be the author of all your pain from now on my pedigree chum." Karl cowered as the man's tone became sinister, 'What will you do now eh, boy? Will you beg for mercy? Will you plead for a reprieve?" B.B towered above Karl with a menacing smirk before softening his voice, "Nah you are alive, really. This is just a state of frozen time or what I call Ticantik." B.B pulled the device out.

"Frozen time?" Karl said sceptically, "D'you think I'm thick?"

"Yes." He replied, "Maybe if you'd let me do this bloody demonstration and show you what I mean."

"So you're saying you froze time, stopped me from killing myself then dragged me here against my will?" Karl said.

"Well technically yes." B.B replied.

"And that explanation is supposed to fill me with joy?" Karl asked.

"Listen, when you see this technology you'll be kissing my feet!" B.B raised his commanding voice.

"You're a pervert!" Whined Karl pathetically.

"Not literally you berk." B.B tutted.

"No you were whacking away with me here, you wanted me to find you!" Karl cried.

Even B.B started to sympathise with Karl's perspective, "Nah look that was a misunderstanding, I completely forgot you were 'ere."

"I'm not having it, you're a freak! I don't believe a word you've said and I'm not doing anything you want!"

B.B's blood pressure rose as he tried to remain understanding. "If it weren't for me you'd 'ave been scraped off the pavement by now. Look, I'm giving you an opportunity to reinvent yourself!" He calmed himself and patted Karl's jumper down as a way of an apology. "I admit it I didn't pluck you from the air out of sheer moral dedication but it'd be less fucking time consuming if I just show you."

Karl was too exhausted to argue anymore, "Okay, but where's my rucksack?"

"Never mind that dick'ead, strap yourself in." B.B pointed the same gold-plated device from the rooftop at Karl but this time scanned him; a stick figure appeared on a small pearlescent screen in the box's plate. The silhouette turned from black to red as Karl began to look closer at it. Suddenly, the front door burst open to reveal an angry couple.

"What the fuck are you dirty bastards doing in my house!?" A woman yelled out in an Australian accent. Next to her was a man with bleach blonde tips in his hair and a wispy goatee beard, brandishing a cricket bat. His bright, white polo shirt and teeth clashed with his fake orange tan. The screeching woman made B.B look trim; her squealing threats struggled to distract Karl from the bulging rolls of fat that pressed against her pink, skin tight dress. He did not know where to look, she resembled a balloon filled with porridge and tied up with rubber bands.

The four stood in a Mexican standoff staring each other down. The man twitched violently with dilated pupils, pointing the bat accusingly at them both. Karl winced and bit his lip in fear as B.B gurgled.

"What are you laughing at you fat cunt!" The Australian man screamed. "You and your rent boy need to get on the fucken floor right fucken now!"

"This isn't even your house!?" Karl asked B.B, then turned back to the couple and tried to level with them. "Look I don't even know this bloke, I'm not a rent boy! I need to get away from him!"

"Do something, Derek!" Demanded the woman, staring at her husband.

"No come on you've gotta believe me!" - Karl could not finish his sentence before the man charged forward and swung his cricket bat while letting out a throaty, rattling scream. Karl shut his eyes in anticipation but the commotion came to a sudden halt. He opened one eye slightly to see the contorted face of the man frozen in time, saliva flying from his mouth and eyes bulging and bloodshot. The woman behind him was suspended in an equally horrifying pose, cheering like a Roman Emperor in the colosseum. Finally Karl turned to B.B who was shaking the device with one hand and holding Karl's shoulder with the other.

"Well it wasn't the demonstration I had in mind but works as good as any I suppose." B.B said.

"You did that?" Karl replied.

"Yeah that's what I've been trying to explain you fuckin' idiot." B.B responded.

Karl approached his frozen attacker tentatively, prodding him and looking closely into his glazed marble-like eyes. He did not look alive, but he did not look dead either, his body and clothes were still warm and malleable but gave less resistance than they

normally would. Karl pressed his thumb into the man's cheek and it left an imprint like when pushing into dough.

"What have you done to them? They look hypnotised." Karl asked.

"They're frozen in time, but we're immune thanks to this device, which I call the Antik." B.B explained as he held out the golden-box for Karl to inspect.

"How does" - Karl began to ask but before he could finish his sentence, time unexpectedly resumed and the cricketer's mighty swing continued onto Karl's head which knocked him backwards, dizzy and concussed. B.B quickly twisted the dial again but to no avail. He stood baffled for a moment.

Motion remained fluid as the delighted woman cheered, "GO ON!" B.B took matters into his own hands and charged his huge frame into the Australian man and flung him like a ragdoll into the staircase. "Derek!" The woman rushed over to her husband and wailed as he lay unconscious on the stairs, folded in an awkward position.

B.B quickly ran over to Karl and helped him up, "Quickly now boy, let's get out of here." Karl mustered the energy to balance himself and followed B.B out of the house onto a long gravelled drive as they completed their escape. Blood oozed out of a gash on the top of Karl's head, "Don't worry, a mate of mine will sort you out."

Chapter 3 – Isaac

B.B led Karl to a parked transit van and pulled a small shimmering artefact out of his trouser pocket. This metal block resembled an axe-head with two horned-points, "Wedge of Aiud," he said, holding it under Karl's nose, "It can morph into any blunt object."

It had engravings all along the face that glowed yellow pulsing into purple. "That's Sumerian." Karl said, inspecting the new artefact, still nursing his head.

"You know your history." B.B said.

"I've spent my whole life on a computer." Karl admitted.

"Yeah I can tell from your physique." B.B retorted, "Need to get out more mate."

"Oh yeah, coz you're a picture of health." Karl looked at B.B indignantly. "How do you know my name?"

"I have my ways." B.B said shadily.

"But no one knows me. I've made sure of that." Karl said.

"You're welcome to go back to your dingy room knocking one out on Facebook if you'd prefer." B.B said.

"At least I wank in my own house." Karl retorted.

“You try living with infinite time, see where you end up. Anyway, I’ll find someone more grateful for what I’m offering.” B.B said as he fiddled with the Wedge and to Karl’s surprise dozens of tiny, shifting cubes morphed in B.B’s open palm.

“Wait a minute…” Karl realised the stillness had consumed their surroundings again. “You stopped it again?” He walked away from the van and curiously looked at a fluffy ginger cat, scratching his ear.

“That’s not me. And if it wasn’t for me registering you into the Antik you’d be frozen too.” B.B explained.

“Is that what that device is called?” Karl said while looking up at the lights of a low-flying plane suspended in the air.

“It’s what I call it, but it’s had many names through history.” B.B said then flicked Karl’s arm with his knuckles then inserted the Wedge into the lock and expanded the mechanism.

“Right get in.” B.B mumbled as he opened the van door and brushed the glass off the seat. Karl walked to the passenger’s side and dribbled orange sick down his chin as his head pulsated. He spluttered uncontrollably for a moment then opened the door. “I don’t feel so hot.” He said as he used his finite strength to hoist himself onto the van seat as his eyes rolled into the back of his head.

“That’ll be the cricket bat.” B.B reached past Karl to shut the passenger door.

Karl awoke sometime later but they were still driving on a motorway, weaving in and out of frozen cars.

“Ah you’re awake, we’re ‘bout twenty minutes away. Hang on, there’s services up there.” B.B swerved through a junction over to the left-side of the motorway, narrowly evading the still traffic.

“Steady on!” Karl cried, as he banged his fragile head on the window. They entered the relatively empty garage and Karl witnessed B.B hop over a fast food counter to help himself to the kitchen. “How can you eat when time’s frozen?”

“As soon as the food enters my mouth it becomes immune from Ticantik.” B.B said, through a mouthful of chips.

“What is Ticantik?” Karl asked.

“As I tried to explain earlier, Ticantik is what I call frozen time. When time is flowing normally, I call it Kinesis. I specialise in locating ancient artefacts that manipulate the flow of Ticantik and Kinesis.”

“So you live most of your life in Ticantik?” Karl queried.

“Almost exclusively, Ticantik seems to stop me ageing so I try to avoid Kinesis as much as I can.” B.B admitted.

“So how long have you lived?” Karl asked.

“Best not to think about it.” B.B dismissed.

“But how did we drive in Ticantik? How can anything function in frozen time for that matter?” Karl asked.

“If I need to drive I use the Antik’s Immunity Ball.” B.B explained as he held out the golden device. “It creates a sphere of Kinesis and I dictate the size of the ball with this dial here.” B.B demonstrated, forming a faint blurred ball around them, “Anything inside behaves normally while the world outside of the ball stays in Ticantik. The only objects that don’t function inside the Immunity Ball is anything that needs an external power source.” He pointed at the fryers that bubbled slightly then fizzled out as the source of electricity was cut off.

Karl began to comprehend the power B.B wielded. “But why did you scan my body back at the house?”

“It’s safer to map our bodies into the device. This immunises us from time stops no matter where we are without the need to conjure an Immunity Ball. I call this Profile mode.” B.B explained.

After stealing food and drink they returned to the van. “Did you build the Antik then?” Karl asked.

“Yeah I built it from the blueprints of an existing device. This dial set the degree of Ticantik or the speed of time. For example if you’d have pressed your finger into that man’s cheek earlier in a full Ticantik, he would’ve probably fallen back and cracked his bonce open.” B.B said as they set off again.

“Wish I had done.” Karl groaned nastily, as he tried to wipe the crusted blood away with water and cotton pads. “Ah god I feel rough.”

They pulled out of the services and passed by a robin which sprung to life after entering the Immunity Ball, before refreezing again on the opposite side of the vehicle.

“That bird just moved! What’s that going to look like the rest of reality?” Karl said.

“It might confuse a few people yeah.” B.B laughed.

“Come on that can’t be good. Haven’t you heard of determinism?” Karl asked.

“Shut up you mug, I know what I’m doin’. Anyway don’t worry, the brain of a modern ‘uman being will do mental somersaults to explain anything slightly unusual. They’ll say it’s ghosts, deja vu, shape-shifting lizards, inter-dimensional jiggery-pokery. There are enough sci-fi and fantasy stories out there to fuel the deranged theories of any poor fucker who happens to see me in action. Then there’s always someone there to tell them to shut up and sit down.” B.B ranted.

“But what would you do if someone caught you?” Karl continued.

“I told ya, destroy the evidence. I mean, people have even uploaded videos of my handiwork but thankfully they’re always nutters and get dismissed as crazy. I have more experience in what I do than anyone.” B.B said.

“Why are you telling me all this?” Karl asked.

“I need someone like you to help me and I trust you’ll do what’s good for ya’.” B.B said. Karl stayed silent as the van pulled into an estate of industrial-sized garages and dilapidated high-rises. As they drove forward they approached a large garage, B.B pointed the Wedge at the door which slid open. They passed by a dim red light into a dark loading bay inside the building. “Right don’t be wandering around sticking your beak where it’s not welcome.” B.B said.

Karl followed B.B up some steps and the pair descended down a long corridor. One by one lights turned on, gradually illuminating more of the path into the distance until finally revealing an antique scissor-gate lift at the end. B.B placed the Wedge into a metal slot, the ancient lettering glowed and a purple current shot up a thick cable then opened the lift door. Sumerian symbols covered the inside of the cage. Karl anticipated going up to the top of the building but the lift started to creak before quickly descending. Karl tried to catch a glimpse but struggled to identify what each floor contained. On one he was sure he saw a biblical collection of animals with a flurry of luscious green, the next a futuristic gymnasium.

“This is mental, who built this place?” Karl asked but B.B did not answer. Karl’s ears pricked as the lift squeaked to a stand-still, he could hear a faint sound of music with heavy bass. They stepped out into a pure white room and smelt a familiar herbal stench. B.B raised his fist and banged a door several times. They heard distant spluttering and locks clanged then the door flung open. A short Jamaican man in a white vest and shorts stood in the frame with a broken smile and reached out for a hug but B.B brushed past him.

“I thought we said no overrides you tit.” B.B moaned.

The vast room they had walked into took Karl aback. Shifting projections of neon filled the walls with cryptic maps and scripture. On the right was a long bar area with wicker chairs and stools. Ancient tapestries were hung around the room. Karl squinted through gaps in bamboo partitions to see what looked like a small museum.

“It was only a lil’ reset, wait till yuh see what I made.” Isaac said excitedly as he passed B.B a joint. He then offered it to an uneasy Karl who took it reluctantly.

“Check it out.” Isaac said pointing a remote at a blank white wall. A projection of the world formed and incrementally zoomed in; first into England and then the South East revealing B.B’s location.

“You nearly stitched me up.” B.B said.

“I jus’ saw yuh heat signature, knew yuh were chilling in a house, never thought yuh’d mind!” Isaac insisted.

“Didn’t think I’d mind? You have to sort his swede out then.” B.B pointed at the gash in Karl’s head. Isaac sat him down on the opposite side of the room on a white leather sofa and attended his wound.

“That should be cleaned up, you better get some rest.” Isaac said, as he gave Karl duvets and pillows.

"I spent the best part of two months in Ticantik, you better have something better than restoring the tracker. Why d'you resume it anyway? Did you find Blaise?" B.B grumbled.

"I needed fluid time an' I was bored of waiting, prepare to cream." Isaac ushered B.B over to a large computer and pointed to a heat signature on the map.

"Siena. Why was he so desperate to get back there? It was a horrendous place." B.B said.

"He finally made it home, we should've known." Isaac asked.

"That's a relief, I'll leave in the mornin'. B.B said, then made his way through to his quarters.

Chapter 4 – The Menagerie

Karl woke up with dribble on the pillow, he could hear Isaac and B.B talking at the bar.

"Maybe we should give the kid a tour." B.B said. "But before that show me the Beamer, you've left it this long." He demanded. Isaac slid a plate of food along the bar to a salivating B.B. It was a full English breakfast; bacon, sausages, golden hash brown, crispy fried eggs and baked beans. He pulled out cutlery from a shelf underneath the worktop and continued. "Come on you plum show me."

Isaac stayed silent as B.B stabbed at a sausage, it slipped straight off and bounced onto the bar counter. Isaac proceeded to pull a device from behind the bar. It looked like a golden rolling pin bulging at the middle, with indented rings and two balled-ends. Isaac pointed the relic at B.B's plate of food and upon clicking a sudden ball of dark purple energy rattled quickly through channels, starting at the end closest to Isaac and then circling around the Beamer, before flying off the end towards the plate. The energy dissipated and steam started billowing upwards as if the meal had just been freshly cooked. Isaac enjoyed B.B's emphatic reaction. "You're a genius, how'd you do it?"

"Anti-hydrogen accelerator that charges anti-quarks. Ositron paths in our cloud chamber traced the same helical path as the electrons it hits, then induces Ticantik. Similar to that chamber we built for the frozen treasure chests. Just had to scale it down."

B.B nodded sagely with eyes closed, despite not following a word.

"Then the orbs suspend and store the magnetic field properties of the object. Due to 'em having the same magnitude of charge-to-mass ratio but wid opposite charge. Even programmed it to reset motion to combat high speed travel." Stated Isaac proudly.

"Nice." B.B confirmed. "But how come it worked in here? Should be immune."

"Oh I dropped the base's immunity defences just for the demonstration. Anyway bruvva, I need to go get Blaise's cage ready, it's a tip. If you fancy giving me a hand?" Isaac asked.

"I thought I'd go straight to Siena, mate. But gonna stop off at 'Dam first." He replied. "I'm guessing you're not letting me take that yet?" B.B pointed at the new artefact.

“Just use Antik for now, I’ll ‘ave it ready for when yuh return.”

B.B wolfed down his breakfast. “We ought to get one each. Right let’s wake Karl up.” B.B pushed his plate forward and made his way over to the sofa then shook him awake. He got up and joined them by the bar.

“What yuh sayin’, Karl?” Isaac greeted with a handshake, “Yuh hungry? Come, we’ll show yuh the fridge.”

“Just get one o’ these down ya boy, ya won’t find a better one in England.” B.B said, wiggling his last sausage.

“I am pretty hungry.” Karl Replied.

“No worries, I’ll hook yuh up wid a gut bustin’ bikkle.” Isaac said.

Karl followed Isaac through the small museum that he had caught a glimpse of the day before. There were a series of glass stands with peculiar equipment sitting on top, with incomplete maps at the foot. Through several small arches and curtained doorways they reached an immaculate kitchen. Isaac continued through to a heavy, vault door and turned the circular handle.

“This is the fridge mate, might be a bit overwhelming at first. B.B insisted we upsize to accommodate his appetite.” Isaac said.

B.B slapped his bursting stomach with pride. They both followed Isaac into the fridge; a warehouse of crates stacked ten high in alphabetised rows.

“Where d’you get all this food from?” Karl asked, looking up at the sheer scale.

“Mostly trucks on the way to a restaurant or some supermarket. Only the best stuff though.” Isaac clarified, as he pushed a small trolley around the stacks throwing ingredients in.

“Brilliant, so you’re thieves. Why isn’t it cold in here?” Karl questioned.

“We call it the fridge but everything’s just frozen in Ticantik, fresh from when we took it. And anyway, the pompous waga-waga’s an’ oversize mampie’s throw away enough food to feed a village.”

“How comes you’d still need to eat in Ticantik?” Karl asked.

“We still get hungry.” B.B said, prodding him in the belly, “Even if Ticantik disrupts our biology, Isaac’s tested it but there’s still ambiguity.”

“We came to the conclusion Ticantik energy suspends the biology of organic beings but seemingly due to the length of exposure. Short stints in Ticantik seemed to be ineffectual.”

“That’s why I said I favour Ticantik over Kinesis. As you will too.” B.B claimed.

They left the Fridge, Karl and B.B sat on stools around a kitchen-island. Isaac disappeared through another entrance briefly and returned with a bottle of aged Chateau Lafite Rothschild. He placed 3 wine glasses down and began to pour.

"It's a bit early, isn't it?" Karl asked.

"Time is an illusion." Isaac said, swigging from the bottle. He finished cooking and ate with Karl while B.B continued to pour.

"Why me?" Karl asked.

"What d'you mean?" B.B replied.

"Stop dodging the question. Why would you pick me? You could've picked anyone." Karl said.

"You had the least amount of baggage." B.B burbled.

"... You mean because I was gonna kill myself." Karl said.

"Er yeah, sort of. If you like. Plus you were the only one on our list that had no friends or family whatsoever." B.B blurted.

"Wait have you been following me?" Karl asked.

"No. Course not. Well, kind of." B.B admitted.

"What how?! Tell me how you found me!" Karl demanded.

"We needed someone without any cares or ties so Isaac suggested we start by tapping calls to The Samaritans." B.B divulged.

"Yeah sorry 'bout that one." Isaac apologised.

Karl's face turned scarlet with shame as Isaac carried on washing up, "You sick bastards! You listened to my calls?!" Karl shouted.

"Well not all of them... A few." Isaac said.

"I should walk out of here now!" Karl said.

"Go on then, door's there." B.B barked. "You should consider yourself lucky anyway if your life weren't so tragic you wouldn't be 'ere."

"Oooh goodie for me!" Karl said sarcastically.

The three sat in a frosty silence before B.B got to his feet and sunk the last of the wine. "I better get going."

"I'll send you updates on Blaise's position, in case he drifts far. If you're definitely lingering in Amsterdam can you visit the Butterfly Pavilion in Artis? I've just built a new exhibit in the Menagerie but have no subjects to fill it. Hang on I'll show you which ones I'm after." Isaac slapped the Beamer on the kitchen side then lifted a hatch-door in the floor. He and B.B descended down creaking wooden stairs.

"Am I coming with you?" Karl shouted down the hatch.

"No." B.B snapped, who returned moments later with Isaac's butterfly scrapbook. He approached Karl, "You're looking better."

“Cheers, feeling good.” Karl replied.

“Right you stay here, boy. Do whatever Isaac tells you, alright? I don’t care if you think it’s degrading or immoral, just get it done.” B.B instructed.

The three made their way to the exit. “Follow me Karl, we’re going up a floor.” Isaac stated, as he lifted two big water bottles and shut the door behind him. Karl followed him closely and they entered the lift. Isaac and Karl exited the third floor.

“Safe travels.” Karl said.

“Er, cheers mate.” B.B said, as he disappeared out of sight.

Isaac led into a central hub of the third floor. A control desk sat in the middle of a circular room with three doors opposite. Each cast iron door had more Sumerian symbols embossed at the top.

Isaac accessed the computer, “Yuh ready to see my pride and joy?”

The door hissed and sucked as the airtight seal was broken. Isaac jumped out of the chair and grabbed the two large water bottles, passing one to Karl. They stepped through a wet, dissipating mist. The two were submerged in an intense culmination of heat and light as their senses drew focus to an immense, breath-taking collection of natural wonders. Isaac closed the door and began to cover it up with nearby tropical-fern leaves.

“You built this.” Karl asked, “How?”

“Yup, with our old colleagues in the field. Took a long stint in Ticantik. Had a few setbacks but got there in the end.” Isaac said proudly.

Karl, looking around at a grand jungle, observed that the surrounding environment was wholly suspended in Ticantik. It appeared to be bustling with life nonetheless. Isaac requested Karl’s assistance but he was not listening. The vibrant animals and plants were frozen and positioned like taxidermy displays; curated into epic scenes of science and nature inside interconnected bio-domes. As Isaac walked ahead he teased and tweaked the positions of plants and animals; he was a painter unable to walk away from his masterpiece.

First he meticulously opened the mouth of a snake wider, and then closed it, returning it back to its original position. Next he plucked a dormouse from the grass and placed it in front of the snake before moving its legs into a running position. For Isaac the changes weren’t forced or laboured, he was at one with his garden and moved through it with a carefree flow and ease. Isaac knelt by a chunky rock and pulled a sketchbook out from the side. He flicked through pages full of anatomical drawings, fractal patterns and surrealist animal figures until finishing at an empty page.

“Gimme 5 minutes something’s up, you can ‘ave a walk around, just don’t touch nothing.” Isaac instructed.

As Isaac started to scribble, Karl made his way through the Eden-like landscape. The immediate terrain was a tropical jungle with palm trees and exotic shrubs filled with

bugs and beady eyes of tree critters. A melanistic jaguar held its paw out as if to point down the path, leading up to a watering hole dominated by a family of elephants, spraying water onto each other. A giraffe leaned its long neck forward to drink, while its partner reached up to eat leaves from a nearby kapok tree filled with spider monkeys in mid-swing. Rhinos, zebras, buffaloes, antelopes and lions stood together drinking from the water in a tableau of peace and parley.

Karl walked around, admiring the beasts, stroking their fur, feeling the warmth from their bodies and staring into their glistening marble-eyes. After lingering for a moment, he looked around for where to explore next. Each dome held different climates and regions; Jungle rainforest bled into desert, which transformed into a rocky mountain terrain covered in snow. The snowy mountain gave way to a British-inspired countryside covered in spring blossom.

These domes joined together like bubbles on top of a shampoo bottle, there were no doors or walls dividing them and Ticantik allowed the animals and climates to exist in harmony. The borders had snow lying next to sand and jungle ferns brushing up alongside a bed of bluebells. Isaac's menagerie was not always curated to be scientifically logical but was an astounding spectacle, with obsessive attention to detail.

Karl walked along to the mountain rocks and approached the wintery dome. A snow leopard sat camouflaged amongst a grove, and a pack of wolves on a faint pathway. He sauntered between the pack and followed their trajectory to the highest point, then uncovered a hot spring filled with Japanese macaques, grooming each other.

Karl reunited with Isaac by a waterfall in a distance. He strolled through the countryside dome, bustling with wildlife in scenes taken straight from the lid of a chocolate box. Woodpeckers and red squirrels balanced from trees. A barn owl hung in mid-flight, talons outstretched above a clueless vole.

Green grass met smooth rock, the waterfall covered a rocky cliff on the far side of the jungle wall. Isaac knelt down next to the pool, positioning two fish mid-air in a jumping motion. He scooped up water and moulded a perfect splash, sculpting Ticantik-frozen water with creative flair.

"Nuh bad, ay? I'll show yuh the best bit."

Isaac carved out a doorway through the sheets of water to reveal a path that led into an aquarium, brightly-lit from the bottom. There was no glass in place to hold the teeming water display back. The walkway had been excavated through the Ticantik water itself. Isaac pointed and laughed at a Blobfish stuck between rocks but Karl studied a colossal great white shark positioned in a perfect ring of synchronised jellyfish.

"Impressive." Karl acknowledged.

"Jus preservin' livity, man. Ticantik makes anything easy." Isaac replied modestly.

Karl ran his finger through the Ticantik water, while Isaac made some quick alterations to a pair of duelling lobsters. He instructed Karl away from the water's surface. Eventually, they walked out of the waterfall entrance and back towards the fern covered doorway. He sat back to the control desk and resumed tapping the keyboard. The door behind Karl pulsed with a black glow to signify it locking, before a green light pulsed in the adjacent door as it hissed open.

“This is where Blaise lived, we’re gonna tidy it up real nice.” Isaac said as he twisted the handle and pushed the second door open. Inside was another biodome, smaller than the last but no less vibrant. The entrance led into a thick tropical rainforest with vines and fruit dangling from the branches. Isaac pushed through the brush, which stayed suspended, to create a clear pathway for Karl. They stepped over a shallow stream and out into a clearing with an antique wooden desk in the centre. Four hammocks hung between trees, one holding a chimpanzee mother cradling her two infants.

Chapter 5 -Blaise

Karl explored the elaborate cage. Towards the back there was a separate room filled with screens. Upon another desk in the middle was a clunky typewriter, hooked up to a computer to monitor his progress. A basket full of mangoes, bananas, watermelons, figs, nuts and seeds sat next to a pile of primitive tools and an array of puzzles.

“Let’s see if yuh can pass the test.” Isaac said, as he led Karl over to a screen in the wall. “Jus’ a straightforward memory game.”

“You made the chimp do this?” Karl asked.

“We never made him do anything. Blaise was an equal to us and his intelligence grew with these tests.” Isaac replied.

Karl sat in front of the monitor and the numbers one to nine appeared in a random order. Isaac instructed him to memorise the numbers and then press the now blank squares in a numerical sequence.

“Most human subjects fail it initially.” Said Isaac but Karl got a perfect score on his first attempt. “Beginner’s luck.”

A handful of peanuts fell into a tray underneath the screen and Karl scoffed them with immediacy. “Do it again.” He stated.

This time Isaac changed the settings so that 50 numbers appeared. “Okay, then smart arse see if you can beat Blaise’s record.” The numbers appeared again and Karl studied the screen. To Isaac’s incredulity, Karl got all the way to 48 numbers before getting the last two the wrong way round.

“Bruv, are you autistic?” Isaac asked.

“Could be. Or it’s Acquired Savant Syndrome from the ol’ cricket bat yesterday.” Said Karl circling the wound on his head. He changed the subject, “Did you ever manage to get Blaise to communicate?”

“I used to play chess with him, although granted he’d shove the odd bishop up his arse. Either way, he exceeded previous records of simian communication during a long stint in Ticantik.” Isaac explained, “The biggest breakthrough was a test similar to the numbers sequence, we displayed up to 30 words on the screen and if he constructed a

coherent sentence in order like, 'I want some watermelon.' Then he would earn a piece. The most complex request he made was a choice of a film, meal and drink. Then we brought the typewriter in to test the infinite monkey theorem."

"Any Shakespeare?" Karl asked.

"Nah, just gibberish. In the end we wanted to return to cognitive reasoning experiments, as opposed to probability." Said Isaac. "His other trials were more successful." Isaac retrieved a computer tablet and showed Karl footage of the chimpanzee's training. The first video showed Isaac and B.B playing Donkey Kong with Blaise, before the chimp chewed at his joystick then launched faeces at the television screen. "That was one of the early ones." Isaac scrolled through more videos. "Our first plan was to try and develop his long-term memory." He showed the albino primate arranging 52 playing cards in order. "Chimpanzees have an inherent ability for short-term memory as a means to overcome tasks, particularly in survival."

Isaac instructed Karl to scoop up dried excrement and place it into plastic sacks. "What happened to him?" Karl asked.

"One night I woke up in the base and Blaise had navigated his way out of the cage, swung his way into the lower floor and sat in my room. He couldn't communicate what he wanted and seemed quite distressed about it." Isaac continued to tidy the cage and filled a container up with water.

"How did B.B take it?" Karl asked.

"Bit of a sensitive subject since we lost Blaise. Anyway we found out what he wanted, it was just a bit of companionship, so B.B collected this family of chimps here." Isaac gently patted a frozen chimp's head.

"And that comforted Blaise?" Karl responded.

"At first yeah. They tried to integrate but they struggled to live together. He actually seemed to use his advanced intelligence to manipulate them or steal their food. So we froze them and tried to remove them from the cage but Blaise went mental, nearly chewed my finger off." Isaac showed Karl his scar. "In the end we left them frozen in here and for some reason Blaise calmed down then returned to his tests. A year after, we created a Ticantik immunity necklace and allowed him to explore the rest of the menagerie at will."

"And he did?" Karl asked.

"Nah, he didn't like it. He just sat in his cage, refusing to leave. Then about a week after I came to clean the cage out and he was gone. We tracked him several times but he outwitted us at every turn. For the last few months he disappeared completely from the heat map, there was no movement in Ticantik at all, we assumed the worst. It was a testament to his training really."

"Don't worry, I'm sure he'll turn up." Karl said.

"Well we think he has. Maybe he had been exploring underground somewhere coz there was no trace of him. Then a heat-signature appeared a few days ago in Siena so B.B has gone to get him."

“Right.” Karl said. “Who is Erikah?”

“Were you eavesdropping last night?” Isaac replied.

“B.B mentioned her.” Karl said.

“You don’t need to worry about her right now.” Isaac assured Karl.

“Okay.” Karl said, solemnly looking at floor.

“... Alright look, Erikah was a psycho bitch. She acquired artefacts too but wasn’t keen on sharing them with us. We thought we had an understanding but one day she just flipped; destroyed our bases, research stations, transport networks. That’s why B.B brought you in, to assist with the repairs.” Isaac informed.

“Lucky me.” Karl said.

“That’s right, now scoop that shit up.” Isaac got an alert on his watch from B.B. “I’m gonna take this call, fetch the rake from the menagerie, I want to get this cage spotless for Blaise’s return.”

Chapter 6 – The Dutch Cure

B.B approached the bay on a custom built motorbike that was stored at the base. He initiated Ticantik then accelerated, his tracks left wet sand levitating off the ground. The sea was calm, with a few mild waves at the fringe. B.B straightened the motorbike and sped up as he crashed through the first wave. The thick wheels of the Tomahawk bike shared a wide surface-area that skipped over the frozen sea like skimming stones. His bike left an imprinted path as it tore through larger ocean waves flinging balls of water in his wake. The more waves he parted the more speed he acquired as he carried on in a straight line to Amsterdam and observed ferries in the distance. The few sunlit clouds above him offered little shelter from the heat.

B.B closed in on Noordpier narrowly avoiding the stationary ships and continuing through the Locks of IJmuiden. He drove on the frozen canals and was wary not to slow down as he would sink into the water. He reached the museum district then forcefully twisted the bike and climbed a couple of feet onto a curb above the water. His tyres started to skid as they gripped the concrete surface but he was quick to readjust and weaved in and out of pedestrians. Finally he arrived at the zoo and entered the Butterfly Pavilion.

He struggled to identify the species that Isaac had requested and after growing impatient he carefully plucked about ten frozen butterflies at random then returned to the bike and stored them in a compartment with a downscaled Fridge facility, similar to the one in the base.

B.B resumed Kinesis to notify Isaac that he would be lingering in Amsterdam for the night then Initiated Ticantik and drove back to the city centre. He picked at his sweaty, wadded y-fronts that had stuck to his buttocks then parked the bike and revealed a second compartment in the side then lifted out two yellow holdalls. Standing up straight, he cricked his neck and looked up at a small cinema, then sauntered past

pedestrians that remained jammed and stood in groups, gathered outside shops. B.B entered a Smartshop and walked behind the counter. With one arm he scooped plastic tubs of truffles into a bag. He looked out at a couple sat on a bench overlooking the canal, legs entwined, sharing chips. His swollen stomach groaned against his tight cotton shirt which had started to chaff. B.B removed all his clothes and stuffed them into an already overflowing bin. Inducing Ticantik on an intensely sunny day locked in the heated air and offered no breeze to cool.

He continued with purpose to a Coffeeshop named, 'White Dolphin'. The motionless customers crowded the till while members of staff looked irritated; mid-exchanging bags of labelled cannabis, trying to cope with the inebriated tourists requests. B.B repeated his thievery behind the counter; briefly assessing the strains then placing several into a holdall.

Before exiting the place he wandered down a narrow spiral staircase into a packed, hazy area. People with queasy expressions filled the compact booths. Though time was still, the chatter and music stuttered out of speakers and echoed incrementally in a jarring fashion. Sheets of smoke fit to B.B's frame as he ambled with intent towards the cluttered tables, gathered tobacco, rolling papers and card. Roaming the silent streets naked, he visited a sports shop and acquired a more appropriate attire for the summer's intense heat; white tennis shorts, polo shirt and trainers. He even swapped his underwear, throwing them into another nearby bin. B.B was relieved to avoid suspended bird muck but as he seized a hotdog from a vendor he slipped off the curb and stumbled straight into it. "Oh for fuck sake." He whined as he smeared the orange stain in further.

Finally after a ten minute walk, he had arrived at the Grand Hotel. He entered the lobby and obtained an electronic key belonging to the royal suite, then made his way up the stairs. B.B threw his bags on the bed, unzipped one and quickly swallowed half a tub of magic mushrooms. He then messily rolled a joint and headed down to the lunchtime dining area then gorged on prepared food in the buffet. He initiated an Immunity Ball then took a freshly poured pint from the barkeep then lit up. Smoke failed to escape the Ball as time outside remained static, surrounding him in secondary smoke. When he reverted to Profile the cloud dissipated and he walked through function rooms towards an indoor pool.

The water still appeared frozen at a glance, he placed the device underneath a nearby towel and shouted throatily as he cannonballed into the swimming pool, cutting through the Ticantik water with ease as if travelling at super speed. The magic mushrooms reached full effect, B.B's fingers appeared to create tunnels in the water. He lay in a starfish, the lights appeared to dance with one another, circling in kaleidoscopic double-vision; it was a dizzying experience.

He looked back at the guests around him. All of a sudden, an excruciatingly loud sound filled his ears and rumbled through his whole body as it droned on, leaving B.B vulnerable and frightened. It was just a musical jingle before an announcement that lunch was to stop being served. Nonetheless in the current Ticantik it sounded like deep horns ushering in the rapture. Even after realising the source B.B's heart was pounding. With a desperate thud, he slammed his fist on the gutter and used all his might to winch his large body out.

As he lay on the hard floor poleaxed he caught his breath. The room was spinning fast. White and purple spots started to form in his vision as he desperately tried to focus and reconfigure the room. He rubbed his eyes with his knuckles then slowly regained his composure. The nearby guests all seemed to be looking at him with horrified faces. He pushed off his knee and limped to his feet with a wobble and headed towards the sauna. This was not going to be a pleasant experience; all he had wanted to do was to cool off but heat and steam was a necessity to combat rising effects of the intoxicant in his system.

The steam moved rigidly, his pants were carrying a series of water bubbles causing a most bizarre sensation. As he dropped his underwear goosebumps appeared all over his body, he felt a chilling presence. Reluctantly, he turned around and in absolute terror saw a chalk-white face in the vapour resembling an old woman he recognised as Erikah.

“No.” He backed into the sauna rocks; scolding his back and singeing his bare bottom. “ARGHHHHH!” He cried as he tossed his pants in fright.

The woman sat perfectly still, smiling with B.B’s underwear draped over her face. He squinted then quickly noticed that this was not the person he feared; it was just a hotel guest. He stood ashamed and unwrapped his y-fronts from her head then left the sauna dejected.

B.B muttered to himself and grabbed his clothes and devices, then stumbled out of the spa and back through the hotel. He felt increasingly uncomfortable and used the walls to steady himself past a crowded corridor and through to the lobby.

The frozen contorted faces of the hotel residents played havoc with B.B’s psychosis; he began double-taking at suspected movements and noises. So much so that he resorted to covering most of his vision and focused on the solid ground beneath his feet instead. B.B flung the entrance doors open and was blinded by the intense daylight outside. “They can all see me.” B.B whispered while wiping his chin.

Panicked, he returned to the front desk and pushed the concierge. As he fumbled through a draw of key-cards his stress levels heightened as he searched for the closest ground floor room. Letters and numbers did not register with him and he scanned his surroundings insanely. Seeing an opportunity, he struggled through a basement doorway and slammed it behind him. The steps lead down to an empty laundry room so B.B barricaded the doors with baskets and trolleys before diving into a pile of sheets and pillows, wrapping himself up out of sight, before flicking the Antik back to Kinesis.

B.B slipped in and out of consciousness for the next few hours, until a barrage of knocks and banging brought him back online. He poked his head out of the sheets at the sound of rapid footsteps descending the stairs but almost instantly regretted his decision. A group of Chinese hotel maids surrounded him shouting in Mandarin and trying to pull the sheets from underneath B.B’s gargantuan stature. One of the women started slapping his bald head like a bongo before three large doormen sprinted down the stairs. B.B started to panic, he was desperate to get to his Antik but his arms were still entwined in the sheets. The three men strained to drag him up the stairs, back through the hotel to the entrance.

“Get the fuck off me! I ain’t done nuffin’!” B.B screeched.

They flung him out onto the courtyard at the front of the hotel. He scrambled to his feet and grabbed his belongings before running away to a nearby ally, still dressed in just his pants. He scuttled into an industrial bin and returned to the safety of Ticantik.

B.B had slept through until dusk. He clambered out of the bin and put on his clothes, preparing to embrace the positive upswing of the psychedelics.

He walked towards the glowing red street lights and observed at Amsterdamian window girls. B.B had an idea to take advantage of his inebriated state, he made his way into one of the brothels. It never ceased to amaze him the lengths people would go to get off, and touring the bordello back rooms while in Ticantik was often an area of curiosity for him. Where Isaac used Ticantik to craft the world to his acquired tastes, B.B preferred to explore and observe the unpredictable chaos of the world framed in still-time.

The first room he entered had a portly man wearing a gingham dress tied to a wooden chair and two women in full latex body suits brandishing mallets. They began to destroy, what he only assumed to be, the man's collection of mint condition Barbie dolls. B.B continued his expedition of sexual peccadillos, ranging from a ginger lout petulantly shouting at an unengaged prostitute and waving euros in her face, to a man wearing a pig mask on a leash. Finally his eyes met a frozen man smearing a pizza on his genitals. B.B decided his tour was over.

He burst out of the exit back onto the street and grabbed a scrawny tourist's chips then perched on the edge of the canal. B.B took a moment to sit in Kinesis and recover from the hallucinogens. After falling asleep, he awoke eleven hours later with a sunburnt head. Despondently he checked the time and was shocked to see it was already middle afternoon. He pulled out his phone to see Isaac had been trying to contact him for hours. A blunt message read – 'Call me.'

Chapter 7 – The Watchful Eye

After triggering Ticantik, he made his way through the frozen crowds of tourists and back to the Tomahawk. B.B turned into the alley where he had stashed his bike, only to see it had been uncovered by some drunken tramps; one riding it like a mechanical bull, while the other knelt on all fours and sucked the exhaust pipe. In no mood for subtlety, B.B drop kicked the man off of the exhaust and yanked the frozen bull-rider from the bike, placing him on the back of the kneeling fool.

B.B revved the engine, wheel-spinning and kicking up dust that flew out in slow motion before hanging mid-air above the drunkards. He passed trams and traffic through the Amsterdam streets and out onto the motorway. He tapped the compass which sat in the middle of the handlebars and mapped out the route in his mind. Living for an undefined eternity meant B.B knew his way around most countries like the average person knew their home town.

By the time B.B had collected his thoughts he'd already passed through Netherlands and was driving past the gothic church steeple of Sint Janskerk when he noticed two stray dogs frozen mid-bark on the pavement. It reminded B.B of Isaac in his menagerie so he

picked up his phone to follow up the somewhat blunt text he'd received back in Amsterdam.

"You rang?" B.B said.

"Where've yuh been?" Isaac asked.

"Sorry mate swamped. Fingers in pies, you know how I operate." B.B replied.

"Alright, don't be alarmed but the tracker's down." Isaac said.

"Well fix it then you plum." B.B stated.

"I am fixin' it yuh waster! Jus' sayin' it keeps displayin' multiple signatures, I thought it was my programmin' but..." - Isaac paused. "I don't make them mistakes. I was thinking what if Erikah."

"Tracker must be faulty, or Blaise is flinging his shit round or something." B.B said. "This is just a simple search and rescue, you stick to your job tucked away inside in your little room while I take care of business." B.B's tone was getting nastier, overcompensating to cover his doubts.

"Hang on, yuh might as well wait for me to check it"-

- "Sorry mate you're breaking up." B.B cut him off and continued his stubborn pursuit, hitting high speeds as he raced down the motorway, dodging the frozen cars with panache as he worked his way through the Ticantik slalom. Cars stacked up in a traffic jam forcing B.B to slow down. The angry Belgian drivers were seething; one man had even leant out of his window to shout abuse so B.B gave him a slap round the chops on his way past.

The next junction led to Malmedy, B.B turned off down the road until he reached the Barrage de Robertville and pulled up on the side of the road. He felt a growing sense of dread and loneliness deep inside. His immediate response was to fill this empty hole with food, so gave the back of the bike a thump, opening the small Ticantik fridge. He reached in and pulled out a steaming hot Cornish pasty, a Congress tart and an ice cold bottle of Old Rosie cider.

B.B did not want to linger too long but leant over the wall of the dam and started to eat, looking over the artificial lake. Now he had a chance to stop, a creeping dread began to infect him. Isaac's concerned voice rang in his ears and thought again of Blaise. He stuffed down the pasty and washed it down with the tangy cider before jumping back on the Tomahawk.

He drove towards Germany through a long stretch of countryside. Suddenly, the bike tyres locked; causing B.B to lose control. He wrestled with the handle bars as they pulled him left and right in quick succession, clipped a wing mirror and scraped between cars before managing to tame the bike and grind it to a halt. He panted heavily, still gripping the handlebars, forearms burning and heart thudding rapidly.

Looking around to assess the area, there was nothing but the broken wing mirror, still floating mid-air among shattered plastic and twisted wiring. B.B lifted his sausage-like fingers to his chin and began to stroke it. The slow, low rumble of engines around him

rang in B.B's ears. He pushed the bike onto its side and opened up the engine to take a look at the maze of mechanical parts. The frantic first inspection did not seem to reveal anything amiss but as he delved deeper he glimpsed a glowing dark purple light.

B.B reached in for the light and felt a diamond shaped device, clinging on to the bike's chassis like a limpet. He picked at the edges but could not get any purchase. Brandishing the Wedge he wrenched the glowing diamond free, only to discover it was connected to the electrical circuits of the bike. B.B deduced that the device was rigged to let out a short burst that disabled the bike's immunity. He snapped it off and slipped it into his back trouser pocket then pulled out his phone to ring Isaac and question why he fitted the device. The call tone rang out. He phoned again; this time it went straight to dial tone. B.B let out a heavy sigh then set to work on rewiring the bike.

He discovered the device had drained the bike's battery and jumpstarting it in Ticantik would not be such a simple task. The Tomahawk was too heavy to push up to a decent speed, even for B.B's giant stature and manipulating electricity in still-time was too difficult to attempt. About two-hundred yards back from the crash site B.B noticed two large lorries hauling fully stocked car-carrier trailers. They were almost parallel, with a further five-hundred yards of free road behind them. He hoisted the bike up onto its wheels and slowly walked it back. B.B climbed up to each cabin to note the speedometer; both read approximately seventy miles-per-hour. Both had reams of spare bungee ropes stored away in the overhead compartments.

Rope in hand, he jumped down from the cabin, and began rigging it to the back of the carriers then hooked them around the back of the bike above the wheel, adjusting the straps to ensure the ropes sat at the same length. Next he weaved another rope around his own body, once around the waist, once around the chest, and looped under his arms though to his hands where he fastened it to a sturdy pole supporting the handlebars.

With everything in position, he twisted the dial on the Antik, allowing time to resume extremely slowly at first. The lorries began to move and the ropes tightened, pulling the bike forward at a walking pace. To get up to a higher speed, B.B knew he'd have to resume time and a much faster rate. He gripped the handlebar with one hand and increased the flow of time. The sudden speed jolt catapulted the Tomahawk forward and revved the engine back to life. He steadied the bike at full speed.

The next few hours of the journey passed with relative simplicity, racing down the Autobahn and through to Strasbourg in north eastern France. B.B felt very comfortable in French surroundings and navigated quickly through the country. Remote Swiss mountains came into view as the Tomahawk's tyres dug into dried grass. Hot air hung in front of B.B for miles. Adhering to the roads was not always the most efficient or even the most fun transport option.

He tore through straight roads and eventually slowed, close to an airport. Small tents surrounded by barricades signified the French-Swiss border. He traversed around the customs security tolls by mounting a grassy bank to the side and battering through cones to join the road to Basel. B.B left the Autobahn and joined a series of dirt-roads as he climbed through rural grounds. He hit the city of Lucerne in the heart of Switzerland. B.B crossed over the green-tinted River Reuss on the Tomahawk. B.B guided his bike down curved, elevated roads past markets on narrow cobbled streets.

He stopped outside an antique shop oddly unfamiliar to him. The storefront read 'Das Wachsame Auge' and featured a hand-painted sign that depicted a stopwatch with an eye in the centre. His curiosity had peaked; B.B had long since seen antique shops as a duty to his archaeological work.

Upon entering the antique shop, he focused on wooden panels holding scores of traditional clocks; from pocket and wristwatches to grandfather and cuckoo clocks. Wooden boxes contained silver chains and fine leather straps. B.B spotted a doorway by the till, it opened out into a room with all manner of antiquities; taxidermy, bronze busts and vintage posters with large antique maps covering the walls.

He spotted a German chest from the Second World War with the marking, 'Wehrmacht'. The lid was open with two compasses on a silk cloth in the centre. B.B opened one of the compasses but his thumb snapped the latch off and it sat in the air. He put them both back and in the process his hand pushed down on the silk which revealed a corner of plastic. He pulled at it and lifted out a clear zip-locked bag holding a dog-eared journal with a label on the front written in English,

'To be auctioned separately. Dated 19th Century (disputed).'

He scanned over crumpled pages then discovered loose map illustrations and sketches, they were Sumerian artefacts. B.B read the label again,

'Receipt from BADA Associations (May 1962) – 1 Journal/Writer-unknown/Field-Excavation'

He looked back through the diagrams and recognised most of the relics then stopped on a map towards the end of the book. Scribbled in ink was, 'Indian archipelago: Andaman and Nicobar islands' next to crude drawings in four parts. A Sumerian word was underlined, 'Enlil',. There was a note at the top, '*My only wish is a sound mind, and one fit enough to travel to Phuket. Unlikely now.*' He quickly tidied up the war chest and ran into a toilet behind the counter, still clutching the book.

B.B induced Kinesis briefly, in order to use the internet on his phone. He searched, 'Sumerian translation enlil'. It listed, '*Lord of Airspace*' and '*God of Air*' alongside primitive illustrations of a figure. He initiated Ticantik then spent a couple of hours in a dingy bar reading diary entries and drinking pints of lager. After scoffing from stall tables outside, he placed the journal in the Tomahawk's compartment. B.B drove up a winding series of hills, into the snow-capped Swiss mountains and through tunnels that lead out to dizzying altitudes.

The road was foggy with suspended snow and the air became thin. B.B felt lightheaded and regretted the volume of beer sloshing in his stomach. He passed a crucifix carved into rock with small groups of tourists gathered, then over the medieval Devil's Bridge. Suddenly everything around him was verdant again with villages scattered along the hillside. Train tracks carved into the mountain and led into city roads lined with supermarkets and houses, he crossed over Lake Lugano then finally reached Italy.

Chapter 8 – The Palio

Having passed through a vast chunk of the Italian landscape B.B came to a screeching halt near a piazza in Bologna. He switched off the ignition and left the sweaty Tomahawk seat. Amid stretching, he fumbled through his holdall bags looking for weed and picked out two strains; 'Queen of Cheeba' and 'Bubba Cheese'. B.B combined them both and rolled a spliff into a perfect cone, then lit it as he wandered from the bike.

He walked into a pizzeria and grabbed a box then collected several slices. He decided to do the last stretch in comfort. An Italian man holding a crate of fresh fruit stood next to a pickup truck with a lowered ramp, B.B gently revved the bike into the truck's cargo bed then took the helpless man's keys from his pocket and started the vehicle inside an Immunity Ball.

With the air-con blasting he looked back over at the man and saw a small boy with him. B.B's conscious weighed heavy, despite still not being prepared to give the car back. He looked down the high street and saw a bank. He jogged to the vault but it was locked shut. B.B snatched handfuls of Euros from cashier trays; it was considerably more than the truck was worth. He returned to the man and stuffed the notes in his overalls.

He drove out of Bologna and joined the Autostrada to Florence. Every road was gridlocked but after seeing nearby posters and billboards it became evident why; 'The Palio', a horserace held twice a year in the summer. It was chaos, thousands of spectators travelled to see this compact race in the Piazza del Campo. Even in Ticantik he knew looking for a chimp through a crowd in the searing Italian heat was not fated to be a pleasant experience.

He checked the most recent image sent by Isaac of Blaise's trail. His heart sunk; there was no mistake the last recorded heat signature appeared near the square. B.B wondered if it was possible for a chimpanzee to go unnoticed in such a busy area. The main Palio race was yet to start and B.B had no intention of resuming time until he had succeeded in his mission. The crowd became denser in the piazza, people swarmed the restaurants and sat under the canopies clutching betting slips while horses were being lead round.

B.B feared that something foul was behind Blaise's disappearance. His scepticism had betrayed him before but he postponed his apprehension and clambered up a nearby wall to get a better viewpoint. He could see dozens of watermelon rinds hovering three-foot off the ground. B.B remained buoyant but as he reached the end of the trail his blood ran cold.

Blaise, the albino chimp, was hung upside down by his hands and feet. All of his fur was claret with a pool of blood hovering underneath him. His whole torso was split open. The poor ape had been dismembered. B.B wobbled, tears filled his tired eyes and ran down his cheek as he fell onto one knee and refused to look up.

Eventually he raised his head to see Blaise tied by thick rope that snaked around his neck with pegs driven through his limbs into the bricks of a gelato shop. He quickly picked at the nails and lowered him down. Something was coming but B.B struggled to drag himself away. He stumbled back into the square in a rage, he was determined to regain his composure and get back to Isaac and Karl All the oblivious people at the around him continued to sport faces of glee.

Abruptly, amidst small rumblings of hyper-slowed chatter, piercing screams hit B.B's ears. It was not slow, a deafening screech of a banshee echoed to him again. The sound paralleled a thousand women screaming in torment. His body went completely cold as he witnessed a masked figure walking independently from the frozen families and groups. The clay mask had large ears, crescent moon eyes and a grotesque smile.

The disguised menace blew a skull-shaped whistle that simulated shrieking and stared directly at a snivelling B.B, who was as paralysed as everyone else in Ticantik. The figure brandished a firearm that B.B recognised as an antique blunderbuss. He anticipated a shot that would end his misery as the aggressor proceeded to walk towards him, shooting a horse in the head from point blank range. Each time a single orb shot out of the gun at a slow, steady pace, continuing towards its target. The demented individual stepped forward to the next victim and B.B finally woke to the situation.

"DO YOU FEEL BLAME?!" Bellowed a throaty voice across the square which transformed into a high-pitched cackle, "Wooooooo!" He screamed upward as he continued shooting.

Powerless to do anything except escape, he fled in the opposite direction but cried out in agony as he felt something pierce his left leg. Stumbling for a few steps he looked down to see the back-points of an arrowhead sticking out of his calf. He crawled away backwards and scraped his backside along the pavement. The attacker weaved through the frozen crowd towards him. B.B looked around for a way out whilst squeezing through the maze of legs.

He knew his options were limited so he resumed time and used the mass crowds to swarm the assailant, functioning only as collateral for his escape. In the blistering Italian sun the aftermath of the massacre materialised in front of their eyes. In a matter of seconds, screams of hysteria exploded from the square as people ran desperately in all directions.

The tyrant grew closer and ignored the pandemonium, the creepy mask's dead eyes stared down. B.B saw glimpses of a silhouette slicing into panic-stricken people with a machete like he was venturing through thick vines in a jungle. Some pedestrians could only stop and cry as they witnessed more horses drop dead to the ground with violent spasms, some screeching a deathly whinny. Other frenzied people looked on in horror at Blaise's bloodied corpse; some pulling out their phones to film the attack unfold. B.B whined as he dragged his damaged leg backward, convinced he had seen a ghost of the past. He struggled up to a limp and looked around but the terrorist had disappeared.

For the first time in a while, B.B felt safer in Kinesis than in Ticantik, despite the overwhelming guilt of the innocent people he had compromised. He struggled through the chaotic crowds and came across signposts for Siena's main train station. Police were overwhelmed by the stampede of people as heavy vans full of terrorist control units appeared from every direction.

B.B glimpsed a rust-stained cargo train hauling huge containers along the track. This was B.B's opportunity; the train had reached the platform and he induced Ticantik then pushed through to a deli that lead into the station. He grabbed a bag of crisps and bottle of whiskey on the way through. Suddenly, he jumped in fear as he thought he saw something move out of the corner of his eye. In a vulnerable and paranoid state, B.B began to analyse the static faces in the crowd for signs of life. "Where are you!?" He

shouted in desperation, grabbing the faces and slapping the cheeks of innocent bystanders.

B.B forced his way through the frozen crowd and held onto railing on the back of one of the carriages. He stepped off the platform and pulled himself over to the walkway that lead around a crate to a locked door. B.B pulled out the Wedge of Aiud and pushed it into the lock. It expanded inside and broke the mechanism.

B.B wrenched open the door and light entered, illuminating masses of parcels and bags; it was a surface mail train. He chucked the bottle and crisps on the floor then ripped open the frayed plastic sacks to read the addresses on the packages. All were addressed to the United Kingdom, a welcome stroke of luck. B.B held out his leg to the light and looked at the bleeding wound. He pinched the exposed arrow points, pulled it out and screamed as it tore through more flesh. He cracked open the whiskey bottle and poured it over the laceration, wincing as he cleaned it, then rummaged through the parcels until he found a clothing order. He pulled out a designer shirt and ripped it into bandages to bind his leg.

B.B pushed as many bags as he could up against the door then climbed over the cargo into the corner and lay down across some parcels, breathed a sigh of relief and induced Kinesis slowly to ease into the train's motion. B.B devoured the bag of crisps and took a few generous swigs of whiskey. Emotionally and physically drained, he rested his head back and closed his eyes.

B.B awoke because the air in the crate became thin, he grasped at his throat and felt through the darkness to get to the door. He chucked parcels behind him and frantically grabbed the handle then flung the door open and a huge gust of wind blasted B.B in the face. He breathed heavily and blinked multiple times until he realised the outside of the crate was as dark as the inside. He sat back and propped the door open with his foot to let the air flood the carriage.

The train rattled and jiggled B.B around before a bright light crept up and blinded him. Colours and shapes began to form and B.B looked up to see a plane flying overhead to land on a runway. He looked into the distance and deduced he must have been passing by an airport. He eased into Ticantik and jumped down from the train to make the trek across to a hangar. Without warning, the train clattered behind him as it shot off again which made him violently flinch and cover his ears. Time had been resumed independently of B.B's control. He quickly induced Ticantik again but within seconds time resumed once more. This duel repeated several times with B.B aggressively tapping the button in increasing frustration. The train visually juddered as it incrementally moved along the track with each click.

He gave up fighting for Ticantik and ran across to the hangar of small planes. B.B had not flown for a long time; he was somewhat mentally scarred since an unfortunate incident involving his Antik, a gram of speed and Blaise twenty-thousand feet up in a Spitfire. But desperate times called for desperate measures. B.B approached a red and white biplane and initiated an Immunity Ball. He had to get above the clouds and out of sight in case now that the masked menace had control of Ticantik. B.B had passed between Ticantik and Kinesis in the public eye more than he cared to for one day, even by his own standards. He jammed the Wedge into the plane door to break the lock and climbed into the cockpit. A significantly larger plane was suspended mid-air preparing

to land but B.B had no choice, he accelerated and took off in the shadow of its huge wingspan. He pulled upwards into the sky and emerged into the sun-kissed cloudscape above which provided him with the perfect cover to travel back to Isaac's Kentish headquarters.

After passing the white cliffs of Dover, he descended over the Kent countryside looking out for landmarks he had mentally flagged to guide him towards the hideout. He grew closer but the tall high rise of Isaac's abode was absent. B.B got a sinking feeling in his stomach. He made a sharp turn and circled the area where the high rise should have been. It was difficult to see but as he flew lower, he saw a smoking heap of rubble with a hole in the centre.

Chapter 9 – Jackie and Barry

The industrial estate billowed smoke as time unexpectedly resumed. Fire engines and police cars lit up all around the site with some jolting forward a couple-hundred yards then stopping as the Ticantik initiated intermittently. B.B looked out of the plane window at the remains of the base, there was still no correspondence from Isaac. He struggled to comprehend how his last few days in both Kinesis and Ticantik had panned out. Long stints in still-time had often felt like an eternity without the days progressing but he would much rather live in eternal daylight than look over his shoulder in the dead of night.

He grumbled as his leg throbbed from the arrow-wound. B.B steered the plane north and wondered if Isaac and Karl could even still be alive. He had to try to get to the lower levels of the base and salvage anything he could. Everything him and Isaac had worked to rebuild was taken from him once again.

B.B knew his trail could be traced from his recent slovenly excursions. Floods of law enforcement were ready to dig around his base. The plane was on autopilot to Yorkshire, he rummaged through the cabin looking for medical equipment and dressing. He sat back down in the pilot's chair and thudded his heel on the console to get a closer look. Something in his flesh-wound caught his eye.

He cleaned the cut then took out tweezers and felt drips of sweat fall from his armpits as he tried to steady his hands. He penetrated the gash and winced as he pushed through flesh then tried to pinch and pull at the shrapnel but could not get any purchase. He persevered then carefully removed the metal shard and examined it briefly then put it in a handkerchief. B.B applied a full dressing around his calf then sat back with relief.

B.B he began his descent to the North York Moors, the skies, were clear but for a few static commercial airliners. The plane jolted as he dropped the landing gear and buckled up. B.B knew that there was only really one safe surface that would be sufficient to land in the moors and had to be wary of the surrounding farm-houses. Trees came into view so B.B decelerated and lowered the landing gear. Touching down, the wheels dug into dirt and snapped off then shunted the craft forward as the tail tilted like a seesaw. Frozen farmers and livestock came into view as his whole body convulsed and eyesight blurred. Finally, after veering left and crunching the wing into a thicket of trees, he was stationary.

He crawled out and ran towards one of the farm-houses in the moors. Now B.B was out of the plane he tested Ticantik but time resumed instantly again. He approached a cottage with a watermill attached to the side. Before B.B could knock on the oak door it flung open and revealed a skinny, scowling woman with jet black hair and sharp features. B.B adjusted uncomfortably, trying to appear affable, then held out his arms as a peace offering.

"We knew you'd come crawling back sooner or later." She said, staring at B.B with piercing blue eyes.

"Leave it out Jackie, we 'int seen him in years." A tall, portly moustached man in a tweed jacket appeared behind her, and ushered B.B inside.

"What mess have you got yourself into this time?" Jackie asked as she turned on the reports the terrorist attack in Siena.

"I was ambushed, it was Erikah." B.B asserted.

"Surely not." Jackie dismissed.

"Blimey, what a mess." Barry pointed at the television as it reported the huge explosion at the industrial estate in Kent.

"We need to get to Isaac." B.B stated.

"I knew you'd kill him one day." Jackie said.

"Listen you old crone he's probably still trapped in there, so let Barry out of your little gingerbread house and help out an old friend." B.B shouted aggressively. Barry sunk into his shoulders and gave B.B a panicked wide-eyed stare.

Jackie seethed running her tongue over her teeth behind pursed lips and squinting. "You come here unannounced and speak to me like that ya lumpy sack o' shit? We focking told you me and Barry are done with your Ticantik utopia and just want to live out our lives. Barry int' got the minerals to fock around in your silly little games no more. We just want to keep ourselves to ourselves and let old age grant us the sweet release o' death, and you want to deprive us of that? You're a nasty piece of work."

"To be fair Jacksta I"- Barry tried to intervene.

"Shot the fock op Barry!" Jackie snapped. The trio stood in silence for a moment at the doorway.

"We can help Isaac out, we owe him that." Barry said, breaking the tension. "And Beebs did reverse a fair few of our misfires." Barry said firmly in his dulcet Yorkshire accent.

"You can call 'em misfires I'd call them monumental fock ups! And need I remind you they were all entirely down to this fat fockin' oaf!" Jackie replied as she turned around to Barry, who had straightened his posture, confident that he was being reasonable. They stood in another tense period of silence. "Alright we'll help, but not for you." she said with a sigh. "If it's Erikah I'm gonna blow that haggard old bint's 'ead off this time."

“Well I only really need Barry. You don’t have to worry yourself, honestly.” B.B stuttered.

“Don’t make me laff cont, you’ll never get anywhere with just this one. Have you seen Barry at work recently? He’s the wettest man in’t England. A stoat ran across the drive las’ week an’ he shat ‘is britches. I actually saw the shit stains on his bottoms.” Jackie said.

“It wa’ varnish!” Barry interjected defensively. “I hung ‘em up t’dry on window sill and din’t realise it w’nt dry!”

“Varnish? Next you’ll be sayin’ it’s me homemade plum jam, ya cont.” Jackie said unconvinced. “Anyway, We’re all going, I’ll drive us in the Volkswagen. Let me load up some tools while you go have a wash, ya smell like ass.” Jackie walked around the side of the house to the garage.

Barry led B.B down some stairs to a room connected to the water mills turbine. It was filled with more intricate ancient technology, scored with markings of several primitive languages and stacked alongside maps and notebooks. The watermill linked up to a device covered in Sumerian symbols, which was hooked up to a retro computer with a green and black screen. A graph with symbols and numbers showed it was tracking Ticantik activation from within Kinesis, with exact time and date accuracy.

“Don’t worry about her, she’ll be alright. Shower’s down that hallway.” Barry said, pointing to the corner of the room.

“Not completely off Ticantik then Bazza, you sly dog.” B.B said

“Research, jus’ research. Nowt here that works anyway, actually I wa’ thinking you could take som’ stuff to Isaac, see if he can make use of it.” Barry said calmly.

B.B picked up a battered Antik, hidden behind a stack of history books, “What’s this then?”

“Keep ya voice down mate shit me.” Barry whispered, snatching the Antik and shoved it into a drawer. “It’s only for the odd occasion.”

“You’re gonna get shafted.” B.B said, relishing every moment of Barry’s panic.

“You know how it is, sometimes I just need som’ peace and quiet. For my research. Jac’ doesn’t know about it so keep ya gob shut eh?” Barry explained.

“Ya don’t have to explain to me mate. Five minutes with Jackie makes me wanna down Dettol.” B.B said.

“Oh come on.” Barry whispered disapprovingly, stroking his thick moustache.

B.B washed and put on some of Barry’s clean clothes; chunky boots, cargo shorts and a thick woollen jumper. As he stepped out of the bathroom, he could hear muffled shouting from outside the house. He walked out onto the drive to see Jackie and Barry arguing over what to pack in the van.

"The guns are a bit much aren't they Jackie. I thought we were just there on a recovery mission." Barry said nervously.

"Use your head Baz, that place'll be crawling with filth, soon as they see how deep that crater goes they'll probably call in every cunt in MI5." Jackie warned.

"Still, seems a bit OTT. Do we need the shotgun and an AK?" Barry argued.

"If it's Erikah, we need to make sure she's dead this time. If I see that prick, she'll be getting both barrels deep up the jacksie."

"Let's just get going." Barry said, already exhausted. Jackie jumped in the driving seat of the rusty green camper van and revved up the deafeningly loud engine.

"Why are we going in this heap?" B.B said, as he slid open the side door. "Not exactly inconspicuous is it?"

"Shot the fucker. Where we heading?" Jackie replied bluntly.

"Head to the ruins. We'll follow the tunnels to the base from there." B.B said. He squeezed his doughy posterior onto the seat between the piles of tools and weapons and initiated an Immunity Ball.

"How's Ticantik looking?" Barry asked.

"Can't induce it, been trying to since Siena but that little fucker sets me back every time."

After filling the camper van with petrol they returned to the quiet roads of northern England, B.B decided to broach the Siena reports.

"Were there any casualties, Barry?" B.B asked.

"Like you fucking care." Jackie interjected, "We knew it was you."

"We going motorway then? Might be risk of a pile up if Ticantik's out of control." Barry suggested.

"If this is Erikah she'll be breaking Ticantik every half a minute, everyone in this car knows that. Let's hit the usual country roads." Jackie stated.

B.B was staring out over the bridge contemplating discreet tactics, "that whole fucking shit-show was meticulous, she had probably been waiting there for months. Gavvers are swarming the base as we speak, we just need to get to the centre."

"Any control you think you have of this situation is a delusion cunt, no mistake. We aren't getting pinched either, we'll help you in then you can get back to knocking one out in stranger's houses."

"Weeeeell, I'm not doing that anymore." B.B deflected.

"You're a pervert." Jackie replied.

“Head to Brighton and we’ll take the tunnels to Kent.” B.B had been holding the shards from the arrow in his fist. He wound down a camper van window and dropped the handkerchief out.

“I thought you said head for the ruins, why’re we going all the way to Brighton?” Barry said.

“Most of the old tunnels have significant damage thanks to Erikah. The one in Brighton is the only one she didn’t know about plus it leads to a base entrance. Shouldn’t take too long to break through. Then there’s emergency stairs that lead up to each floor, hopefully Isaac and Karl have been smart enough to stick together.”

“Who’s Karl?” Asked Jackie.

“Kid I found in London. I was gonna get him to help with our facilities.” B.B replied. Hopefully, if he’s still in one piece you can meet him.”

“And you were gonna teach him wa’ ya? Don’t make me laff, cont!” Jackie said.

After a white-knuckle ride through the rolling green hills of East Sussex they approached Brighton city centre but got stuck in traffic. They resorted to watching the eccentric locals.

“Fock me look at the state o’ that.” Jackie said, pointing at a green-haired man wearing only a backpack, Doc Martens and a nappy.

“So many colourful individuals down ‘ere, int’ there?” Barry responded.

Suddenly, a man slammed his hands onto Barry’s window, provoking a short, sharp mewl.

“YOU WANT APPLE?” The scruffy dark-skinned man shouted, spittle dripping from his dry cracked lips as he swung a blue carrier bag of fruit.

“Oh, Jesus Christ no!” Barry yelled, winding up the window in a panic, startled by the vacant stare of the black suited tramp. “Drive Jac’ drive! Take that side road!”

Jackie was eager to get moving so mounted the curb and cut a corner of the pavement to escape the traffic. Barry looked in the wing mirror to see the gentleman smiling and waving slowly before disappearing out of sight as they turned the corner. Jackie had driven them into The Lanes. She honked the horn to disperse the crowds and manoeuvred through the winding roads then down towards the coast, before parking up on a narrow street.

Across the road was the entrance to a mews, gated with thick, iron bars. B.B got out of the van and approached a rust-stained intercom embedded in the wall. He jammed the Wedge into it and the doors opened slowly, allowing him to lead the van into an abandoned Royal Mail warehouse. The large windows had been bricked up so most of the room was shrouded in darkness until B.B pulled down a heavy switch and revealed a round hatch with a square window in the centre. It was white and futuristic, a stark contrast to the dirty and dilapidated warehouse filled with dusty mail frames and trolleys.

Jackie and Barry started attaching ropes to the bags of tools and weapons as B.B pulled open the hatch and proceeded to climb down the shaft via a ladder. The silence should have comforted B.B, reassuring him that he was alone, but he felt like he was creeping into the dragon's den, climbing for nearly five minutes before he could finally touch down onto solid ground.

B.B emerged into an ancient brick tunnel, perfectly preserved beneath the city. He gave three swift knocks on the ladder to indicate the coast was clear. First the bags were lowered down, followed by Jackie and Barry. They each picked up a holdall and walked a short distance along the tunnel out to a huge dome, housing an underground reservoir that shimmered gold under spotlights. B.B continued along to an archway. Water from the reservoir channelled into the tunnel and was suspended in Ticantik, defying gravity to coat the walls with a few inches of water. A platform sat parallel to a smooth spherical pod sitting, flush against the walls. B.B placed his Antik into a slot inside. The vehicle required two people with two Antiks; one to power and one to steer.

"Ah I hate the pod." Barry responded. "Makes me gip."

"Dry up Baz you flannel, where's your Antik?" B.B asked.

"I don't have it anymore, you know that." Barry's eyes widened in an effort to make B.B cease talking. Before he could respond, the pair were startled by a surge of purple light and a rapid series of dull bleeps. They turned around to see Jackie standing at the pod door with Barry's beaten up Antik placed in the second slot.

"Save your breath Baz." Jackie said. "I've known about your little secret for ages. You don't hide it very well, knew somethin' was up when you stopped pestering me for nookie."

B.B winced at the image and hoisted the bags into the pod. The interior housed similar technology to the Wedge of Aiud, it shifted and moulded to securely hold whatever sat inside it. The inner surface clasped the bags as B.B stepped in. Then cubes clung to both of his feet and more branches stretched out to secure his flabby frame in position. Jackie and Barry followed and were secured behind him in single file, with Jackie facing towards the Antik at the back.

B.B and Jackie were well versed in driving the pod. There being no windows or traditional steering devices, instead the malleable interior presented symbols in front of the driver that signified available tunnel directions. The person steering then uses hand signals that correlate to the direction needed. The back seat required Jackie to channel the Antik's power and control speed.

B.B clenched his fists and pushed them into holes in the front. The pod began to vibrate as energy surged through it, he opened his fist and propelled the vehicle forward at a blistering speed, then pointed his fingers to direct the pod through the undamaged tunnels. Using Ticantik charged water that coated the walls as a buffer and lubricant. After about twenty minutes, a pointed cross symbol signified the tunnel was coming to an end.

"Slow it down Jac' we're nearly there." B.B instructed.

B.B closed his fists and drew the pod to a halt.

“We’ll walk the last bit, God knows the state of the tunnel out there.” B.B announced.

“These pods play havoc with ma gut.” Barry said nervously. “Oh nooo, I’m gon’ - lemme out, lemme out-HUEEEEEYY!” Barry spewed up violently out of the pod door.

“Jesus fockin’ Christ Baz sort it out!” Jackie said, as she pulled the holdalls out of the way. She rummaged around in the bag for a torch before shining it to reveal a mass of rubble where the tunnel had collapsed. “Cut that one a bit close din’t we?”

“Yeah, as I intended *sniff*. Chuck me a torch I can’t see shit.” B.B said. Upon closer inspection, he could see that some rubble was from inside the base. This brought back some painful memories but also indicated that the excavation should be a fairly quick undertaking. Ticantik water from the tunnel was suspended mid-air and bounced off him as he walked through, it glowed like crystals as he shone the light through it and back to the pod. Jackie and Barry approached with goggles, hard hats and Kango hammers.

“We good to blast straight through?” Jackie asked.

“No blasting, Jackie, need to stay incognitus. Should be fine though, on the other side of this is the station, it’s the lowest point of the base where most of the tunnels link so should be out of the way of prying eyes and ears. Take us an hour tops.” B.B said.

Three hours later, the trio were covered in filth and still chipping away at the rubble. Jackie had ditched the tools and resorted to slinging rocks with her bare hands.

“Sure you don’t want to use the pickaxe at least Jackie?” Barry said nervously.

“Slowin’ me down cont, it’s not just concrete in here either, we got weapon parts, springs, piping. Worrying amount of bones too Beebs.”

“Don’t worry about that.” B.B interrupted, “Look I think I see light, stand back!” He picked up a sledgehammer and took a mighty swing at the crack in the wall, blasting through it with great aplomb. “Let’s get up to Isaac’s room, if they’re not there we can check the CCTV at least, if it’s working.”

“Heads up!” Jackie shouted, throwing B.B a pistol and Barry a shotgun.

“Bit small, init?” B.B moaned.

“Dunno if I can trust you with anythin’ bigger.” Jackie replied.

“Hopefully we won’t need it anyway, let’s get in and get out.” Barry said.

B.B led the way, walking stealthily into the station; six adjacent platforms with a pod docked in each and more water trenches leading into separate tunnels. This floor looked relatively untouched by the explosion, apart from two doors that were blown off the hinges, and a light dusting of ash across the large open space.

“Oh fuck.” B.B whispered, as he spotted a tail poking out from behind a pod. Suddenly, the tail whipped up and disappeared briefly. Three wolves emerged from the other side, with dried blood on their snouts and sharp white teeth exposed.

“AH.” Barry said.

“We can take’em!” Jackie interjected, cocking her gun.

B.B initiated Ticantik but it resumed shortly after again. “Let’s not do anything rash, I don’t wanna start spraying bullets, less noise we make the better.”

The wolves paced back and forth on the far platform opposite the newly reopened tunnel, intermittently disappearing behind the stationary pods. Led by B.B, the trio slowly tiptoed along the trench and took cover behind a wall. While the wolves dashed to the furthest end of the station, B.B holstered the pistol on his belt and quietly climbed up. He then held out both arms and hoisted Jackie and Barry up simultaneously, before hopping over to the next trench and repeating the process. As they approached the entrance to the stairs, B.B breathed a sigh of relief. “Got away with tha-“

“WoooAHHHH AH AH!” A screeching spider monkey swung down from the stairwell and mounted B.B’s shoulders, clawing at his bald head.

“Oh FUCK get it off, get it off!” B.B tugged at the screaming monkey’s paw.

Barry attempted to grab it but before he could another four flew out of the door and mobbed him and Jackie. Alerted by the commotion, the wolves had now broken into a sprint towards the mayhem. B.B grabbed the monkey off of his back by the scruff of its neck and hurled it towards the oncoming wolves. One grabbed it mid-air and began to shake it while B.B lifted his gun to shoot the second. He made the shot but the third wolf leapt and bit his wrist, making him drop the gun. Meanwhile Jackie was tearing the spider monkeys from her clothes, beating them with the foot of her gun and Barry was slamming his back into the wall in an attempt to free himself. Jackie grabbed Barry’s shotgun and began blasting the monkeys in quick succession, scaring off the remaining wolves down to the tunnels with the deafening blasts.

“That’s the stealth plan fucked.” B.B panted. “Let’s get to the CCTV, just up these steps on the second floor.”

They ran up the steps and entered Isaac’s abode, it was dark and covered in ash; small fires were dotted throughout and water sprayed from a burst pipe in one of the walls. As he kicked through rubble, three police officers bundled into the room brandishing handguns.

“Freeze! This is Kent police, put your hands where I can see them!”

B.B lifted his hands in the air slowly.

“Step into the light so we can see your face.” The officer instructed.

B.B hesitated. Desperately wanting to reach for his Antik. He didn’t know if he would be able to induce Ticantik but he was running out of options. Suddenly, Jackie and Barry crashed through the door, the silhouettes of their guns as clear as day.

“Freeze! Drop your weapons!” Demanded another officer.

No one moved for a moment, Jackie crept in front of Barry and made the police more agitated and nervous.

“I SAID-“

“Get fucked.” Jackie induced Ticantik then they strolled past them. After they got to safety Kinesis resumed.

“What the fuck is going on?!” One policeman shouted.

“They vanished.” The other said.

As the officers fumbled their ammo clips, Isaac’s African lions emerged from the doorway. B.B, Jackie and Barry took cover into the CCTV room then heard roars and screams rattle through the base. B.B scanned the screens for signs of life. He could see more officers preparing to descend into the base from the outside through the fiery destruction of the base. B.B spotted something on the high ground of the Menagerie; it was Isaac, cowering in between jagged rocks.

“Isaac’s in the menagerie, third floor. No sign of Karl yet though.” B.B said. He led the way up to the control hub. All the doors were sealed and water covered the floor. He logged into the computer and brought up the history of input commands.

“Oh god...” he said, staring in shock as he analysed the data. “It looks like she induced Kinesis throughout the facility, woke up the animals and set them loose into the base before trapping Isaac inside.”

“Yeah we gathered that much dick’ead, let’s get him out!” Jackie snapped.

“Poor bugger.” Barry said.

B.B opened the menagerie door and pushed through the jungle brush. Water from the aquarium had collapsed during Kinesis and flooded the facility forming several ponds and large puddles. Mutilated corpses of exotic birds lay among fish skeletons and bloodied snake skins. Barry jumped as a scared badger ran across the path. An eerie sound of howling and pining animals rang around the menagerie which intensified the horror show. The peaceful desert watering-hole now ran red and a bloodied elephant lay motionless next to it alongside a lifeless great white shark.

Despite the carnage, the surviving birds were flying around peacefully and some of the less aggressive animals had taken refuge on the high ground where Isaac was spotted. Jackie and Barry split up to search the wooded region, while B.B made his way up the hill. He walked past a family of rabbits and a donkey eating figs from a tree. The Japanese macaques still bathed in the hot spring, seemingly unaffected by the chaos, even when B.B called out Isaacs’s name.

“Beebs mate, tell me that’s you.” Isaac shouted, peeking over a small cliff edge.

“It’s me mate, you alright?” B.B shouted back.

Isaac hopped down, his clothes looked tattered and stained.

“Fuckin’ hell mate you stink of wet dog, where’s Karl?” B.B said.

Isaac looked exhausted, “Him killed... he locked me up...”

“He? Who? Where’s Erikah?” B.B asked.

Isaac shook his head, “Not Erikah. It was Karl.”

Chapter 11 – Reinvention

Isaac triggered the Ticantik immunity defences after days of waiting. As soon as he gained access to the central hub he reversed Kinesis in the menagerie, and froze the animals in disarray.

“How could it be him?” B.B asked.

“We were in the menagerie and he rushed me. Then he must’ve froze me coz I warped to the high ground... Then they all resumed.” Isaac looked confused. “I had to kill Timmy Deacon.” He rubbed his eyes in regret.

“... Who’s Timmy Deacon?” Jackie asked.

“Honey badger.” Replied Isaac. “He went mental.”

“It don’t make sense though, it must be Erikah. Everything was fine before I spoke to you yesterday, then the Tomahawk broke down.” B.B said.

“Did it?” Isaac asked.

“Yeah I fixed it though, your incessant tinkering nearly fucked me again. Was a nightmare, I had to kick-start it.” Said B.B.

“What you talkin’ about tinkering, I haven’t touched that bike once.” Isaac asked indignantly.

“Bollocks, there was this little limpet thing rigged to limit the bike’s immunity.” B.B said.

“Well why would I fit that you plum?” Isaac asked. “I told you I was only working on the Beamer anyway.”

B.B was stumped but still struggled to believe what Isaac was saying. He scratched his neck anxiously.

“So it was Karl then?” Jackie asked. “Trust you to not do a background check. Sloppy.”

“Did you save Blaise? Where is he?” Isaac said.

“He’s dead, it was horrific. It was Erikah in Siena I’m sure of it. She must be using him.” B.B claimed.

“Where did Karl go after he attacked yer?” Jackie asked.

“Let’s just look over the CCTV.” Barry Said.

Isaac rewound the footage of the last two days, starting with B.B and Karl arriving at the base.

“Where’d you find this kid?” Barry said.

“I told you in London. He was gonna jump off a tower block I saved him.” B.B said.

“Always the saviour.” Jackie said sarcastically.

Isaac fast-forwarded through the introductions, to the next morning. He switched between cameras in the main room and they watched intently as Isaac presented the Beamer to B.B. They froze the image and noticed Karl watching secretly from the sofa. Isaac knew he was culpable; he had provided insight into the Beamer and with the Ticantik immunity off, all for a trivial demonstration.

The footage now showed Karl and B.B sat around the kitchen worktop. Isaac eventually stopped cooking and talked with the pair then slapped the Beamer down in front of Karl. Then B.B followed him down the hatch to retrieve the stock list. It was at this moment that they saw Karl reach forward, grab the Beamer and shoot Isaac and B.B, freezing the pair. However, the footage then stuttered very briefly and resumed. Karl shifted from a slouch to an upright posture. B.B and Isaac were in shock as they watched their oblivious selves return from the hatch to face a new Karl.

“Even if you dropped the defences I was still registered on Antik, so he couldn’t have stopped me could he?” B.B said.

“I don’t think so, no.” Isaac replied.

Jackie turned on the television above the bar, flicking through the news channels, all broadcasting the same content.

“What d’you think he wants?” Barry asked. “If he wanted to kill you could’ve done it there and then.”

“There’s more than one wair t’ kill a man, Barry.” Said Jackie, increasing the television volume.

And we have breaking news for you all now; we along with every newscast in the country have received a manifesto from the alleged perpetrator of the terrorist attack in Siena, demanding we read it to prevent any more bloodshed. He encloses a picture of himself.

The newscasters held up a picture of B.B with perfect clarity and started to read.

“There you are fockface, you’ve really don’ it this time!” Said Jackie.

“To Whom It May Concern, a new dawn is in effect. This man, pictured at Heaven nightclub names himself as B.B. He claims responsibility for the Palio massacre which left several people and animals dead or in critical condition. The manifesto itself is quite erratic and appears to be written in multiple languages, so we will dissect the demands and report throughout the week. In the meantime If anyone knows or has seen this man please report it to the police and stay vigilant.

“Well... at least we can find out wha’ he wants.” Barry said trying to lighten the mood.

“Think we know what B.B wants.” Jackie mumbled.

“Wah yuh doing at Heaven?” Isaac asked.

“I think there’s more pressing issues going on now.” Said B.B.

Isaac checked the current CCTV stream and spotted ropes being lowered as armed police began their descent into the base. He flicked a series of switches and activated many nozzles positioned all over the base. Everything turned silent briefly before the main entrance chamber shook violently. All four stood looking at the live feed and watched as expanding foam fired out of the pistons and forced the police to clamber back up to safety. The news networks showed aerial shots of the foam filling the penetrable areas, acting as a robust concrete seal. Almost immediately after this effective defence settled, the television screen froze and all heads turned to B.B. He checked Antik and confirmed time outside the base had just been frozen.

“He’s coming.” B.B.’s growled.

Isaac hopped over to the museum and lifted the glass cases filled his holdall with artefacts, maps and scripture.

“Where’s the Beamer?” B.B barked.

Isaac patted his belt, “We need to help the animals they’re trapped up there.”

“Erm, lads. We ‘ave a problem.” Said Barry pointing at the CCTV stream. The same masked figure had descended from the lingering smoke cloud down to the top of the base on a jet-propelled board. Without hesitation he dropped several spheres onto the hardened foam as the four watched on with baited breath. Orbs bounced up and down on the foam, boring deeper holes each time. “Klerksdorp Spheres.” Said Barry in fear.

“We need to go.” B.B said.

“But the animals.” Isaac pleaded.

“Would you rather him get to them?” B.B asked.

“Fock the animals, we need to blow the base.” Jackie said. “It’d be a mercy.”

Isaac reluctantly agreed, he turned a sequence of keys. The base lit up red and initiated a countdown of self-destruct. The CCTV screens all switched to display the same feed, suddenly the attacker flew close into shot and lifted the mask and brazenly revealed his identity. It was the familiar gaunt, chinless face of Karl with his tidy bowl cut unruffled. He held up a sign that read ‘You’re in trouble now boy.’ The four ran back to the pod to escape, holding the wounded Isaac up. As they collectively loaded their bags and weapons into the pod a deafening screech hit their ears, the same one from Siena.

“Jackie quickly, close up the tunnel.” B.B yelled.

Jackie picked up a bulky piece of dynamite and unwrapped the fuse with haste. She struck a match and exploded the hole then continued on to the pod. B.B and Barry placed their Antiks into the pod’s slots as simulated screams filled the tunnel. They felt their surroundings shake and heard the explosion collapse the tunnel. They navigated back through the tunnels to Brighton then B.B collapsed from exhaustion.

“I’m not carrying that fat fock anywhere you better wake him up.” Jackie said to Isaac as they unloaded their cargo. “We’ll stick out like a sore thumb in Ticantik if Karl’s looking for us.” Jackie waltzed over to B.B and emptied a bottle of water on his bald head.

“Blaise!” Shouted B.B deliriously jumping to his feet.

“Come on mate let’s find a place to hideout.” Isaac said.

“Where are we, Brighton? Let’s get to Hove. Head to the seafront Baz.” B.B instructed. They left in the Volkswagen Camper and scanned the skies in paranoia.

“What happened in Siena?” Isaac asked B.B.

“I dunno. I got to the Piazza after looking at your screenshots and saw his watermelon rinds but I was too late, he’d butchered Blaise. Hung him up over a gelato shop.”

Isaac sat in silence for a moment dwelling on the other animals he had lost. “I couldn’t believe it was him either, it made no sense. He was a little dweeb.”

“Maybe he was trapped in Ticantik after shooting the beam at us. It seems unlikely he’s working alone, you saw that he had Erikah’s Antox on. That grin. Shrinks my bollocks.” B.B said.

The pair were interrupted by Jackie, “Where we going? Just about to hit Hove.”

“Head to Hove Park, it’s the other side.” Instructed B.B.

“What made you bring her?” Isaac whispered.

“I fucking heard that cunt!” Jackie snapped.

As they arrived there was still no sign of Karl but Ticantik had been initiated. The park was mostly empty but for a few frozen dog walkers and joggers. Collectively they gathered up the salvaged equipment and walked speedily through the park. B.B led them to the centre near a small grove of trees.

“If this is just a hole in the ground with your sticky porn-mags we’re going back up t’Yorkshire quick-smart.” Jackie stated. B.B ignored her and stopped at a series of large rocks and dropped their heavy bags to the floor.

“Holy ‘ell I can see him.” Barry said as they all watched a faint dot hovering in the sky for a while then dart off out of sight. B.B took out the Wedge and plunged it into the largest rock; small cubes shifted in the same way as the pod interior, to reveal a hole. Isaac limped down followed by Jackie and Barry but B.B remained fixated on the sky. He crouched and descended down, placing the Wedge into the top rung of the ladder. The large rocks above creaked as they closed back to one. The three lingered in absolute darkness waiting for B.B to finish climbing down the ladder.

Chapter 12 – Hove Bunker

The series of rooms in the bunker were each decorated in a vivid nineteen-fifties style. It did not seem like it was underground; simulated light shone through windows that were separated by garish curtains. A flat stone wall had a cosy fireplace at the foot in the living room. Muted colours of the furniture were contrasted by the vibrant pink and

green wallpaper. If not for a few crusty towels, the hideout was unexpectedly immaculate. A utility room stocked with food and drink was adjacent to an art-deco bar.

“Fock me, who you trying t’impress?” Jackie blurted.

“I’m gonna monitor the live feed. Make yourselves at home, there’s a pool out there too.” B.B said. “There’s a freezer of food at the back if you’re hungry.”

“Oh aye, I’ll do us one of me famous Cottage Pies.” She replied.

“Alright but don’t cook it in the bowl like last time. Makes the spuds go soggy.” B.B said.

“Don’t pigeonhole me cont I cook spontaneous.” Jackie said.

Isaac located a basket of medical supplies and attended the wound in his leg more thoroughly. Then joined Barry by the pool with two cans of beer.

“Cheers lad, guess we could hideout here for a good while. What do you know about Karl?”

“Basically nothing. B.B only brought him to the base a couple of days ago. Thinking back he did seem underwhelmed with the menagerie.” Isaac pulled out his phone and handed it to Barry. “Think you better translate this.”

Barry read through the manifesto published in B.B’s name, “Most of it’s in Sumerian, some Aramaic too.”

“What’s it say?” Isaac asked.

“It doesn’t really make sense.” Barry said, “It’s just random words amongst gibberish. This looks like a distraction. ‘I B.B am lord of airspace’ ... This kid a serious illness.”

“In Somnis Veritas.” Isaac read aloud. “What does that mean?”

“In dreams there are truth.” Barry replied.

Isaac slurped his Fosters nervously. A short while later, Jackie rang a bell and summoned the exhausted group back to the table. “Dinners served, cottage pie by the bowlful!”

B.B and Barry pulled up a chair and sat around a circular table illuminated by low hanging lights. “Thanks Jac.” Barry said politely.

“Couldn’t find the oven dish in there then?” B.B Said.

“Shut it cont Barry says me cottage pie is his favourite meal.” Jackie said.

Barry stayed silent as B.B scooped up a spoonful of soggy mash and gave it a sniff. “Think you forgot to put filling in mine. Might just grab the ketchup.”

“Focking ketchup?! You really are working class scum aren’t ya?” Jackie snapped.

“I just like a bit of flavour is all.” B.B moaned.

“You arrogant prick, I saved your life today. Ungrateful!” Jackie shouted.

“Weeeell I’m pretty sure I’d have outwitted Kent police without you there.” B.B said.

“Ooh yes you really looked in control when we showed up. Shitting yourself with your hands in the air in front of three female gavvers!” Jackie yelled in a raspy voice.

“Don’t be sexist Jac’ it’s unbecoming. Anyway the lions saved me.” B.B said. Jackie scowled at him from across the table in a moment of silence before Isaac changed the subject.

“Karl still out there?” Isaac asked.

“Couldn’t see him but we’ll check in a bit. I still don’t get how it can be him, he seemed so pathetic in the short time we spent together.” B.B said.

“What if he planned this for years, he seems to have planned all this meticulously. You sure you never met him before?”

“His is the sort of face you don’t forget.” B.B replied. “He didn’t want anything to do with me, jumped off a building to get away from me.”

“Understandable.” Jackie plopped another heap of pale mince on Barry’s plate.

“How would he have known I’d save him?” B.B questioned, shovelling mash in his gob. “How’d he have known about me at all? The more I think about it the more I’m sure it all went down in the base, when he shot me with the Beamer.”

“So what’s your theory? He froze ya’, took your Antik, and then what?” Queried Barry.

“But he’d have no idea how to operate it.” B.B said as he turned on a projector. Everyone turned to watch as he played through the clip of Karl shooting the Beamer, rewinding it repeatedly before Barry spotted something.

“Look at tha’!” Stick it in slow motion and watch it again.” Barry said. The first beam hit Isaac on his left buttock, but the second hit B.B directly on his Antik, causing a crackle of purple electricity to fizz up, and shoot back into the Beamer.

“Look even the creases in his clothes changed, and the shape of his hair.” B.B had now stood up to get a close up of the footage, rewinding it obsessively and examining the minor inconsistencies.

“Well what happens when a Beamer hits an Antik then?” Barry questioned.

“The results could be unpredictable. The Beamer anti-quarks could defibrillate the Antik’s mechanics, causing a burst of Ticantik energy. If the beam returns to the Beamer it could theoretically immunise the user while simultaneously disabling the Antik’s Kinesis function.” Isaac explained.

“So Karl unknowingly initiated Ticantik and had no immediate way of returning to Kinesis?” Barry replied. “Is there any way of knowing how long he was trapped before working out a way to undo his mistake?”

“Well put it this way.” B.B said. “When I met him he was a pathetic little worm with pit stains standing on a rooftop. The next few hours I got to know him, he didn’t seem like a

bad bloke, but to call him an incapable sad-sack would still woefully under-equip you in your effort to comprehend his pitiful existence and feeble human spirit.”

“Yer got all that in a few hours?” Jackie said.

“Point is; he went from that to a Ticantik Jedi flying a hoverboard and wielding Neolithic artefacts even we haven’t uncovered. So my guess is he’s been trapped a long old while.” B.B said.

“Even if yer right about all this, why not just slit yer throat in Ticantik? Or if he wanted to defame yer he could’ve just dropped yer in Trafalgar Square Stark bollock naked with an apple in yer mouth and yer Antik up yer jacksie.” Jackie said.

“Considering his attention to detail so far I’m sure there’s a method to his madness. Just gotta stop him before he blows our cover. Luckily we salvaged the best artefacts, if he thinks he’s got the upper hand he’s sorely mistaken.” B.B declared.

After everyone finished their dinner they walked through the living area to assess the artefacts from Isaac’s base, as well as several that were already there. The lounge was in a lower level and had four leather sofas surrounding a square coffee table. A projector hung above and pointed to a large white wall. B.B twisted a vault door with a golden handle to reveal a storage facility, with shelves stacked four high surrounding several scratch-marked leather briefcases. He grabbed two cases with each hand and lugged them over to the table.

“Bringin’ out the big guns are we?” Jackie asked.

“Too right.” B.B replied.

The first case he opened contained a dark, green scaled mask with piercing orange gems portraying snake-like eyes. The next three resembled a silver pocket trumpet, a harpoon and a large compass.

“That trumpets mine!” Jackie announced as she picked it up. However as she grasped at the handle it crumbled in her hands, disintegrating into slimy ash. B.B upset and alarmed frantically picked at the other artefacts but the same thing happened again, each dissolving through his fingers and onto the table. Scrawled on the inside of the suitcases were the words; *‘Infinite is the number of fools’*.

“How did he get down here? How would he even know about this place?” B.B said, distressed as his plans crumbled like the artefacts in front of him.

“He must’ve pieced together our whole set up.” Isaac interjected.

“So is there anything he doesn’t know now?” Jackie asked.

“He’s shafted me. This is the end times, might be time for plan B.” B.B suggested.

“What’s that?” Barry asked.

“Operation suicide.” BB grumbled. The group fell silent for a moment.

“Let’s not be dramatic, we’ve still got our Antiks. Let’s just pack up some firepower and pop this weasel.” Jackie said.

"I guess I did find some old journal with maps on the way down to Siena. At first glance they looked pretty tasty, could tip the scales back in our favour." B.B said.

"Well there we go then! Let's ave a look." Jackie said.

"I left them in the Tomahawk." B.B Said.

"Right where's that?" She asked.

"In Siena." He replied.

"Well that's good as fockin gone then yer daft cont." She spat.

"Na not necessarily, Isaac put a tracker on the bike after I kept getting gattered and forgetting where I left it." B.B responded.

"Yah." Isaac interjected. "Shall we go and retrieve it then?"

"Me and Baz will go." Jackie said. "You lie low while we get as far away from you as possible."

Chapter 13 – First Flight

Jackie and Barry made their way across Hove Park to the van and set off for the airport. They unregistered from their Antik to blend in with the rest of the world, as Karl could still be patrolling and spot them moving in Ticantik. Jackie turned on the radio to listen to news reports.

More global cases are being reported about the mysterious figure B.B and his list of demands have been posted online.

"Corr, fock me something's gone wrong in my stomach." Barry moaned.

"Shh I'm tryin' to listen." Said Jackie turning the radio volume up.

Several reports have placed the suspect throughout Europe including the terrorist attack in Tuscany, which left several wounded. Our correspondent in Italy also reported that an albino chimpanzee was also killed in the Piazza, ritualistically butchered and hung upside down.

"Ah Jac pull over it int not good." Barry mumbled.

"Shot the fock up!" Jackie snapped.

"An Australian couple from Hampstead claimed the man currently known as B.B broke into their home two days ago, Derek you're on the air now thank you very much for contacting us."

"No worries mate."

"Now tell me, Derek, what happened?"

"Well me and the missus came back to Hampstead in the arvo to find him in our house with a, ar, well let's just say a younger gentlemen friend."

"... Right."

"Me and the wife told them two to leave then this B.B fella in the news tried to attack Sandra but luckily I got between them. I ended up with 8 stitches in me head."

"I'm sorry to hear that, do you think the young boy was being held there against his will?"

"Yeah probably."

"That's horrible. Now you say you live in Hampstead, did you report it to the police?"

"Too right I did."

"Did you provide any evidence of the break in?"

"Yeah they took a sock and DNA. We rigged the whole gaff up with cameras but he must've messed with the footage. It's all over the place, it's done a number on poor Sandra."

"I'm sorry to hear that too, will you be willing to upload your footage to our website?"

"Don't worry mate it's Already on YouTube."

"What was it that he was doing in your house may I ask?"

"-He was wanking to pictures of me!"

"Shut the fuck up Sandy you fucken boomer!"

... Ah... Apologies for anyone offended by the course language-

Barry turned off the radio, "You're gonna haff t'pull over alright, there's services up ther- PULL OVER JACKIE I'M GONNA... Oh no..."

"Ah don't tell me you shit yerself again." Jackie groaned.

"It's your cottage pie y'know." Barry cried.

"Ohhh here it comes, truth's out now, intit?!" Jackie shouted.

"It wa, I knew that mince din't look right!" Barry said as he pulled at his trousers.

"Then why am I alright, Barry? Riddle me that! Fock me that reeks like egg salad." Jackie said as she pulled into the services. Barry waddled to the garage toilets, the options of trousers were limited, forcing him to settle for an incredibly snug pair of skinny jeans and give up on underwear altogether. After a tumultuous journey they parked the van in a multi-story car park at Gatwick Airport and approached the entrance with little trepidation. They were still confident that Karl would not be aware of their existence yet. They approached a British Airways counter and bought first class tickets to Leonardo da Vinci International. The Yorkshire couple accumulated a considerable retirement fund from their misdeeds in Ticantik.

They scanned their passports then accessed the lounge and sat by the window sinking whiskey sours until they were called up to board. They took their seats on the plane, relieved to be on the way. Shortly after take-off, the captain addressed the passengers. A tannoy tune rang through the cabin, in-seat screens all stopped showing the entertainment content and forced even the most ignorant passenger to pay attention.

“This is your captain speaking, B.B. We’ve got clear skies ahead but unfortunately you shan’t be seeing it. Sad really.” A soft voice announced. The couple looked at each other concerned along with a few other passengers. “Oh I almost forgot, please welcome aboard Jackie and Barry, the middle-aged couple sat right in the back row, for they wish you great ill and eternal suffering!”

Immediately brazen men started emerging through curtains on each side, coming from the front section of the plane. Jackie saw one large man with clenched fists lock eyes on her husband then approach their seats with aims of being a hero.

“Oh fock this.” Jackie said, flinging her seatbelt back and stomped over to the man who in turn met her in the middle.

“You are under citizen’s arre”-

Before the man could finish his sentence Jackie had head-butted him on the bridge of his nose, causing him to fall back, blood poured from his nostrils into his cupped hand. This caused further concern to the passengers who erupted into a mass brawl. The plane was midway across the English Channel when the voice of Karl came through the speakers again.

“Well I’m afraid I’ll have to leave you all now, goob-bye my disciples I’ll meet you on the other side, don’t be sad that I’m leaving, be happy that you’re free!” His sinister bellow caused a momentary pause in the scuffle. Then Jackie and Barry felt a subtle bump in the plane as distant screams were heard from the front.

“He jumped!” A Chinese man shouted.

“Get off us yer focking ‘tards!” Said Jackie trying to make her way to the cockpit but people were now stampeding through the aisles in sheer panic as they felt the plane start to dip.

Suddenly a piercing sound grew louder over the commotion. Jackie and Barry continued to struggle before successfully breaking free, treading over writhing bodies to get forward to the next section, which was mostly vacant. They both saw a danger that they could not escape; a grenade rolled back and forth on the floor. The deafening whistle ceased and it detonated. However, there was no visible explosion. Instead an instantaneous Reverse-Immunity Ball was triggered. The plane froze mid-air, along with every frantic passenger, including a fear stricken Barry and Jackie. It stayed suspended above the sea while the rest of the world remained in Kinesis.

Chapter 14 – Promethean Fire

Back in the Hove base B.B and Isaac were playing Mario Kart, making squawking sounds of excitement. The pair had dulled their own fears with heaps of cannabis and successfully distracted themselves.

“Oh fuck sake that is bollocks!” Isaac whinged.

“Ooooh get in!” B.B shook his fist at Isaac to celebrate then sat back sipping his bottle of beer.

“Yuh think they’re on the plane yet?” Isaac asked.

“Fucking better be.” B.B burred.

“Turn the news on we might be missing something.” Isaac stated.

B.B ignored the request and launched grapes in the air and caught them in his mouth. Isaac grew impatient and removed the Beamer from his belt. He was relieved it had not dissolved and aimed it at an airborne grape but as he fired the device rumbled. Suddenly a beam jolted backward through Isaac in a spasm as he froze solid on the spot. He stood like a mannequin while B.B sat unaware.

“Come on let’s have another game first.” B.B said. In the silence he shuffled backwards and saw Isaac, frozen with a dazed expression then dropped his grapes from shock. He became paranoid that Karl was watching him, he carefully uncurled Isaac’s fingers and acquired the Beamer, then pointed it directly back at him but before triggering, he came to the conclusion it may have backfired. Isaac never had the opportunity to fully describe how he got the device working in the first place so B.B ran over to the holdalls and grabbed stacks of hard drives and dog-eared paperwork.

He opened a laptop and pored through the files on restored artefacts. By the third hard-drive he began to grow impatient, then his phone started vibrating. He hoped it was Jackie in Tuscany but the contact appeared under the name, ‘Ticantik Bilateral Assistance Group’.

“Hello? He answered!” A well-spoken man said.

“I’m blocking your number.” B.B replied.

“No wait! We are aware your preference is against us calling but” - He continued.

“It wasn’t a preference, it was an order. Don’t listen to that shit on the news anyway, it’s not true. Someone’s trying to make me out as a deviant.” B.B said.

“Oh no not that, although that did amuse us. No it’s about the planes, darling. There’s five planes frozen in the air of which I’m sure you’re aware?” He asked.

B.B skipped through the news channels but nothing seemed to be coming up. “What you on about? There’s nothing there.”

“Yes well we are rather ahead of the news media. Do you need our assistance? We could send transport, we think if you just saw our headquarters you’d” -

“No! I don’t need anything from you, just leave me alone.” B.B said.

“Very well. If you change your mind our assistance group is willing to standby as always.”

“Stop ringing me.” B.B ordered.

“Right you are.”

B.B hung up the phone and looked at the helpless Isaac, he had to leave him there until he could find a way to unfreeze him. He needed to locate the static planes but he had no clue where to look due to his lazy reliance on Isaac and mainstream media. He sat back at his computer, Isaac had left two screens up tracking Jackie and Barry’s progress but their markers were motionless. He zoomed out, hoping they were located in Italy but they appeared in the middle of the ocean. He checked Antik’s status; Kinesis. B.B tried to induce Ticantik but reverted back instantly.

He carried Isaac through to a bedroom and stashed him carefully in a walk-in wardrobe in case Karl came looking. Then he noted the marker’s coordinates and identified they were over the English Channel. Isaac had hacked into MI5’s restricted access files which included reports of the static planes, with locations to be confirmed. There was information on the RAF military base in Swanwick demonstrating state of the art flying technology with plans to implement them on a reconnaissance mission in the unfolding crisis.

B.B knew he had lost control of Ticantik but this did not deter him from his usual lack of subtlety. He walked to a vacant road under a bridge and stopped at a parked Jeep. After checking there were no witnesses, he banged the Wedge of Aiud into the door which instantly set off the car’s deafening alarm. He panicked and expanded the lock then fumbled to start it. An old woman stood at the top of the road staring straight at him, he jammed the wedge into the ignition and stalled it as another pedestrian stopped to watch the commotion. Finally the engine roared then he sped off past them and joined the motorway to Southampton.

To B.B’s relief, the journey was quick and relatively uneventful. He drove calmly so as not to draw attention to himself and occasionally covered his face in paranoia. As he approached the military base, news reports about the Ticantik stricken planes began to flood the airwaves.

“Breaking news, yet another plane has been discovered seemingly frozen in mid-air, adding to the growing list of sightings coming from across the world including the English Channel, Johannesburg, Sofia, Kyoto and Chicago. Scientists initially claimed it was an optical illusion but are yet to comment on the developing phenomenon. In the studio we’re joined by a gentleman who claims to know exactly what’s going on, he’s a self-proclaimed expert on scientific anomalies, and despite having no official status, his controversial blog titled ‘B.B: The Gorgon of the Apocalypse’ is making waves across the world, welcome to you Mr Clurtis.”

“Thank you, Susan.” The man said in a nasal voice.

“Now firstly, you explain on your blog that the scientists dubbing the planes as an illusion are part of a mass cover up.”

“Correct.”

"Right, and to what end?"

"To protect the 'man' currently known as B.B."

"So you claim these incidents are linked?"

"Wake up Susan! You may subscribe to the religion of coincidences but some of us are actually paying attention."

"So who is this B.B figure?"

"It's obvious isn't it? It's Medusa! Read the blog Susan, Jesus."

Disgruntled, B.B changed the channel to a local radio station.

"Yes well I just feel for the passengers up there, this really is taking flight delays to a whole new level. I just hope those poor souls are ATOL protected. Anyway let's listen to what all you loony's in radio land are thinking about this. I've got a few callers on the line here so tell me Bernard from Manchester, what are you thinking about this and remember to keep it clean, please."

"I think it's an absolute fucking disgrace Richard." Replied a gruff voice.

"Ah Bernard going to have to cut you off there, friend. Apologies for any offence caused by Bernard's language. Let's hope Roche from Cardiff on line two can be a bit more insightful."

"Theese are the new plaaaagues! God almighty is smiting us for our lives of sin and despicable blasphemeeey!" Said another caller in a Welsh accent.

"Interesting take there Rochey. We've all had our naughty moments here and there though, god knows I have ha. What sins is your god smiting?"

"He hates the gaaaays, the transgenders and of course those greedy Jeeews!"

"Ah, respect your right to your own opinion there Rochey but that is some pretty ripe subject matter for a Tuesd'y afternoon so let's move to Mr. Hoffman on line 3 post haste. Now, you're a man of science aren't you Hoffa, what do you make of all this?"

"I think it's pretty clear to all of us here that this is definitive proof we're living in a simulation, and the very nature of our physical reality is a lot more"-

"Ooh fascinating stuff there Hoffmeister but we have actually run out of time. Now here's a lovely little ditty by Jefferson Airplane, how fitting!"

B.B turned off the radio for the rest of the journey. As he pulled up by the seaside to watch the sunset and wait for nightfall, Kinesis had been in motion for nearly a whole afternoon. He sat patiently and collected his thoughts, occasionally turning on the radio to listen to emerging reports. As dusk drew, B.B initiated Ticantik then secured his Antik in a buckled pocket. This time Kinesis did not resume which made him suspicious. Despite this he was keen to take advantage of the lack of interruption and walked up the still streets towards the RAF base. It was deserted and the gates at the entrance were open to grant access to an unmarked lorry. B.B strolled into the grounds with minimal effort, he made his way to the airfield then passed a group of frozen pilots and scientists

testing the prototype aviation devices. A weaponised drone and a camouflaged squirrel suit were being wheeled on a slope from the underground depths of a warehouse. B.B walked down the path and into the sterile tungsten lit hallways.

A door at the end was frozen slightly ajar, so B.B pushed into the room to see an assortment of one-man jet-powered wingsuits of varying shapes and sizes. After a few minutes of struggling into an insulated onesie and a shiny helmet, B.B hoisted a dark camouflage jet suit onto his large angular back. It was a solid carbon fibre wing that strapped the pilot between two compact jet engines. The words 'Yves Rossy' were branded on the centre.

B.B tightened the straps then suddenly, a deafening alarm started to wail and a red flashing light intermittently illuminated B.B's face a bright scarlet. He had not noticed Kinesis had been resumed. Two soldiers kicked the door in brandishing assault rifles, prompting B.B to unholster his Antik and freeze time. He shuffled past them and ducked down to squeeze the wingsuit out of the door then closed it behind him and locked the soldiers inside. Two corridors stretched out in front of him. Kinesis initiated again and several soldiers piled into each of his potential escape routes.

"Stand down!" One of the soldiers said.

"Wait, is that the geezer from the news? What the fuck is he doing here?" Another said.

"That's the bloke who wanks in people's houses! Take him down!" A ratty looking private squealed.

"Sorry to bother you lads! I'll be on my way now, no need for violence!" B.B shouted as he leant forward B.B fired up the jetwing. He started to charge, his juggernaut like presence bowled towards the soldiers, causing them to panic and attempt to ready their weapons. As the jets reached full power B.B's unbalanced steps got bigger until he lifted off the ground completely, tearing down the hallway about a metre from the ground. The rest of the soldiers started to fall back and fired their weapons but B.B initiated Ticantik, freezing them where they stood then ploughed through them like a set of bowling pins and rocketed out of the base. Kinesis initiated and bullets flew past him as he shot vertically into the sky.

After an exhilarating aerial joyride, B.B reached the static plane, floating peacefully amongst the clouds. He pulled up and attempted to slow down and land on the wing, but over shot and only clipped his foot on the tail before dropping dramatically. He started to spin out but managed to regain his composure, flying back up to the plane from a vertical trajectory then hovered above it before he touched down slowly. As he walked across the wing he saw someone walk past the window. Startled, B.B desperately tried to see who it was.

Pondering for a few seconds, he removed the jetwing, and clutched the straps, it was too large and heavy to manoeuvre into the plane. He reluctantly dropped the wings over the edge and into the ocean, then used the Wedge to break into the emergency door and bundled inside. Everyone on the plane was frozen. B.B cautiously walked down the aisle looking for signs of movement, the contorted faces of rioting passengers only added to his growing sense of dread. Jackie and Barry stood ahead of other passengers, bracing

impact. B.B looked on the cabin floor and observed an ancient grenade but recoiled as he heard a voice from behind him.

“Know these two do you?” Karl said, slowly walking up the aisle then leaning on a seat and fiddling with a passenger’s curly hair nonchalantly. “You’re as predictable as your little white monkey.”

“You ‘orrible cunt.” B.B grumbled.

“Scurrying around for your friends, risking your life all just to trap yourself in the one place in the world you really don’t want to be. So sad.”

“Did Erikah put you up to this?” B.B replied.

“Erikah!” Karl cackled creepily. “Your delusions know no bounds, boy. I’m the man from the rooftop, the suicidal no-hoper. I’m the half dead, beaten traveller to your Good Samaritan!”

“You’re not seriously blaming this on me.” B.B scoffed.

“I’m a product of your own mess! You elevated me to the status of a God, showed me the truth, you gave me the Promethean fire!” Karl’s tone became more unhinged.

“I did no such thing... What truth?” B.B asked.

“I know what you did boy, I know what you done! I know you inside out from birth to your death.” Karl continued.

“I’ve had enough of your cryptic bollocks, you’ve done enough damage son.” B.B paced towards Karl with fierce intent.

“There is no damage, you know that friend”- Karl got interrupted by a devastating uppercut to his non-existent chin and hit the deck, then stumbled to his feet still sporting his ugly grin. B.B wrapped his sausage fingers round Karl’s neck and began to squeeze. Blood oozed from between Karl’s gums and glistened on his bottom lip.

“So I’m just another annoyance to you am I?” Karl wheezed. “Another person threatening your pointless, hedonistic existence?”

B.B squeezed tighter, “Pretty much.”

“Pitiful.” Karl choked. He kicked B.B in his arrow wound and frog hopped over him to the plane exit. They tussled out onto the wing and pushed at each other’s faces. B.B gained the upper hand and maneuvered Karl off the edge but he got hold of his ankle. Reaching out frantically, B.B grabbed a wing light, leaving Karl dangling from his wounded leg. Karl looked back over his shoulder and smiled then loosened his grip and dropped into the clouds below. B.B struggled back to his knees and as his senses sharpened, he heard the multiple propellers of helicopters and military drones surrounding the plane.