

Lost in the Marshes.

By Scott Coe, November 2010.

The sun rose above the marshes. Big and yellow-orange, born from the horizon setting the sky on fire. He'd been out here all night but hadn't seen a thing, no lights in the sky, no little green men, nothing (well they wouldn't be green or little anyway. Stupid bloody Hollywood, what did they know!). He emerged from his camouflaged tent, stretched his arms and gazed at the landscape around him. If he had been a birdwatcher this would have been a great spot, but he guessed he must be up before the birds had awoken. So used was he to the bustle of city life, that these little trips always had an eerie feel to them. Anywhere in the world was quieter than home, but this place though was different altogether. It was quieter than quiet and it made him feel uncomfortable. No matter, he wouldn't be here for much longer. Time for some breakfast, pack up camp and make his way back to civilisation.

Watching a sunrise was an unusual luxury in this game, it only happened on these occasions – when the intelligence was wrong. When the information was correct, you didn't want to hang around too long. Just get your data and get out, or under cover before you risk detection. The thing that really bugged him this time, was that the source for this information was always right, always one-hundred percent. Yet, last night... nothing. So sure was he, that he almost didn't bring breakfast, if you can call it breakfast; service issue ration packs. Personally he loved them (most of his colleagues hated them), and he always ended up with more by trading with his fellow agents. He even used them at home when he couldn't be bothered to cook in the evening. He used to love cooking for Alison, he would serve her a meal fit for a queen. She to him was everything, she was the one that he had waited his whole life to meet, she was his sole mate. Then one day she vanished. Vanished without a trace, no body, no belongings, no goodbye note, no trace of her credit cards being used, nothing? All they found, was her car parked in a quiet country lane in Suffolk. He found himself alone, more alone than he had ever felt in his life. Returning to intelligence work had been his escape. The distraction was the only thing that kept him sane, but he never cooked a proper meal again. He lost his appetite, cooking for just himself didn't inspire him. Even a ready meal in the microwave seemed a lot of effort and was the only cooking he ever did these days. He only ate because he had to, therefore the ration packs suited him, breakfast, lunch and dinner. This is what earned him the nickname “Ration-Pack Robert”. So after just one little bland gunk filled pouch, he was finished and packing his gear ready to head to the rendezvous point. He pulled out his compass and made ready to set off. 'Odd?' he thought, no activity last night, yet the needle was spinning like crazy. He looked around him, the landscape looked the same in all directions. If he was a novice, he'd be lost already, but he always aligned his tent to point to home, therefore the sun and his watch were all he needed.

He must have been walking for at least two hours, yet the landscape changed very little. In every direction a sea of grass, marshland stretching outwards beyond the horizon, wide open and exposed. He should of course, have reached the main creek by now, but there was no sign of it and the compass was still spinning. He looked at his watch, then down at his shadow, this confirmed to him that he was heading in the right direction, yet (and he had to admit it), he was lost. 'I don't get lost' he thought to himself. He had what he conceived to be a “natural” sense of direction. So this situation pricked at his pride, and, if word ever got out to his other operatives he'd never live it down. Unless he'd been walking around in circles (which judging by the time and shadow, he hadn't), he was out of the danger zone, plus it was well enough into the day, to allow him to be alone out here safely and to use electronic devices. He put down his backpack and pulled out his GPS, switched it on and waited...

... And waited, and waited, and waited, yet according to the device there was no satellite in range. Impossible of course, and obviously nothing to block the signal either. He put this down to the same magnetic interference that was acting upon his compass. He tried the radio, but got nothing but

static, which only served to confirm his theory. He sat and rested in the long grass, pondering the situation. There was only one logical course of action, he would walk until he came to the next stream, then follow it downstream to the main creek.

He walked for several more hours, but there was still no creek, and his irritation was starting to turn to concern at the situation. He checked the time and compared it to the location of the sun. 'Strange', he thought... the sun, although high in the sky, seemed bigger and more orange than it should be. Was this due to dust in the atmosphere? Was the dust therefore, the reason for the wild magnetics? Whatever the reason, he was getting nowhere fast, and this, together with walking in the sun for hours, was leaving him tired and disorientated. He made the decision to make camp and rest until he felt fresher, or the magnetic interference subsided.

When he awoke it was night time, and although he must have slept for over eight hours, he still felt tired and dizzy. He knew he had no time to waste laying here feeling ill, there was still a possibility he was in a dangerous location, despite the lack of activity last night. There was one advantage, if the sky was clear, he could use the stars to navigate. He activated his scanner, and extended it out from the safety of his stealthed tent. Not a blip - all clear in all directions. He slowly emerged from his tent and scanned the night sky. He was no astronomer, but this was the northern hemisphere, so all he had to do, was find the saucepan like section of Ursa Major, and it's stars which pointed to the Pole star.

This beautiful night sky, clear and full of more stars than usual, was breathtaking, like a scattering of diamonds on dark velvet, and it was wrong. No Ursa Major, no Polaris. The sight that greeted him was like nothing he'd ever seen, not even in the remotest parts of the world he'd visited. Not only were there stars, but behind them – galaxy shaped discs of bright light, and in front - Three moons?

At that moment, he felt something, he hadn't felt in years – panic! So where is he, how did he get here?

He collapsed to his knees, his mind racing, nothing at all making sense, his breathing erratic. Falling to the floor, grasping the long grass in his hands, trying to hold on to the world as his head spun out of control. Too many questions, illogical answers, like a dream but all too real. Blind terror of the unknown, the unthinkable... What? Why? How? What? Why? How? And when? When? The word triggered in what remained of his sane mind. 'Get a grip and think – when?' He thought of the previous night, going through every moment, did he miss something? Nothing happened, it was too quiet, uneventful. Nothing stuck out, apart from the battery on the stealth scanner giving out for a few seconds. But nothing happened, it was out for 3 or 4 seconds at the most, there was no gap in time, no activity, but it's the only moment he was left unguarded, and yet no nausea. He was very much awake, especially when that dam mosquito had bitten him whilst rebooting the scanner. Bloody insects, dam bloody countryside in the summertime. Every time he came out on a mission, no matter how much repellent he used, at least one would get him!

He laid on his back, and looked again at the strange sky that rose above him. To his left, the biggest of the three moons shone with an orange tinge, reflecting the alien sun in who's light he'd been walking. Was it bigger than our Moon, or just closer to this place than ours is to the Earth? The craters seemed larger, perhaps it was closer? Above his head, a Nebula of gas and new born stars scarred the upper sky. Not as colourful, as the super-imposed images he was used to seeing in NASA's photos, but still eerie and yet full of wonder. He studied it's shape for a while, as he would with a cloud on Earth, looking for familiar shapes. The left side seemed to curve away like a giant wing, as if it was flying above him, soaring into the heavens. He wished he could fly away from here, wherever this was. The night, like the day was quiet, the only sound apart from his breathing, was the breeze rustling the long grass. A summers day with no sight or sound of birds, and the night empty of insects and small scurrying mammals. Insects? So nothing to bite him unlike last night. Insects? The word dangling in front of his minds eye.

He crawled back to the tent, not sure of what he was about to discover. He was bitten behind the ear, but it didn't itch? Examination with a torch and mirror revealed a small round scar. The skin around

it looked pale, colourless, unblemished. He felt gently, but nothing, if anything his skin almost felt numb. It was raised like a spot or bite, but apart from the pinprick scar it was just pale. He ran his finger back to the summit and prodded harder. The sudden pain seared throughout his head and down his spine. The agony like a rapture gripping his body in a vice, crushing him. He head felt it was going to explode, his lungs like they've been squeezed of air as he slipped into unconsciousness.

He awoke laying in the tent holding his head, feeling like he's having the worst hangover in history. Dazed and nauseous, he lays trying to focus on the roof of the tent, willing his surroundings to stop spinning. He is going to be sick, it's as if his stomach is spinning with the room, 'please stop', he tries to close his eyes but he can't? He can't shut his eyes and at that moment his body convulses, vomiting, and he passes out again.

He awakes to the smell. It's a smell of sick unlike nothing he's ever known. It's like the smell of vomit and rotting fish. Then there's the taste and the sting of the bile in his throat, and his head which feels almost overinflated and which throbs with a numb throb. He clutches his head wanting to cry but he can't? Wanting to close his eyes and die, but he can't? But he can see, and what he can see looks sharper and wider? He pulled his hands away from his head, and then saw a new set of terrors, in his hands he saw hair, his hair. He reached back to his head and clutched at his hair once more, the hair falling away like strands of dust, and then there was his hands. His hands now pale, colourless and smooth. No lines, no hair, no veins, they also seemed thinner. He was dying, it was the radiation that was killing him surely. Presuming of course that any of this was real. He didn't exactly know what was happening but he'd been compromised, either abducted and left to die, or under alien hypnosis. He could see no other way out of this nightmare. He was compromised with no escape and no hope of survival, just this slow agonising death. His last resort was the cyanide pill, it was a choice he never wanted to make, but as soon as he came to the decision the pain in his head erupted, falling him to the floor. He clutched his head again and slowly the pain subsided, he sat up and reached for his backpack to find the pill, but again the pain came shooting through his skull. He lay on the floor staring at his backpack, and stretched out his arm, as soon as he did so the pain started. He pulled his arm back and the pain dulled. It was as if something in his head was stopping him. Again he laid on the floor gazing at the backpack, almost stunned, then with a sudden movement he lunged again, and again the pain returned. He screamed trying to fight the pain, desperately trying to reach inside for the medical kit containing the cyanide, but the pain was overwhelming, and as the pain intensives, his vision began to blur and before he could reach his goal he slipped back into unconsciousness.

When he re-awoke it was daytime again. He focused on his hands, his skin seeming paler still and then reaching to his head, where his flowing hair had once been, just the smoothest of skin remained. His body ached all over, it was as if every bone, every muscle and inch of flesh was being stretched. Indeed his arms seemed longer and his clothes felt loose. It was as if he was wasting away, his flesh and muscle being eroded by whatever was happening to him. Every movement he made was laboured, every exertion aching through his joints. He lay down again for a while, alone in the tent, alone wherever he was, with only his thoughts for company. He still had his mind, but it occurred to him, that it probably wouldn't be for too much longer, judging by his rate of deterioration. If these were to be his last moments, he had to fill them with hope, or at least a projection of his humanity, who he was. He still couldn't close his eyes, so instead he tried to let his mind drift, to let himself daydream of happier times. Alison, that was his happy thought. He thought about how they first met at a party, that awkward first kiss, summertime walks, making love in front of the fire. He felt the impulse to smile, there was a fleeting joy inside of him, yet it did not stir in the muscles on his face, but he kept thinking of her, determined that she would be his last thought when the time came. He was lost in his thoughts for what seemed some time, when an odd feeling in his lower torso distracted him. It was as if his intestines were being inflated. He didn't feel

bloated or anything like indigestion, he couldn't quite explain it and after a while it was gone. However it was replaced by a very familiar feeling, all too natural. He hated having to crap in the wild at the best of times, but there was no way he was going to die in a tent, laying in his own faeces. So crawling his way outside, he slipped down his trousers and answered his call of nature. It was all over too quickly and too easily, and with dread he turned around. Instead of where his excrement should be, he found a squashy white bag containing his waste. This wasn't any symptom of radiation he was aware of, so if he wasn't dying, what was happening to him? He removed the rest of his clothing, wherever he looked he saw the same pale grey smooth skin, and he had no genitals! In his mind, there registered a terrible sense of recognition, how could this be happening to him, he wasn't dying, he was mutating into a...

Stumbling to the edge of a pond, he hesitated in disbelief for he knew what he expected to see, and then in trepidation he looked at his reflection. What he saw was not his face, not the face of Robert Anderson or any human, for it was the face of a grey! The face of an alien, an evil alien, the image of one of the most malevolent creatures in the galaxy. Now he wished he was dying, he wished he was dead and as soon as he wished it, the pain returned, erupting in his head. He collapsed to the ground, his hands clutching at his skull. He screams but he can't cry, for he has no tear ducts. He screams but he can't close his eyes, for he has no eyelids, just two dark ovals as black as the heart of what he has become. He wants to die, and with every such thought the pain shoots through him. Each is a shot into his soul, killing his resistance, killing the last traces of his humanity. For now he has only his mind, but for how long? Despite the pain, he fights, but as he fights, so he gets weaker. It is all he can do to hold on before unconsciousness takes him again, all he can do is to think of Alison.

When he awakes it is night again. The strange sky unyielding in it's beauty, yet a reminder of how lost he is, how alone and helpless he is. Alone in this new strange skin, and naked before the universe. He gazes upon the sky and a million stars gaze back, a million other places he'd rather be, but where is the one where he should be? He wonders which one is his own Sun, if indeed any of them are? Where is this, why is he here? The sky of a million stars and a million questions, but no answers to shine down upon him. Too weak to move, he stares into the unknown, his mind wandering amongst the points of light. He begins to notice something unusual, in one part of the sky some of the stars seem to have vanished, as he watches more go out. The area of total darkness stretching wider and wider, he views the scene with growing unease, either something is eating the stars, or... something is approaching. Rigid in terror and racked with weakness, all he can do is stare at the dark shape falling from the sky and which seems to be heading for him. Then suddenly when it's eclipsed most of the night sky, it stops above him. Gripped with fear he stares up, knowing that all his questions are about to be answered, and he wishes for death and ignorance. The thought causes his head to hurt again, yet within seconds he feels a strange calm wash over him. It's an unexpected feeling which only adds to his questions. A ship is hovering above him, in the darkness it sits there, as if just content to study him. He can make out a low vibration buzz and the growing sensation of electricity, but there's something else. He doesn't know how, but he can sense someone, they are above him, they are watching him, it is as if he can feel their thoughts. He focuses back towards the dark shape, and feels it even more, as if being born to a new clarity. Then he hears in his head, strange sounds, no not just sounds, voices, he can hear voices yet the words he cannot fathom. Is he in their head, or they in his? Then suddenly one word he does know... 'Robert'. He recoils in surprise at the sound of his name and his mind goes quiet. For what seems like an age, and except for the vibration, there is silence. Then a new sound, a soft hum sounds from above and with it light breaks from within the ship. The light expands, and all around him new sounds emerge into the night. As the light from the door grows, he can make out more of the ship. It is round and sleek, and the new sounds are from four legs which reach down to the ground. The light from the doorway is shining down on him, and framed within is the silhouette of a figure. A ramp slides out from under the doorway and the figure walks down it – it's another grey. It crouches down next to him. It looks into his eyes, yet he is not scared, when he should be feeling terror, he only feels

calm? The creature tilts its head in a way that reminds him of somebody he used to know. It strokes his head and in his head he can hear its voice, a female voice, one that is familiar and who knows his name. It's Alison.

'Robert? Is it really you?' He can hear her, her voice echoing in his mind, clear and concise. 'Alison?' he replies in thought, though fearful this is some wicked alien trick, 'Where am I?' 'A long way from home, and no it's not a dream or a trick, this is me.' She gazed down at him, stroking his head. He gazed back full of fear and uncertainty, 'Where is this, how did I get here? How did you get here? Why?'. 'I will explain this all in good time, first we must get you away from here or I will lose you again. Can you stand?'. Robert tried but he was still weak. Alison beckoned to two other greys standing in the doorway, and together they helped him to his feet, 'We need to stop your pain and give you back control'. She produced a small cylindrical device and pressed it to the spot where he'd been bitten. The pain returned with a vengeance, but this time too, with a burning sensation. He could feel himself passing out, but then suddenly it was over. On the end of the cylinder was now a small green ball, it glowed with a strange luminescence. He stared at it, then back at the three greys standing before him, he was standing unsupported, he felt strong and was no longer aching 'Come, we need to leave before they come for you' said Alison, and he knew it was her, he wasn't sure how, but he knew. He followed them into the ship, and together they left this world behind.

Alison sat with Robert in the medical bay of the ship, there was so much to tell him. A war had been raging in the galaxy, for over 60 million years between the Reptilians and Mammalians. The Reptilians, genetically engineered the Greys as a means to take over and control, the mammalian sentient species throughout the galaxy. All Greys are cloned from Mammalians and there is no way to reverse the process. Around Ninety Thousand years ago, some of the Grey clones escaped after capture and have been fighting a war of resistance, against the Reptilians and their Greys ever since. Alison had been abducted and underwent the same metamorphosis. However, she had been rescued by the free Greys and became part of their resistance. Now he too has been rescued, before he is collected by the controlled Greys and becomes a slave of the Reptilians.

It took a while for Robert to take all this in, all he could think of was how he fitted into all of this, 'Why was I abducted and left on that planet?'. Alison pondered for a while, 'I'm not sure of either reason, maybe you were just in the wrong place at the wrong time? It could be, that your knowledge of the intelligence services would have been useful to them? As to why they left you to mutate on that planet, I'm not sure, maybe it was an experiment? Maybe it entertained them, they are malicious creatures. To be honest, I don't know for sure, I don't know why they took me, maybe I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, ripe to be harvested as a slave. Why were you in such a dangerous location?'. 'We had noticed an increase in Grey incursions' Robert replied, 'The agency sent us into the field to spy on them, to ascertain the threat level. Is there a reason for the increase?'

'Once upon a time' started Alison, 'many millions of years ago, our part of the galaxy was a stronghold of the Reptilians. The Mammalians drove them out and the region has been safe ever since. Now the Reptilians are stronger and the front line gets ever closer to home. The closer they get, the more interest they take in any nearby systems.' Robert only had one logical response, 'So do you think there is a risk of invasion?' Alison continued to relay to Robert what she knew, 'If the Reptilians drive out the Mammalians, then at some point probably, but it's a case of priorities. Currently the human race is of little importance, we are studied and experimented on, but nothing more. They focus most of their resources in battles with the more evolved Mammalians, Earth therefore, is not yet a priority.'

'So if we're not important, why study us?'

'Ever wondered where new diseases come from? Of course some are natural, others, are introduced to our ecosystem by the Reptilians and Greys. They see how we react, then judge how effective they are, before they use them as a weapon. Apart from that, Earth remains insignificant. We're primitive, and so no threat to them and of no strategic importance, however, if we advance further we may be. So for the moment, they ignore us and besides, with all the nuclear weapons we like to point at each other, we may save them the bother. That or global warming, which would make our climate more appealing.'

'So if we stayed primitive, are you trying to say that, we would be safe?'

'No. If they drive the Mammalians out, Mankind *will* be doomed. It's just a question of time - they want back all of which the Mammalians took from them.'

'But we're not part of this war Alison, we're primitive and not a threat. Surely there's hundreds of other planets they could have?'

'65 million years ago, Earth was a Reptilian colony before the Mammalians destroyed it. Eventually Robert, they *will* want it back.'

© Scott Coe, 2010