The Second World Chronicles

Sati Varg

THE SECOND WORLD CHRONICLES

SATI VARG

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Who I am is of little import. Of what happened to me, the same cannot fairly be said. On the afternoon of Sunday 23rd October 2016, I vanished from this world for a period of a little over three hours. Upon my return, I sported three months growth of beard, my clothing was dirty and damaged, and I possessed absolutely no memory of what had happened to me. This journal, and the accompanying photographs, were recovered from the devices I had with me.

The Author

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Of Photographs

- **6 Day 1:** A photographic device with an illuminated display, excellent, let's take a look at my face, see if it stirs any sense of recognition. No. Damn.
- **14 Day 8:** Hey, where's that camera? Let's see if I'm looking better. Ouch. Grey. Beard's grown a bit over the week, getting very grey and whiskery now.
- **23 Day 14:** My structure is a smallish... what? Industrial building? Storage? It most definitely hadn't been used for a while. Constructed from large grey blocks, probably pre-fabricated, broken and/or disconnected piping on the side, overgrown with ivy and other parasitic fauna.
- **26 Day 17:** But... hang on... I had walked another 200 metres while thinking, now suddenly there were what looked like human bootprints. Camera, record it.
- **28 Day 19:** No, it was not even a clearing, just a small pond, the water green with algae, the clearer parts reflecting the grey of the sky.
- **29 Day 19:** Barely a mile beyond, the whole place descended into a swamp, there was clearly no way through it.
- **32 Day 21:** Only then did I truly become aware of my surroundings and their absolute beauty. It was just so enchantingly green.
- **34 Day 23:** Now I find myself standing on the grassy bank of a river. No, not a river as such. It doesn't look natural, more like a dug out trench, maybe two metres across. The wreck of a car sits in it, rusted, much of it missing.
- **39 Day 26:** Jesus Christ, I have never been so fucking scared in my life. I am sitting back in my cellar now, still trembling from the experience, still really cold and wet from a night exposed. Look at me!
- **45 Day 26:** From the tree line, I could see smoke to the north-west. Whatever it was had grounded behind... I wasn't sure, were they trees or bushes?
- **96 Day 51:** The craft chose this moment to begin its descent, heading to my left, straight towards the landing site. It was quick, too fast to see clearly, behind the tree line above the grounding area before my eyes could register it with any real clarity. But the camera was a lot faster than my eye...

- **105 Day 53:** I emerged to find myself looking at the most beautiful full moon, smiling warmly down at me through a gap in the clouds. I had not seen it clearly since my awakening, I had forgotten just how compelling it was. A small break in the swirling clouds above allowed it to pierce through and cast its light upon the earth.
- 117/118 Day 57: As soon as I unfastened the tent opening, I knew. There was a kind of childish excitement, a throwback from years earlier, I could smell it in the air. I felt the cold come in through the opening, saw my breath turn to vapour as it took hold, it chilled my fingers as I removed my hands from the sleeping bag. I'm dreaming of... open the flaps wide... yes! Snow!
- **139 Day 65:** I was planning a photograph for posterity before I left, one of a dignified looking man, a man about to face his destiny. I end up with a picture of a sad old fuck wearing broken glasses.
- **201 Day 82:** The height of the damage stopped me in my tracks as I stood near to it, taller than she, most certainly. If she had been stood on the ground, the beam would have gone straight over her head, only if she had been standing on the thick exposed root directly under the blast damage would it have hit her.
- **207 Day 82:** Following those, I was confronted with a dark screen, containing only a small light, small yet bright, around two thirds of the way up the monitor, sixty percent across the screen from its left.
- **208 Day 82:** There, staring at me from the LCD monitor, was the masked face of that abhorrent creature, its cold reptilian eyes piercing through the white film over them.
- **218 Day 83:** I found a small round mark on my bicep, about the size of a fingertip, two puncture marks in it, like some kind of twin-point injection.
- **236 Day 87:** "Good," he continued, "oh, I have an idea, where's your camera? You keep it in your inbreast pocket, don't you? Hey, shall we get a souvenir for the folks back home?"

Day 1

They came this morning. The skies had darkened first, as would herald the arrival of a summer storm, though it was filled with strange throbbing rhythms, as would herald the arrival of a nightmare. I dared not look outside for fear of being observed myself. And I felt safe here, however illusory that sense may have been. "Here"; nothing more than the place I had found myself this morning. Sunrise. Something nagged in the back of my mind it is the word this should have started with. But it did not. And I did not yet understand why. I found myself in what I believed to be a small cellar, damp, dark, though I could see daylight at the side of the ill-fitting wooden door. "I"; that was another question. There was a backpack to my side, it seemed reasonable to assume that it was mine. Two tags atop it, when pulled in opposite directions, opened the zip to reveal the main pocket. There was bottled water inside, some food, possibly enough for 3-4 days. Why? Did I put it there? Did somebody else? And if there was somebody else, where were they now? Was I going to be here that long? Where exactly was here? And who exactly was I? Which brings me to now. There is also a small computing device in the backpack, a useful tool. It seems prudent to write down everything I can remember. Which is nothing. But I can write my thoughts, erratic as they seem at this moment. There is a smaller outside pocket, I can feel several small objects inside. A photographic device with an illuminated display, excellent, let's take a look at my face, see if it stirs any sense of recognition. No. Damn. I don't



think that is me. I thought I was younger. The man in the image must be in his fifties. Maybe it didn't actually take a picture, maybe that image was already on the camera. I'll take another. Just to be sure. Damn again. It's the same man, so it must be me. How can you look at your own face and not know it? Need to think. Yes, I need to think. Turn this off, conserve the power. Maybe later, things will become clearer.

Day 2

I remember it becoming dark last night. Utter silence. No wind, no rain, nothing moving, as if a frozen moment in time had been stretched to breaking point. But I knew they were out there. Maybe not traversing our world, maybe just observing their prize from a distant orbit, but they were there, I could sense them. My fear was palpable, my stomach felt empty, uneasy. Through the crack in the door, the sunrise came greeted by relief, but greeted impersonally from the relative safety of my refuge. I think I had slept for a few hours, uneasily, constantly waking, my heart pounding, my head filled with questions that my dreams were only too happy to provide unpleasant answers for. Where was everybody? I had heard nothing since regaining consciousness. Was I wrong to believe "they" had only arrived yesterday morning? Perhaps they had been here for days, perhaps their work was done, perhaps they had killed everyone already, perhaps I was alone? My eyes are growing accustomed to the dark in here now, the dim glow from the screen of this device further illuminating my immediate surround. There is bare brick, damp bare brick, small droplets of water running down across its surface. A wall to my left seems to have a powdery coating on it. I can make out pipework. That is cold and wet too. But it is outside I want to see, If not for the silence, I would venture out. Imagine a silence so quiet that it deafens your every sense. That is my silence. It is menacing. It is disconcerting. It is an enemy. So is fear. I cannot conquer silence, so the fear is where I must concentrate my efforts. Logic dictates that I cannot stay here indefinitely, I will die from dehydration before a week has passed. Though uncertain what I am, I feel confident our species can only survive a handful of days without water, I seem to know this at an instinctive level. The food aspect seems less important. I have not eaten since I have been aware of being here, yet I feel no hunger, only a sense of dread.

I must focus, I must construct what I may from what little I have, by way of a

thought experiment. Let me consider what I need to know;

- My identity a designation of some description will help assert my sense of self and lead to greater understanding of who I am.
- My genus understanding what I am and the culture that bore me will help to provide a tether to the reality I now find myself in.
- My location knowing where "here" is will aid my ability to assess available resources, thus increasing my chances of survival.
- My purpose understanding why I am here and the nature of my objective is clearly crucial to my being able to achieve it.
- My capabilities I must learn my strengths, my weaknesses, my skills, my powers, my moral centre, my limitations.
- My nemesis and I need to know who "they" are, what manner of beings they are, why they have come here.

I must return to the world of thought, it seems there is much work to be done.

Day 4

I think I must have slept all of yesterday, the aching tiredness finally overpowering me. My dreams were filled with the faces of strangers, though all felt familiar, as if I was being allowed a night-window into my real life, which every sense of my being told me was elsewhere. I was by a swimming pool, curiously shaped like a guitar, a view extending from a hillside, overlooking orange groves and homes of the obviously and ostentatiously wealthy. A woman sat beside me, pointing at a child in the pool and laughing. Then the child was a puppy splashing around in the water, barking frantically at something behind us. As I turned, the fridge door was open before me, letting an icy breeze through the entire kitchen. I sought cheese, but was faced down by a mouse, winking at me and wagging its finger. I closed the fridge door. It was daylight in the kitchen, but midnight by the time I had walked to the rear of the shop.

"Can I help..." began a youthful assistant, pausing quite suddenly, "who are you?" "That," I replied, "is the \$64 question."

I knelt and felt the grass, it was damp, the dampness of early morning, rather than rain. I had not felt rain. I could hear a horse breathing several metres behind me, a breath, the tearing of grass, the grinding of teeth, a breath. The sea was barely a

stone's throw from where I knelt. I stood, looking for some way I could find better elevation on the ship. The crow's nest, yes, surely I would be able to see it from there. Yes, I could see everything from my new vantage point, but had no recollection of how I got up here. I put my feet up on the coffee table, poured myself another chocolate milkshake from the jug, soulful jazz emanating from the walls behind me. I nodded my head in time to the music, smugly, I had been here before. And I would be here again. What was that damned noise? A dull drone, constant, irritating. I looked at the woman by my side. No, she was still laughing at the child, it wasn't her. I looked out of the windows. There was a man with a mower, inches from my front window, looking at me in defiance as I asked him what he was doing in my garden. Then my eyes opened and I saw I was still in the cold damp cellar, illuminated as the sun was falling from the sky, casting its last rays of light through the crack at the side of the old wooden door. The drone had been my own snoring, bleeding through into my dreams. But what if they heard? Fuck this

Day 6

I had to leave the confines of this illusion of safety. No, it wasn't courage, it wasn't some desperate need to explore my environment, though I'm certain that will come in time. It was just the desperate pressure of nature. Pissing in a bucket in the corner is one thing, evacuating your bowels the same way and living with the consequences is something else again. In all the days I have been here, I have heard absolutely nothing outside, nothing save the wind, the occasional downpour of rain. And the throbbing in the sky. Weather, weather, technology. Nothing resembling ordinary life. So I had crept out at nightfall. My heart had been racing uncomfortably as I had moved towards the cellar steps, eyes focused intently on the crack at the side, eerily lit by what little moonlight was out there. The door creaked as I pushed it. I froze. Stopped breathing. The silence was penetrating, even the slightest of noise seemed to echo, deafening, above all else, prominent against the dull throbbing, ever present but equally distant. I moved the door more slowly, minimalising its impact on the impossible quiet. It wasn't appearing any brighter as it opened, I was still inside a structure, too dark to make out the fine detail, too fearful to utilise the torch I had also found in the backpack. My stomach was beginning to hurt now. It's not that I had been eating much, determined as I was to make my meagre rations last, but you can't hold it in

forever. I could see what was here later. I would *have* to see what was here later. As my eyes grew more accustomed to the different level of light, I could see that I was not entirely enclosed; one corner of the room was missing completely, it was only the lack of visible stars that had made me take so long to realise it. I could see no door, the missing corner seemed the only way to leave the structure. Creeping stealthily to my exit, I slid feet along the floor, not wanting to kick anything and draw unnecessary attention to myself. My arms outstretched in front of me, unsure what each shadowy obstruction was. At the small opening, the blackness outside registered. There was a faint crescent moon up there somewhere, but mostly obscured by heavy cloud. Or them. The ground felt uneven as my first foot felt its way outside; rubble, overgrown with weeds, trees. Yes, they had to be trees, dense forest, commencing mere metres from the structure. I didn't want to go any further, I had no idea what was out there. Keeping my back to the wall, eyes focused as well as they could be on my immediate surround, I undid my belt, lowered my trousers and underpants with reluctant urgency. Shitting is a very simple and hasty process when you are terrified. Job done, tissue, dress restored, move back inside. Now it was extremely dark in there. I stopped for a minute or so, better to give my eyes time to adjust than risk noise. Fuck, I wish I knew what it was I was so scared of. Instinctive. It was in my gut. A deep sense of menace. People don't just become aware in a dark, damp and remote place, with no idea of when or where it is and who or what they are. It just doesn't happen. But it has happened to me and my logical mind tells me this is unlikely to be without purpose.

So here I am. Still cold. Still damp. Still bereft of knowledge. But at least minus the stomach ache. I know it's coming; the moment I have to venture outside, in daylight, recon, I need to know where I am in relation to... well, in relation to whatever is out there. And I need to get a look at them. I had heard them arrive, I had seen the sky darken, but nothing since, save for that background hum, reminiscent of an irritating electric meter I... hang on, that's a distinct memory. Yes, I remember an electric meter that had a kind of 'earth hum', it would gnaw away at you while you sat there. You had to go to the meter cupboard and push it slightly, then it would stop. Sometimes, as you closed the door, it would start again, before you'd even started to walk away. Other times, it would allow you to become seated again, feet up, comfortable, then it would start over. Am I dreaming this? Is that all the noise is? That fucking meter bleeding through into

this nightmare? That can't be right, there is no logical progression to dreams, whereas these last few days have been a constant chain of thought and 'events', no change. Everything stays the same, day after day after day. You can become aware you are dreaming, lucidity they call it, you can even take control of your dream to some extent, so long as you maintain that awareness and concentration. I am aware this is not a dream. But if it is simply reality, I should have much more control over it than this. Why do I feel I am trapped here? What exactly am I afraid of? And the fear is very real, not a neurotic fear, my foe is not my imagination, my foe is above me in the sky. In very large numbers.

Day 7

The last of my food has gone, maybe I can stretch the remaining water a day, day and a half. That perception of threat is no longer relevant. If I stay here, I die. Some things, they say, are worse than death, but some things are purely speculative, death is a dead cert. I've heard, maybe read, that dying from thirst is unpleasant in the extreme. The silence out there continues, I have heard nothing move since I have been here, just that ever present hum from them. For fuck's sake, are they just going to sit there and watch us? Us? Me? I haven't seen or heard anybody else. But all that for me? Unlikely. Must be something really big. Or very many. You can't darken a sky with a microlight. Another memory! I can visualise one; small, open, triangular wing configuration. I can recall standing on a vast beach watching them. There's someone with me, but she... yes, I'm sure it's a she... she is behind me, so I don't know who it is. I can hear her laughter though, it's a child. Wake up, man, who are you? What should I call myself? I need a designation of some sort. So... what sort of name do I think I should have? I am clearly intelligent, I seem to be alone, possibly the only being in existence on this world, so that makes me important, that almost makes me godlike! Should I be worried how good that thought made me feel? No, if I want to play the god, who is to stop me? Therefore, I need a name with some gravitas. Sati Varg! Hah! I like that, it's a name with ALL gravitas! Just backwards! I have a sense of humour too, clearly. So, Mr. Varg, are you ready to step from your Asgard into the world of mortals? Do you truly have a choice?

Daylight. Cloudy, overcast, but I will still stick out if I am the only thing moving down here. Think, man. There is some kind of structure outside that door, one

corner of it missing, open to the elements. If you keep your head down, you can use its standing parts for cover. The cellar door. Fuck. It opens outward. And there's a window. You would be visible. Be rational, man, you will only be visible if anything is watching. What could be watching? You think there are any number of snipers waiting for you out there? Why would they wait? You are one man, you are unarmed. If they intended you harm, they would have caused it by now. If they knew you were here. What if they are looking for you? Maybe that one movement is what they need, maybe that desperate foray for more food and water will give away a secure position. Maybe this cellar is the only damned thing keeping you alive. But it won't be doing that much longer. I believe you can go without food for several days, but not water. That's a death sentence. Biology 101: Every living thing needs water. Even if I am a god? Oh, how I wish that were not just bitter humour. So, Mr. Varg, what say we switch off this device and see what daylight reveals of the structure beyond the cellar door? Wish me luck...

Day 8

Well, that was an interesting way to 'celebrate' my first week in my 'new home'. I took the plunge this morning at first light. Still hadn't heard a solitary sound from out there, figured it was now or never. Naturally, I approached it with caution, careful not to make any avoidable noise, but I'm happy I couldn't have been seen. The structure was much more intact than I had imagined when experiencing it during darkness. Though not in the best of condition, there were no holes in the walls or roof, with the exception of the missing corner, no broken windows, floor mostly in place, the more dangerous gaps being by the far wall. That would be a place to avoid at night. It looked like it had once been a relatively small industrial building, maybe 10 metres long, 3 wide, my cellar being under the first couple of metres of that length. Old dust-covered units were inside, quite randomly arranged, looking more 'ransacked' than feng shui. Cut off cables hung from conduits along the top of the walls. No problem, the ceiling had to be 4 metres high, no danger of catching my head on one. And that assuming any power coursed through them in the first place. The floor was strewn with pieces of rubble, some ancient kitchen cutlery, dead grass, leaves that had presumably blown in through the missing corner. It must be Autumn. Fits with the temperature, length of daylight and level of dampness. Some cuts of wood are stacked unevenly in one corner. No doubt people were here once, but it seemed like it must have been a long time ago. It wasn't good light inside, the windows were filthy, but the sun had the good grace to rise over the missing corner, so at least the central section of the building had some extra illumination. Not too much, fortunately, I guess really bright light would have been quite unpleasant after a week in a small dark cellar. But enough to draw my attention to what appeared to be an old filing cabinet, gun metal grey, four drawers, a metre and a half tall. I pulled at the top drawer, Locked. Fuck. The subject card in the slot on the drawer front said simply "pocket", handwritten, likely in haste. The other three were empty. It wasn't worth trying to break it open, not with all the associated noise risk, not just for what was probably nothing more than a bunch of dusty old files. But why would it say "pocket"? What the fuck kind of filing system is that? My pocket? Is that what you're trying to tell me? It was no great stretch, I obviously didn't appear here by magic. Okay, I may have had a knock on the head, crawled here, then not known about it when I came round. But more likely, someone put me here. Yes, definitely most likely. But I'd checked all the pockets. Of course, you'll have guessed by my more upbeat tone today that something has changed for the better, and this was it. Sure, I had checked all the pockets I used, searching for any clue as to my identity. My nett find had been a handkerchief. Pristine, clean and ironed neatly. Did I do that? Until I remembered the small 'ticket pocket' in my jeans. A filing cabinet key would only be small, it could easily have been slipped in that pocket. By who, I could only guess. No, I couldn't, I had no idea, but I liked to delude myself that I was able to. And there it was, a small flat silver key, which unlocked the top drawer, which in turn unlocked the other three. And not a dusty file in sight. Canned foods, no problem to open them, I remembered seeing an old fashioned manual can opener amongst the cutlery on the floor. Some bags of nuts, not sure what type, labelling is unfamiliar, but I think all nuts are a good source of protein. Liquids in cans and bottles. Actually, I can't read a word on anything here. I'm obviously not illiterate, I can use this gwerty keyboard fine, looks like a completely different alphabet. Don't recognise any of it. But "pocket", I knew that, same letters that are on this keyboard. And why are my spirits high? Oh, well that would be one interesting bottle in the bottom drawer, it looked a little different to all the others, so I opened the screw top. Click. I seemed to be familiar with that sound, it had a nice comforting tone to it. And I drew a breath over the mouth of the bottle. Oh, that was good. And a few swigs later... well, here I am. A content stomach and a light head, best I've felt in a week. Hey, where's that camera? Let's see if I'm



looking better. Ouch. Grey. Beard's grown a bit over the week, getting *very* grey and whiskery now. I did a stoic look for my selfie, spoilt marginally by my squinting for the flash. I look kind of distinguished. If a little greasy-skinned. Still don't know who that image is of though. And no more clues on the camera; scan backwards and there are no pictures before the two I took a week ago. But I feel good. Somebody must have put me here. Somebody left me food and drink and a note that lead me to it. I'm not alone, I appear to have a guardian angel.

Day 10

What was in that bottle? I spent most of yesterday with a raging hangover, which, as you can imagine, seriously enhanced the experience of being stuck in a dark and damp cellar for the duration. It didn't taste quite like anything else I'd had before; ultra dark red in colour, flavour rather like a spiced bourbon, a chilli-like after-kick, maybe no more than two thirds the strength of whisky, but definitely strong enough to make emptying the bottle a bad idea. I suppose I went for the instant fix, rather than to think through long term gain. I suspect that's been a

problem most of my life. Whatever life that may have been. So I spent the day thinking, and leaning my forehead on the cold cellar wall, and thinking again. Yesterday; well, probably the headache won the day, but this morning I feel much better. In some ways. Yet, in another, the reality of my situation is really starting to kick in. I've not seen or heard another living soul in a week and a half, I haven't the faintest clue who I am, where this is or how I got here, and, worse than anything, when or if this will ever end. Today; well, I've made a decision to spend it in reflection, looking back to the questions I set myself a few days ago. I need answers. And I need to ask the obvious questions too; like how big a dickhead would I feel if half a kilometre up the way from here there turned out to be a bus stop? I don't know what's beyond the four walls of this structure, but that will definitely be next on the list. Why not first? Because I can't shake this ominous sense of doom. That and the fact the sky is still unnaturally darkened by their presence. I know they are there, I saw them arrive, I can still hear them, just hovering up there, motionless, watching. Ten days. Nothing. If they planned to attack, why would they have not done it? Perhaps they are launching a coordinated strike? Maybe I am only thinking of this in my own context. If I were leading an invasion force, I would position my ships, then have them all launch an attack at a pre-arranged time. I wouldn't leave too long, why allow the enemy unnecessary bonus-time to organise defensive plans, maybe even launch a counter attack? But maybe that is not how they do it. Maybe their idea of a countdown is longer than ours. Maybe we pose little or no threat to them however long they wait. Maybe their job is already done, it's not like I've seen anybody that would contradict that idea, just waiting till they feel like popping on down to claim their prize. Come on, damn it, there's a big empty world waiting for you, why come all this way to sit up there and watch? Or are you talking to someone down here already? Or is this your world and your fleet has just returned from invading somewhere else? Questions that lead to more questions, great. Be logical, be systematic, work through it as you would any other problem, be a machine. But machines don't have an aching back, machines don't keep getting cramp in their calf muscles, machines aren't weak. For fuck's sake, get a grip!

Day 11

So, I recall and observe the purpose of this journal. Never was it meant to be some aimless diary, rather a point of focus for my thoughts, set down in words to aid

my discovery of myself and my situation. I have decided on my name, I shall be Sati Varg. Now the second question on my list was of my genus. Two arms, two legs, intelligent, problem solving, self-indulgent, much instinctive ability, seem to have sensory information at my fingertips that does not directly correspond to my obvious organs. I feel only special in the sense of my individuality, most likely one of many. I do not feel out of place here. Yet, because of that extra sensory information, I do not believe I am of this world. But I do not believe I am one of those in the sky. Something, however, nags at me when I think that, as if trying to tell me I arrived here the same way. I do not have the power of flight, at least as I am aware of. Could there be a craft parked outside of this structure? Perhaps my co-pilot hid me here, left me food and drink, then went for help? Conjecture. Unhelpful. Perhaps whether I am stranger or native is not the relevant question. I am not with them, my enemy's enemy is my friend? No, I do not like that, it would make bedfellows of tyrants. But I sense those here are like me, and those in the sky are not. I cannot recall the name of our species, but I seem to be on a world upon which the gravity and atmosphere are well suited to me. Sati Varg, you do not belong, but you are welcome.

Question 3 - My location; where is 'here'? I have already stated everything I know; the gravity feels comfortable, the air is breathable, I appear to function well. I am clearly not somewhere alien to me, thus am either on my homeworld or one similar. In either event, I am likely a defender of it. But not a soldier, I have no weapons. Yet I suspect I would enjoy the act of killing? That thought leaves me uncomfortable. Wherever in the universe I found myself, I think I could safely say, "Forgive me, I am a stranger here." I am Sati Varg, I am a guest, 'here' is not where I belong.

Question 4 - My purpose; must I have one? What is a man without one? I have been placed here for a reason. Could I have been directly 'beamed' here from elsewhere? I have an image in my head of a technological form of transport, a matter reassembling device, but I am not certain it feels 'real', rather more a memory from a work of fiction. But it feels a powerful memory, something I am strongly connected with. Knowledge, that is the key here, I must stop these flights of conjectural fancy. Knowledge; somebody put me here, they left me sustenance, they left me a single word note so that I might know they had done so. Were I outside, those in the sky would have seen me. I would not have been left here

without memory if I needed to do something, so I believe my purpose must be to keep myself safe and wait for the cavalry to come charging over the hill. Sati Varg is a welcome guest where he does not belong and he has been hidden for his own safety.

Ouestion 5 - My capabilities; not exceptional. I do not feel especially fit, my breathing becomes wheezing at night. I appear to have excellent mental faculties, though concentration seems to be a problem, along with an inherent sense of negativity. What do I do? Hands, hands are a key. Mine seem soft, no calluses, they do not look as if they have done a day's hard labour in their lives. I seem to know about systems and organisation, I have a keen eye for detail. I am physically strong, but clearly not in the best of shape. The fear I feel here strikes as against my nature. It's as if some external force is suggesting fear to me, not as I would generally experience it by choice. I believe I would normally be a clear thinker, though I suspect I do not come from a race of them. What might I be? An administrator, a librarian, an artist, a sleeper? Insufficient information. But I could have said the same on each question, let me trust those instincts and go where my gut takes me. If I feel I do not belong wherever I may be, have a sense of the rest of 'my race' not being like me, think of myself as an outsider... sleeper, everything points to a sleeper. But what type? And did I know about it? I feel like an observer, one who watches from within, but who would benefit from my information? Dear God! Is it me? Am I in league with those in the sky? Did I bring this fate to the people of this world? No, no, I don't think I did. I remain unconvinced that I would shed tears were my world destroyed. Or do I? I even doubt my doubts. But I observe, coldly, I analyse, for whatever unknown purpose. And I stand apart. Sati Varg is a welcome guest where he does not belong, he has been hidden for his own safety, he will be watching.

Question 6 - My nemesis? "You are your own worst enemy, my young friend." I remember the words well. An old man spoke them to me, I can almost see his face, almost, but there is a fog in the way, one that bends light to remove the sense from such visions. He was a friend, that much I feel I can be sure of. But I can also be sure I am not my own nemesis here, at least no more than one of them. *They* are my nemesis. They whose arrival was heralded by thunder, darks skies and silence. Then that distant pulsating hum that never ceases for a second. They who have sat in the sky ever since I became aware, emanating pure menace. I

have not even seen them. Why? What act of cowardice is this, Mr. Varg? How can an observer, a watcher, not watch? How can I spy on our visitors from the safety of a cellar within a construct? Conjecture; they are legion because they are enough to fill the sky. And there my imagined knowledge ends. A week and a half of silence, nothing stirs day or night. I need to **SEE** what is out there, what fate hangs above this world. I feel that is what I am to do. Perhaps it is not you that are my nemesis, sky-dwellers, perhaps I am **YOUR** nemesis! Sati Varg is a welcome guest on this world to which he does not belong, he has been hidden for the purpose of watching you, he is your nemesis. And he is coming for you.

Day 12

Hi, how's your day been? Mine, oh, sure, sit down, make yourself a cup of tea, let me tell you about my day. It started like any other; awoke to silence in a small dark cellar, all sorts of muscular pains from sleeping in an awkward position on a cold and damp concrete floor. Blew my nose into one of my last packet of tissues. Hurt slightly. Became aware of a rather unpleasant spot right on the end of the aforementioned nose, the joys of not having seen a bar of soap in nearly a fortnight. What the hell, not like I have to worry about anybody seeing me in this state. Well, maybe if the camera is found years after my demise. Perhaps I shouldn't do any more selfies till it's gone. A fucking spot! At MY age! I'm rambling, I know. Fuck, my heart is pounding at the moment, small flickers of light are dancing in front of my eyes. Blood pressure, I'll bet. A guy of my age would probably be on something for blood pressure. No meds in the backpack. I obviously wasn't planning on being away more than 24 hours. Or figured I could get whatever I needed where I was going? I wish I bit my nails, it would help. I remember doing that as a child. Used to bite them down to the quick, often made them bleed. It would be uncomfortable, even painful, and then I would try even harder to get the smallest bit of tooth-leverage under any part of nail and keep biting. My mother would paint some kind of lacquer on my nails, tasted bitter, quite vile, didn't stop me though. Of all the things to remember. It's odd, I'm remembering much more from my childhood. I think it's the situation I find myself in. I've felt quite helpless and childlike, like a frightened infant hiding from the bogey man in a cupboard. Nervous. Fuck, I am SO nervous. Today, you see, today is the day. I've eaten well this morning, a tin of something I would take for soya protein in a savoury brown sauce. May have tasted better hot, but it was good anyway, and beggars can't be choosers. I wish I had more of that alcohol too, I could do with a stiff drink right about now. So, just thought I'd put something down on this record, just in case I don't get back. I probably have people I need to say goodbye to, there are probably people who I've wronged that I need to say sorry to, there are probably people who have wronged me that I need to forgive. I don't know who you are, any more than I know who I am. But to those who I need to say goodbye to, I'm sure I loved and/or cared deeply about you, I think I'm a kind-hearted soul amidst the cold outer walls. To those who I've wronged, I have the feeling it would never have been my intention to do so. Maybe this isn't necessary, I think I'm the kind of man who would have already tried whatever I could to put things right between us. But if I failed, if you didn't listen, if I failed to make a good case, know that in my heart I have regrets. To those that have wronged me, I think I probably do forgive you. So many things pale into insignificance when you are preparing to go and face a nemesis that fills the sky. When you may be the last person alive for kilometres around. Maybe even last person alive, period. How do I want to be remembered? As someone who tried. I doubt my life was error free, I don't feel the kind of inner peace I would imagine went with that. But as someone who tried hard to make themselves a better person, someone who tried hard to overcome whatever difficulties he may have caused, whatever difficulties may have been caused by others but that he handled badly himself, whatever difficulties life threw at him that those closest to him may have suffered as a result of. I believe everybody warrants a second chance, I hope I proved to have deserved my own. Mostly, I think I would like to be remembered as somebody who contributed something good to the world. I don't know what that is, but I feel like I have tried to do that. If I didn't succeed, perhaps you can at least remember me as someone filled with good intentions. Fuck yes, I had so many that I could have paved the road to Hell single-handedly. And remember me as someone who stepped up to the plate willingly when his time came. If I am alone, I may well be the only person who can put an end to this. Or it gets to put an end to me.

"Here lies a man with no name, from nowhere we know of, killed in the name of something he knew nothing about."

Power button... 'Shutdown'... destiny. Elvis has left the building.

Day 13

Drama Queen, I know. I think I was just trying to bolster myself for the inevitable. Going outside, not death. Okay, the latter is inevitable, but hopefully not yet. Going outside was a more immediate concern. Truth? Elvis got as far as looking out the missing corner that now passes for a door. Woods. Grey skies. Totally clouded over. Grim. I did take a step forward, but I swear the hum got louder as my foot was set to cross the threshold. It's the weirdest thing; I WANT to go out there, this is something I **NEED** to do. But I feel hesitant as I get to the door, I start providing myself with reasons for why now would not be the right time. Probably I should eat first. No, sleep first, that's what I should do. I know how much better I will feel when I've done it, but I can always think of a hundred reasons why I shouldn't do it now. It's like the meaning of dreams, it feels like it is symbolic of something in my real life, the one I cannot remember, save for a few odd shreds. There is something I desperately need to do, something I feel I have been putting off, for no good reason, for many a year now. I fully intended to go out there yesterday, no doubt in my mind at all. I had it all planned out in my head, I knew exactly what I was going to do. Then I convinced myself that they knew I was going to do it, I convinced myself their hum rose in volume as I approached the threshold, I convinced myself I should not do what I know I must and want to. How do you deal with something like that? Who is my nemesis? It seems to be myself at this moment in time. It's what I was saying about purpose; I am bothered by this deep-seated feeling that I am not fulfilling mine, that I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing. Maybe I'm dancing around it, making as if I am doing it, going through the motions, but not actually doing it. It's wrong, I can't dance, do you think I should? So, I am committing my plan to record; first thing tomorrow morning, I will piss in my bucket, eat something light, one of the cereal type bars I found in the filing cabinet, drink some fruit juice, meditate until focused. I will then leave the cellar, make my way cautiously across the floor of the structure, exit through the missing corner, then walk slowly around the building in a counter-clockwise direction. I will take the camera, record images of what I see, so that I may study it later. I shall look intently in each direction, ascertain in which of them I am most likely to reach civilisation, assuming there is some here to reach. If I am satisfied it is safe to do so, I will then conduct a more thorough search of the structure, check the darker corners for anything else useful. A map would be good. A map would be Godsend. There's not going to be a map,

is there? I saw cutlery on the floor, any tools would be useful, pens, pencils, paper, I could make my own map as I explore, make notes as I discover my new outside world. And I have to get a photo of **THEM**. God alone knows how many of them are up there, what nature of craft they have come in. But that arrival, the noise was chilling, a guttural bass-laden deceleration, the pitch dropping until it made my ribs vibrate, even down in that cellar, beneath walls and earth. And then that hum, constant alternating pitch, barely a quarter tone between each pulse, several discordant harmonics adding to a peculiarly low level cacophony. As much a contradiction as a nocturnal sun, but as much truth as you could imagine. It just goes on, as time without end. And that is all time seems to be in this domain, without end, senseless measure. I have a wristwatch. A plain black face, two golden arms, a solitaire diamond. It is my tether, I do not know why, but this watch connects me to the spirits of my ancestors, it connects me to the passing of time in the present, it shows me where the future will be, ahead of me, as moments in spacetime. And I will go there, as I have no choice. But which future will that be? I do not wish to get back to conjecture, especially not now, I wish to sleep after a long day of angst, yet I cannot help but wonder how my discoveries tomorrow will change my world. No excuses, no dramatic speeches, you know who you are, you know what I would say to you, end of. Tomorrow morning, let's see what's out there...

Day 14

Nothing. Nada. Zip. Fuck, I am absolutely nowhere. To hell with noise, there's no bastard here to hear it. I shouted. I shouted again. Nothing. I couldn't see them, the sky was dark grey and cloud-laden, not an inch of blue, or them, showing through. But I could hear them. Always. Yes, I did it, I took the step. The damned cellar door creaked. I got lucky, I found some lubricant. I have no idea what kind of oil it is, I can't read their language, whoever this other 'they' are. That's 'they-the ones who live here', as opposed to 'they-the ones that fill the sky'. Doesn't matter a fuck, it's stopped the door creaking. That nearly made me back off, that door. I was spooked enough as I put my hand out, who knows what may be looking through one of those windows. Okay, something tall, they were high. And something with x-ray vision, they need cleaning. I thought I saw a shadow flicker across one of the windows while doing my initial 'recon', peering through the crack at the side of the door. It made me more cautious. I pushed, it creaked.

Sharp intake of breath. No further sound. Nothing had heard me. As I pushed it open further, the luminosity increased sharply. I looked behind back into the cellar, now it looked seriously dark in there. Surprising how your eyes adapt when you spend so much time in it. Without the sun streaming in through the missing corner, the previously hidden dark zones came more into focus. More admin style units, mostly gun-metal grey, or some subtle shade of pale blue my eyes cannot quite detect in this poor light. Larger storage boxes in the opposite corner. Cobwebs everywhere, but not a spider in sight. I opened a few, see what else I could come up with; a set of jeweller's screwdrivers, a slightly damp large spiral-bound plain paper pad, an assortment of pens and pencils and various other items of fantasy wish fulfilment, the most welcomed of which was a sizeable crate of bottled water.

But outside beckons, it calls me, it mocks me. "Come out, you frightened fuck, come out and let me devour vou." Damn, I am sure this is NOT my nature. I swallowed hard and headed for the gap. Counter-clockwise, that was the plan. My structure is a smallish... what? Industrial building? Storage? It most definitely hadn't been used for a while. Constructed from large grey blocks, probably prefabricated, broken and/or disconnected piping on the side, overgrown with ivy and other parasitic fauna. No wonder the windows were hard to see through, there was some kind of semi-translucent plastic stuck onto them, partially obscuring the passage of light. They seemed to let a reasonable amount in to the building, but you couldn't see through them from the outside. I couldn't quite work out what had happened to the missing corner, be it accident or deliberate. It was by no means a clean cutaway, but it would have to have been the most orderly accidental damage in living history. Odd. The building was much the same all the way round. As, bizarrely, was the clearing around it, about 3 metres from the wall, continuous. But no path leading away anywhere, or any sign there had ever been one, no reasonable candidate that was now overgrown, it honestly didn't look as if a path had ever lead here. So how did they build it? From the sky? I had looked up towards the ominous hum as I had thought that. No, this building was very human. Maybe, if I looked a little harder, there would be an exit path somewhere. It was such a huge disappointment, I had seriously expected to find something. Anything. Not just 'disconnected derelict building'. Whoever had hidden me here had done a pretty reasonable job, I'd rather doubt there's much to see from above either. So, Mr. Varg, this is your world; 30 square metres of industrial building



with small cellar, 3 metres of clear land all round, woods. As much as I would like to convince myself otherwise; you know, rationale along the lines of "Somebody put me here, they will come back for me." Yeah, as much as I would, it's pretty fucking quiet out there. What if they were dead or incapacitated? What if they were waiting for me to rescue them? What if they had no fucking idea that I had no memory? If I stay here, I see no end, save death, and it doesn't look like that is going to happen any time soon. But the food and water I have, as surprisingly ample a supply it is, will not last eternally. I have a backpack, I have good boots, I have a compass, I have paper, pens and a camera. I need to become an explorer, as well as a sleeper spy who has lost all sense of mission and purpose. I need to reinvent myself, because I am so tired of being the timid shell-dweller that hides away nervously in dark damp corners. It's not me, I know it's not. Look at me, I'm not exactly a little guy, I'm certainly not weak. If somebody wants to mess with me, I feel like I could do them not inconsiderable harm. Ah, the light is starting to fade outside, I need to turn this thing off, spend my evening thinking up a plan to explore beyond. Get a good night's sleep, be ready for it, get angry. If? Oh, somebody **IS** messing with you, and I think you've had enough.

Day 15

Counter-clockwise, starting with the way the compass points, north. But something wasn't quite right here. A compass can't be wrong, can it? They either work or they don't. This works, no argument. However, when I'm standing looking at the missing corner, exactly where the sun rose a couple of hours ago, it is clearly indicating north to my right. Now, my brain may still be a bit scrambled. but I remember the basics, and I happen to know the sun rises in the east, and if I'm looking at it, north will be on my left. That, of course, could be planetary bias. So I am a member of a space-faring civilisation? That doesn't sound right. I'm not dressed in a silver suit, I don't have a ray gun. To be honest, I'm not sure I can distinguish real memories from those of dreams at the moment. I think I felt more together in my head a week ago. But I am meditating now, a good hour this morning. It feels right, I think it is something I would do normally. God help me, I'm probably an old hippy. Okay, we'll go with the compass, it's more likely to be right than I am. Maybe this idea the sun rises in the east is something I picked up from a fantasy book or a television programme, maybe it really does rise in the west and it always has. So, out through the opening, turn left, facing south. Shit, that really doesn't sit well, feels instinctively wrong. But like I said, compass, more likely and all that. I did plan to start my sweep north and go counterclockwise, but that would mean turning right out of the opening on the first morning, then changing that path and turning left the final two days, having walked straight from the building on the second day of the four. For some reason, I am uncomfortable with that. I feel I should only change direction when it becomes necessary, which it is not, it would be wrong to do it sooner. So, here we go, exploration one, the north, I will then follow in a clockwise sequence over the coming days. According to my watch, the sun has been rising about a quarter past seven, setting around half past four. It's pitch black out there at nights, I need to make sure I'm back here by dark. Before. Yes, before would be better. I have half past nine now, seven hours of daylight, so I'm not to pass 12:30 outbound. Time to swap to pens and paper now, tuck this lifeline away safely, God alone knows what is waiting for me out there. At least the sky is thick with cloud again. They won't see me. Film at eleven...

Day 17

All Hail To The Spirits Of The North...

Where lies there forest, with such mud underfoot as to make each step an arduous journey in its own right. Various greys formed the base of colour, desaturated by the dense cloud in the skies above, the only green of note being moss on bark, the leaves long gone. Autumn, as I had expected. Leaving the opening in The Base... ah, I need to explain; as I am to be explorer and adventurer, I thought my partially derelict sanctuary needed a little re-branding, thus it is now The Base, home of Sati Varg, intrepid... well, whatever I turn out to be with my soft and unworked hands. So, on leaving The Base through the opening, which again sounds an improvement on 'the missing corner', and such small things matter enormously when one has so little else to cling on to, I turned to my right, where in this strange reality, north lies to that side of the rising sun. I walked to the intact north corner, leant so the point of the building dug into my backpack and I stood at 135 degrees to either adjacent wall. The woods all around The Base had looked identical, nowhere was there any obvious entry point. The forest was not extremely dense, there was plenty of room between the trees to continue forward, my compass assuring I remained in that solitary direction. With no apparent pathways, I fear I would otherwise have gone around in circles.

It was fairly hard going, heavy wet soil, raised tree roots, I surmised that my progress would be little more than 25 minutes to a mile walked, and when it came to walking, it seemed I felt more comfortable with miles than kilometres. At my first mile marker, I stopped to take notes. I sat myself on a fallen trunk, stopping to check for insects, not knowing what infernal bites the indigenous creatures may bestow upon me. There were none. It occurred to me, not for the first time, that I had seen no life whatsoever since I had been here, save vegetation. If not for the cobwebs I frequently encounter in The Base, I would doubt that anything had lived here in the last decade or more. But it is not a dead world, it does not appear poisoned, and the skies seemed normally bright before they came. No landmarks, no high ground, just continuing woods. A further mile, possibly a little beyond, I had noticed the ground getting heavier. Again, I sat, nothing more to note than "two miles, nothing changes". A third mile and my progress was slowing notably, so much so that I could no longer be sure of the distance I was covering. The

forest floor grew gradually wetter with each passing furlong, heavy mud by the fourth or fifth mile. And as far ahead as I could see in any direction, things remain the same. Three hours out, and I would be a fool not to turn around at this point, I did not want to be caught in a domain like this come nightfall. Because I have seen nothing breathe here during the daylight, that does not mean it will not become alive with nocturnal predators later. Of course it does, don't be an old woman. Do you ever hear anything sniffing around The Base? No. Would anything stop them coming in? No. Tracks? No. But... hang on... I had walked another 200 metres while thinking, now suddenly there were what looked like human bootprints. Camera, record it. I measured them comparatively, albeit crudely, just using a broken piece of thin branch. They were not all the same, none matched the length of my own rather large imprints. There has been rain since my arrival here, surely these prints would not have survived all of that, does that mean someone has walked here recently? Another 200 metres offered no further insight. And another. I needed to turn around now, I could not justify continuing. Perhaps if there had been one clear set of prints leading in a particular direction, but there was not



Despondently, I turned for home, or the God-forsaken derelict that had become my home of late. The ground felt heavier going on the return, though thankfully the journey not so long. But when a man is so alone, he cannot help but wonder. Is there somebody out there who is missing my company? Have they engaged people to search for me? I keep dreaming of a child, a young girl, I am not a very good judge of ages, could she be mine? No, unlikely, she is definitely pre-school age, and look at you, old man, a grandchild perhaps? I could have spent most of my life with one special person, how would I know? Would they be missing me? Or would they be raising a glass to my welcomed absence? I felt low, I had to be honest, if only with myself, then who else was there? I decided that tomorrow I would rest, write up this day's lack of discoveries, as I am doing now, spend some time constructing a map of my known world, things like that. And meditating, it seemed to help. Then, strength restored in body and mind, I shall continue my clockwise journey. My next venture shall be to the east. Somewhere out there lies answers to this mystery, I shall not rest until I find them, for I fear my rest may be of a permanent nature should I do so.

Day 19

All Hail To The Spirits Of The East...

Stepping from the opening, I had turned to my right. Once again at the northern corner, then coming to rest at the eastern one. I stood with my back to the point, each adjacent wall at 135 degrees to me. I ventured forth. Again, no path into the woods, though they were no less accessible here than at any other face. For the first couple of miles, I may as well have been travelling north once more. As I walked further, and that had been my plan, leaving much closer to sunrise on this occasion, again the ground became wetter, the going heavier. Two hours of walking, pausing only briefly to note the unremarkable sameness of my surrounds, I came to a small stream. I crouched and looked into the waters. Brown and murky, no scent of stagnation, but equally no sign of life. If you cannot find life where sits water, what hope is there? Still, the closest I have come to it was the mysterious footprints in the north woods two days earlier. I am not delusional, I am no tracker, I have no idea how old those tracks were. On the... I suppose it must have been about the fifth mile, larger puddles began to appear. I resisted some childish urge to jump up and down in them, even though I was wearing my

boots. The stream grew wider, joined by another to my left. Whereas to the north the trees had been bare, in this direction, merely a few miles away, they were greener, more with leaf. The strangeness of this place set me ill at ease. At one point, I became convinced I had heard something above the background hum. Oh yes, they were still a feature of my everyday existence, hanging in the ether, wearing the dark grey cloud as a mask. Auditory hallucination, I believe, like the noises you hear in the night, never sure whether they were part of a dream or some abomination is present in your home. There seemed to be a clearing ahead, a small one, but a clearing nonetheless. I hastened my footfall, keen to explore the first real space I had seen away from The Base. I should have planted a flag in the sodden ground and claimed it for myself. But what joy in that when one is unchallenged? No, it was not even a clearing, just a small pond, the water green with algae, the clearer parts reflecting the grey of the sky. It was still the first significant piece of sky I had seen in quite some time. For the briefest of moments, I thought I could see the outline of a craft through a thinner section of cloud. Whether or not I was just seeing what I expected to, I do not know, I did not see it again. I circumnavigated the pond, difficult due to the amount of growth





around it, rather than its small size. A check with my compass and forward once more, a check on my watch also, I should not exceed four hours outbound, the daylight is not so long. Another ninety minutes and I must turn. But it would not be that long. Barely a mile beyond, the whole place descended into a swamp, there was clearly no way through it. Repeating the despondency of my last trip, I turned and began the walk home. I find I am talking to myself a lot now. Thinking about it, I have probably been doing it ever since my arrival. It's just as well, there's nothing else to listen to. I miss music. Not even birdsong here to serenade the murky sunrise. Just that infernal hum. It's even piercing the cellar now. I would likely feel comfortable sitting up in the main section of The Base now, do my typing there, but for that damned noise. It's like when your own snoring bleeds through into your dreams, not loud enough to awaken you, but sufficient to get your attention, so your dream-self is busied looking around its ever-changing environment, desperately seeking its source. If this is a dream, please may I wake now? It isn't, of course. Dreams have a certain 'feel' to them. This existence has a consistent stream of logical development. Agreed, there are things here that do not make sense; the sun rising in the wrong direction, a constant presence in the sky

that never grows into more than that, and the strange building with no pathways to or from it. Given time, I could undoubtedly think of more, but I feel drained. Two arduous walks in three days have left me exhausted, I was clearly no explorer in my before-life. Be optimistic, Sati Varg, as unnatural as this may feel, there are still two more vectors to be followed. One, surely, must lead to answers, for I grow weary of questions.

Day 21

All Hail To The Spirits Of The South...

Stepping from the opening, I had turned to my right. Once again at the northern corner, once further at the eastern one, then coming to rest at the southernmost tip. I could simply have turned to my left and stopped at the first corner, I would have been in the same place, I do understand that. However, the destination was a mere secondary concern to the journey. Perhaps you would not comprehend such things, I am sure it is of little import to anyone but myself. I stood with my back to the point, each adjacent wall at 135 degrees to me. I ventured forth. It disturbed me that the woods looked much the same from whichever direction you entered them. For the first two to three miles, they do not change at all, this southern exploration varied not from the mould. Was it just me or were the skies becoming ever so slightly clearer? Yes, I believe they are. They, those that are up there, are more visible. Still only as ghosts in the atmosphere, but nobody would doubt their presence now. As if the infernal noise was not enough. The constant drone, something mechanical, too faint to identify fully, too quiet to ignore. It was becoming wetter underfoot again, but noticeably less mud. I don't know what you call this, small pieces of rock, like slate, shale, I am not certain, I do not have the words. I seem familiar with it though. I followed a stream, heading almost due south, the compass pointing comfortingly right into my face every time I paused to check. Two and a half hours in, I realise I have been following a path, running along the east bank of the stream. I do not believe it to be man-made, but it has clearly been formed and maintained by foot traffic. How recently is another matter. We cannot be talking months or years, it would be overgrown. All evidence continues to point to whatever cataclysm has occurred here happening only a matter of weeks earlier.

I know I have been here at least three weeks now. How long I was here before I attained consciousness, that is particularly hard to say. I awoke with a hunger and a thirst, that much I do know. I still remember that morning, my birth, as it were. As my eyes had opened, I could see nothing save a slit of light. I felt strange, disorientated, slightly nauseous. I think I must have sat there in a stupor for an hour or more. I reached for nothing, instinctively I knew nothing, the sum total experience of my life appeared to be nothing. Gradually, basic knowledge began to return. I realised that my eyes were growing accustomed to the poor light, I recognised brickwork around me, a concrete floor. I began to understand that I was cold and wet. I felt around me, aided by my adapting night vision. I got to my knees, I wasn't sure there was room to stand up, I understood I had height, a body, that I did not only exist where I experienced myself. That's when the process was temporarily disrupted by their arrival. That's when I had first heard that sound, at first a distant hiss, then a distinctive hum, then a burst like thunder, before sinking once more to the consistent hum that his filled the air ever since. I had seen the dark shadow pass down the crack at the side of the door. The light has never been so bright as my first hours again. The rest you know.

Lost in thought, I had nearly missed that it was time to turn around. Only then did I truly become aware of my surroundings and their absolute beauty. It was just so enchantingly green. It was as if Autumn had not travelled south here at all. Even the water reflected the green of the trees, most covered in moss. The woodland floor exuded green. I gasped. An emotional reaction, deeply so. Never since I arrived here have I felt so much at peace. I will come here again, I shall name this as The Green Glade on my map. A part of me wants to mark it as The Enchanted Glade and write "there be faeries" next to it. Oh, please, dear God, don't tell me I am the kind of fool taken to whimsy. No, is it any doubt my head drifts after three weeks in this... place. So, my map builds; I have The Base in the middle, the Northern Forest, The Eastern Swamps, The Green Glade to the south. Thus far, everywhere is wet. I knelt by the side of the stream, the water clear as crystal, the smell only of fresh air. I had tasted it, like that from a bottle, clean, pure. I drank a cupful or more. If my stomach remains in good working condition for the next day, I will have found a replacement source of water should I run out. But food nowhere, save from the 'stash' I have been provided with by my clandestine benefactor. The walk back saw me in quite the best mood I had experienced to date, an unnatural sense of joy. I use the word 'unnatural' as I cannot shake the feeling that happiness and I are strange bedfellows. I don't know exactly what makes me think that, it is just a feeling, but I have nothing more to go on than those.



The Green Glade

I'm actually sat upstairs in the main structure today, typing this in the last minutes of daylight, a broad smile on my face and a renewed sense of optimism. Odd. It is not as if anything has truly changed. I am still trapped here. I am still alone. I still have no idea where I am. I still know myself as a man with the assumed name of Sati Varg. That's helped though, just having something to call myself, something to refer to myself by when in deep conversation with myself, it has begun to give me a *sense* of self. Slowly, I am starting to come to know myself. An uncomfortable experience, I must be honest, but we are what we are, even if we know not what that may be. Perhaps I need a name for here too? I don't even know the name of the place I spent my first life, let alone this second one. My first world is purely myth. My second is at least tangible, if somewhat limited. Second World... yes, I like that. My name is Sati Varg, I hail from the Second World, and you?

Day 23

All Hail To The Spirits Of The West And The Rising Sun...

Oh, what I would give for a refrigerated beer. To feel the coldness of the glass on my fingers and in my palm as I lift it, to feel its expectant chilling touch on my lower lip, letting the amber fluid run around my tongue to extract every essence of flavour from it. Sadly, everything here is served "at room temperature". And, in any event, I have not seen a can or bottle of beer since I have been here. Perhaps I have finally died and gone to Hell! Hah! No, I am not an evil man. Misunderstood. Yes, I think that is probably me. Misunderstood. But I digress, to the matter at hand; yesterday, and the final of my four vectored routes of exploration.

Stepping from the opening, I made no turn at all, merely facing the risen sun in the direction my compass assured me is west. Something that still troubles me, still feels instinctively wrong. But the happiness factor is still upon me, I feel good about my life here on the Second World. Yesterday, I found the second sign, the first being this building. The Base, that a civilisation has, or does, exist here. The terrain to the west seems to grow more dry with each mile, completely unlike the other three directions, as if the rising sun takes the moisture from the soil each morning. I covered four outward miles in little over and hour and a half, without exerting myself to any great extent. Soon after this, I could see the woods ahead growing visibly lighter, as light as this ever grey sky would allow. I hastened my footfall, anxious to finally come upon significant space. My world here has always seemed uncomfortably claustrophobic; a small cellar, a confined structure to house it, sparse clearance around said structure, then thick woodland for some miles. The biggest 'clearing' I have found to date was the green pond in the Eastern Swamps, not exactly ideal for a picnic, unless I can find a floating blanket. Finally, my luck would be in, not just a clearing, an actual end to the woods.

There was no thinning out as I came to the edge, quite a defined finish, as if deliberately planted or managed. Beyond that, just grassland. It looked as if it had once been managed, but not for some time. Not long and overgrown, just patchy and differing lengths and types of grass. Not exactly the perfect bowling lawn. No

structures, no signage, no waste bins, nothing that would indicate human or other habitation. Flat. Behind me the woodlands, again relatively neglected by the northern Autumn, not in as straight a line as I had thought, that becomes more apparent as you walk away from it, more a slow and gentle curve, continuing all the way to my horizon in both directions. In front, open grassland. There looks to be a raised bank in front of me. I wish I were a better judge of distance, I have no idea how far that is. Do I have time to walk to it and see what is there? I can't have come this far for nothing, how pointless would that be? The first sign of clear space and I turn around and walk home without checking it out? I think not. As it turned out, the journey took merely another half an hour. To start with, it seemed no closer regardless of how many steps I took. Then, quite suddenly, it crept up on me. Now I find myself standing on the grassy bank of a river. No, not a river as such. It doesn't look natural, more like a dug out trench, maybe two metres across. The wreck of a car sits in it, rusted, much of it missing. Possibly white at some point, there is only paintwork on some of its lower portions, the rest the rich russet victim of oxidisation. It appeared that someone had marked it some years ago, part of a blue circle remaining, crudely drawn, on the rear nearside. Probably I could jump the water and get a closer look in it. However, if I should



fall short, I have a long walk home with wet boots and jeans, and the latter are not renowned for holding in heat when they are wet. From my side, I could just make out some rusted metallic lettering to the far side of the boot, an 'R', an 'O' and an 'N'. Well, Ron, I think it a little late for your last rites, but I wish you good passage to the automotive beyond.

Annoyingly, I cannot see over the grass bank the other side of the waterway. Whatever is over there is clearly no higher than the bank itself, or I would see something of note above its skyline. No hidden citadel then. And anyway, would noise not accompany that? Silence prevails. Stillness prevails. If anything moves around here, it seems to be the result of the wind and nothing else. Picnic. The word had been in my head since I had thought of it earlier. Why not? Okay, I didn't have a blanket, but the grass was dry. I didn't have to worry about ants. Or any form of living creature, it would seem. Just they. And if they were looking at me, they certainly did not let on in any way. Hum. Almost a perfect B flat, the most prominent part of the sound, two octaves below concert. That immediately had struck me as a curious observation. I realise now that I had always known the pitch, but in such a 'matter of fact' manner that I had barely given it a second thought. So I am a musician perhaps, a composer? Maybe I write great orchestral works? Maybe my First World life is as a noted composer of great orchestral works, fêted by the great and the good, burdened with flowers and riches. Ah, reign in your disgust, you cannot see the huge smile upon my face as I sit in The Base typing these words. Clearly, I am a musician and/or composer with a sense of humour, but my clothes do not smack of success. The boots don't look cheap, but my coat seam was already coming apart under the left arm the day I became aware. If I do have many riches, I must hide them under my bed. What I would give for a comfortable bed now. What I would give for someone to complain to about not having one. A new plan, I know not what, but I fully intend to sleep on it. Sleep tight, don't let the bed-bugs bite. Bed bugs? Fat chance. It would actually represent a moment of deep joy to awake and find some unpleasant parasite fortifying itself with my blood. I had never realised just how special life is, how completely empty a world seems without it. I often wonder how life came about, but now I wonder how it could not? There seemed to be a certain inevitability about it. Could you truly imagine the vastness of the universe devoid of life? Why, surely life is the whole purpose of the exercise, for what point to any of this would there be without it?

Day 24

Spending far more time on the surface now, I actually feel quite comfortable outside the cellar, in spite of being fully aware that they are still up there. I was worried they would be scanning the planet, searching for lifeforms, but I think I confuse reality with science fiction. That there are aliens could hardly be considered within the realms of cinematic fantasia, there must be endless billions of inhabited worlds in this near infinite vastness. But that they should have magical machinery that can see... satellites, fuck, I hadn't thought of that. They say you can almost make out a face in a satellite photo. Who does? Where am I getting all this from? All this 'stuff' keeps coming into my head, bleed from my life on the First World? Maybe my memory will ultimately come back in its entirety. I so wish I knew where it had gone in the first place. I seem to know a lot of "what it is and how it works" stuff, but none of the specifics of my personal existence; where I lived, what I did, who I shared my successes with, who held my hand after a failure. But my Second World, it's honestly starting to feel like home, which is somewhat disconcerting, in spite of the sense of ease I now find myself at.

I think my four 'expeditions' have helped. I have a sense of what is around me now. Nothing much, but at least I know it's there. In terms of a plan; well, west showed the most promise for further exploration, the Green Glade showed the most promise in terms of leisure. Not that I can sit on my arse all day contemplating the nature of existence. But there's only so much a man can do. I've began to dig myself a latrine in the woods, fed up with stepping in my own shit when walking around the building, and I need the exercise. I found a shovel in The Base, a bit rusted, but does the job. I found a box with half a dozen buckets in too, they're collecting water when it rains, at least I can have a wash now, I'd have been ripe enough to pick before long otherwise. Who knows when I'll meet the girl of my dreams out in the woods, then think of the heartbreak when she cries out; "Why, Mr. Varg, you done smell worse than my daddy's pigs!" That would hurt, and it's not like I can drown my sorrows in the saloon. Standards, one must have standards. One would rather like to have a change of clothes too, but beggars and choosers, huh? One change of underwear in the backpack, socks and briefs, that was it. Not the most conducive climate to getting them dry, but God knows, what I'm wearing needs a wash. Though maybe not today. Till sun up...

Plan B is to explore the diagonals. As the woods cleared in a westerly direction and northwards is the only place I have seen footprints, north-west will be first on the list. I should end up more than three miles away from anywhere I've been before, there must be something out there. Somewhere. A man-made track, a building, cultivated land, an orchard, anything. It doesn't feel like the time of year you'd find blackberries on brambles and apples on trees, but I'm more interested in evidence of inhabitation than finding fresh food, I'm fine with the stashed supplies my 'benefactor' has left me. Has he left me? I suppose I'm still alive by his grace. Te absolvo. Of course, if my tin-opener breaks, I'm in deeper shit than walking along the south-west wall! Ah, it's nice to be able to come to the end of the world and still find something to laugh about. "Take my wife!" Oh, now there's a thought. I wonder if I'm married? I seem to feel quite happy with my own company, bit of a loner, probably not then. Plus, if I'm honest, I annoy the fuck out of myself some days, so who the fuck would put up with me? Perfect world; no people. Not sure I could take this forever though. Not that forever will be especially long if I can't find another source of food eventually, don't think I'll make it to the spring. Not that I know precisely how far off that will be here. You know, there are times I hear people speak. It's in my head, of course, but you wonder if it is something coming from memory, or just imagination. The voices sound so real. They're not telling me to dance naked round trees and drink my own piss or anything like that, but they sound real enough to make me do a double take on occasions. Ah, who knows? Maybe I will dance naked round a tree tonight, forget the piss bit though. Actually, that sky looks darker than usual, looks thunderstorm dark, maybe forget the naked dancing too. Yeah, I'll just sit in tonight, order a pizza, watch a movie, bottle of wine. No signal on my mobile? Looks like something out of a tin, can of juice and stare at the sky then. Fuck, what better way to remind myself they're still up there.

Yeah, now there's a question too; why has my mobile still got power? I can't believe it would last three and a half weeks without a charge, but there it is, battery still showing as full. Same on this device, I thought these things were timed in hours rather than weeks, but same as, battery showing as fully charged. Camera too, all three bars still there. Okay, I've not exactly taken a thousand photos, probably a couple of dozen tops. Maybe it doesn't use much power if you don't sit and keep looking through them. I haven't done that much because I didn't want the battery to drain, then I'd have nothing left to keep any kind of

physical record of this experience. Hadn't stopped to think about the thing I'm typing this on, not even 90%, still says 100%, like it's charging itself from the air. Weird. Okay, so let's take a look at these photos then. Small screen, but something may stir a thought, an idea. A forest edge, grass bank, wrecked and rusted car in a waterway. Oh joy. Back we go. Oh, that lovely Green Glade, almost expect to see little people in the picture if you look hard enough. Same again, and again, and again, think I liked it there. That pond with all the green shit on it, swamps, more swamps, and some more. Woods, woods, mud, mud, prints, woods and mud. The Base, south west wall, my ugly mug, squinting in the camera flash, looking like I could use a shave, all grey and whiskery. Fuck, feels like I have a beard, must look like Santa or something by now. Stay away from selfies till you find some razors, huh? That's it, black screen. No, hang on, that's **not** a completely black screen, there are a couple of lights there. It's a photo, it has to be, just hard to make out on the camera's small monitor screen. Looks like car headlights or something. Mind you, if that's a tree, it would have to be a flying car, so maybe not. Like I said, no silver suit and ray gun. The light's getting a bit poor now, can't see the poxy little buttons on this thing, not even with my glasses on. Maybe there's a magnifier function somewhere, will have a better look when the sun's up, then off on another adventure. "Five Go Mad At Armageddon Time"! Hah! Dinner, methinks, bon appétit...

Day 26



Jesus Christ, I have never been so fucking scared in my life. I am sitting back in my cellar now, still trembling from the experience, still really cold and wet from a night exposed. Look at me! Fuck, fuck, fuck. I need to get all this down while it's all still fresh in mind. If I don't make it out of here, at least somebody may one day know what had happened to me. I had started out yesterday morning with some degree of optimism. With my back to the centre of The Base's north-west wall, I had strode out, stepping over a small ditch, filled with rotting tree remnants, browned and sodden leaves and the obligatory moss. I had made good pace, no notes to make this time, this was a longer recon mission. The first couple of miles were of the standard woodland terrain I had come to expect from the surroundings of The Base, though I quickly became aware it was far muddier to my right than my left. As with due west, I was only a couple of hours out when I could see the wood's edge a few hundred metres in front of me. If my map scales, timing and distance were all accurate, I should be around four and a half miles

from home as I exit them, about 3.3 miles from each of my first and fourth explorations. So far, so good. It wasn't going to last.

As I had neared the woodland edge, I had heard a cracking and rustling sound, reminiscent of a fallen branch cracking underfoot amidst fallen leaves. Instinctively, I had dropped to the floor, rolled behind some foliage and tried to look through in the direction I thought the sound had come from. I saw nothing, but remained cautious. This was, after all, not too far from where I had seen the prints last week. I must have remained frozen for some half an hour. When I was finally convinced it could be nothing more than the imagination of someone too long starved of human interaction, I got back to my feet and surveyed the full 360 degrees around me. Calm, still, silent. Barely a breeze to move a leaf. I stood still for some minutes, breathing deeply, seeking peace to return to my chest. It's amazing how frightening any sound can be in an otherwise silent world. The only sound comes from up there, from them. Down here, we all wear our fingers on our lips.

Still feeling quite tense, I soldiered on the last few dozen metres to clear space. The fear became temporarily replaced by near elation when I realised what was just beyond the last trees; it was only a fucking fence! I remained in the borders of the woodland, observing from what I felt to be a safe distance. It was a rather typical country fence, wooden posts every couple of metres, joined by several horizontal wires. It looked maintained, certainly didn't have the appearance of anything long abandoned. Closer to the edge; it was just the other side of a track, just a worn gravelled one, two exposed seams of dirt and stones, slightly raised foot of grass in the centre. I knew I'd seen hundreds like it where I had come from. It was a track for use by vehicles, so there had to be civilisation nearby. Still uncertain of the reception I may get or the nature of said civilisation, I held back from walking into the open, rather crept just inside the woodland edge, ensuring I remained in cover. I could see no farm buildings, though noted what appeared to be cultivated fields. Away to my left, the gentle hills flattened out to the grassland I had found on my western exploration. Away to my right, it became more wooded. In front of me, there was definitive evidence of inhabitation; cleared fields, trees in neat configurations, there was even what looked like an electricity pylon in the distance. About now, it was all looking really good. Then the lights went out.

Imagine; it's the middle of the day. Grev and cloudy, like every day, but it is daylight, just dull. Then suddenly, like somebody snaps their fingers or flicks a switch, it's pitch black. The first thought that hits is that you've suffered an aneurysm, the little time-bomb you've always feared was in your brain has detonated, your sight has gone. You're alone on an empty world, miles from the only part of it you are familiar with. And you're blind. I felt sick. It could only have been a few seconds that I lived through that potential outcome, but it seemed an eternity. I soon began to realise that it wasn't my eyes that were failing, it was the sky. How could the sun just switch off? I've seen an eclipse before, I have no idea where, but I remember it. It's like something slowly devours the solar body, it doesn't just vanish in an instant. I take the torch from my backpack and check my watch, lunchtime, nothing has changed there. I've experienced this before, I know I have, I just wish to God I could remember when and where. No starlight, no sunlight, no moonlight. I would have burst into song if somebody had put a spotlight on me. Just as soon as I'd changed my jeans. I was instantly aware that if I tried to make the journey home in this darkness, I was quite liable to injure myself. But what would I be exposing myself to if I stay out in the open? I can barely see three metres from where I stand, I don't have a choice.

It has to be them, who else would have such power? God? I don't believe it. Which one? "There is only one God." I remember a teacher saying that when I was child. But my life experience had told me that just about every religion thinks it's theirs. I could never believe in this idea that some omnipresent deity would have such a fascination for one tiny world, do my people not understand just how big creation is? It is so vast that it appears infinite to us, yet they cannot see how insignificant that makes them in the eyes of their gods? I use the words: "I wish to God I could remember etc etc", but I don't mean it in any literal sense. I believe the universe itself to be alive, alive with infinite spirit, I believe this source is where all life comes from, I believe we are all one with that whether we would wish to be or otherwise. But there is no wise white bearded man that looks after your every whim. Well, except Father Christmas, of course. I made myself smile, that's good. And I thought about things I believe in. That was good too, I think I'd quite like to start believing in Father Christmas again about now. I am coming back, I am starting to discover myself. But my predicament remained unchanged; I was still several miles from The Base with too little light to find my way home in. But *then* my sense of urgency had to be further reappraised.

Believe me, I wanted to leave the very instant I had heard that sound. What do you call a sound like that? A 'whistling sound' makes it seem non-threatening and inoffensive, and that was *not* the shrieking that had me drop to the floor, face first. It was a harsh sound, like something moving through air at great velocity, but without the mechanical addition of an engine. Friction, as something terrifying claws its nails into the air, seeking to slow as the ground approaches. I rolled on to my back, looking awkwardly over my head, eyes trained uncomfortably skyward. A streak of light in the jet sky, heading earthbound, and not looking anything like as far away as I would have been comfortable with. I rolled back on to my front, raised to my knees, then stood. Looking out from my forestal cloaking, I may as well have been blind, a lack of sight would have been no less use. But there was nothing wrong with my touch and my hearing. There was an enormous thud that registered intensely with both. In the near distance? Again, I am a poor judge of it, by whatever means. I was overwhelmed by the need to flee, yet this was perfectly counterbalanced by my paralysis at the fear of making a sound. Meteor? No, what kind of meteor would have caused a solar blackout? Hell, I didn't even realise the technology to cause that existed, let alone anything natural. Though I found it hard to judge its distance by the streak of light in an otherwise black environment, the sound and vibration under my feet convinced me it was no more than a mile away, virtually due north-west of my position. I would never be able to find my way to it in this Faustian pitch. Yes, let that serve as my excuse. The lack of inclination seems somewhat too cowardly. Home, I thought, and as swiftly as my legs would carry me. But I cannot see, and I fear I will pass out or my heart escape through my chest should I make the attempt. Gods help me, whatever you may be.

And then, as suddenly as it had switched off, the sun came back on again. Like poor continuity in an under-funded old B-movie, we had gone from day to night to day in around fifteen minutes. I had looked up at the sky as soon as my eyes' adaptation to the dull daylight brightness had allowed. I could make some of them out, the cloud seemed to have thinned. Ominous. I was positive the humming was now audibly louder, like it was in a neighbouring house with thin walls. Nearly a month here and nothing, *now* they stir. I was torn. I had come this far to explore, I had found evidence of inhabitation, I would need to return if I left now. Whatever threat they may pose, they have to be higher than a commercial airliner, and those things fly at eight miles high or so. From the rare glimpses I get of their craft

through the cloud, it is hard to tell how big they are, how far away they are, so I am only guessing, but I feel fairly comfortable with the guess. If they get closer, then maybe I'll get more nervous. If they wanted me dead, wouldn't I be decomposing already? Either they don't know I'm here... or they don't consider me a threat. But I could not even begin to understand what they would gain from blacking out the whole illuminated side of the planet? There is no-one down here to see anyway, for fuck's sake! Where had I seen it happen before? I knew the feeling, I was so sure of that. It'll come to me, damn it, it'll come to me.

My legs felt unsteady as I started to move again, they were trembling slightly, I hadn't realised it as I stood still, but the whole thing had really unsettled me. One can only imagine how man would have felt in ancient times during an eclipse. It's the seeing of unexplained phenomena, the fear of that power, that creates your gods in the first instance. Perhaps I could use some gods now. I dropped to my knees and prayed to the spirits of the soil beneath my feet, the water that moistened it and the air that I breathed. None listened, but they gave me comfort regardless. I desperately wanted to walk along that track, I could see it from there. And the track should go somewhere. Then I stay in a building that does not have pathways. Perhaps no pathways go somewhere and pathways go nowhere. No, I was talking nonsense. My hesitance was that here, inside the edge of the forest, I am invisible. On the track, under the open sky, I am a man moving on a world where there are no others. And they are awake. And something is down here. Is there a connection? If they are toying with their technology, it stands to reason their attention will be trained upon its target. And that is here. And why was the light getting poorer? Now what?

Seeking the most obscuring cluster of trees I could find, I edged towards the wood's border with the unmade track. Looking up, I could see streaks of orange in the sky, almost looked like the sky was ablaze above the cloud line, the light from the burning bleeding downwards. Purple streaking as well, and a distant glow just on top of that hill. The light wasn't getting poorer from any supernatural means, the sun was setting. But it's been setting after four, it can't be later than one. I had checked my watch, it still showed exactly the same time it had when I had done so twenty minutes ago by torchlight. But it wasn't wrong, I knew that much. I had been timing myself out from The Base, it's how I keep track of the distance I travel. I clearly have some experience with walking, I seem to know

how the state of the ground affects average speed, thus can work out what I cover in what time. There is no way it is later than lunchtime. Did that blackout steal time? Alien abductions, you lose time, don't you? People who see UFO's, they often say they lose a few minutes. But I've just lost three hours. At least. How do I know all this stuff? What kind of life did I lead, for fuck's sake? Could it just be my watch battery has died and I hadn't noticed the time pass what with all the 'excitement'? In this land of eternal battery power? I don't think so. My stomach was telling me it was lunchtime too. But the sun was setting, there was no doubt about that. And I'm at least a two hour walk from The Base.

As you can see, it wasn't courage that made my decision, I really had no choice but to face a night exposed, make my way back first light. So, fuck it, I had thought, as I'm here, and the day can't get much worse, let's at least try to get a look at that thing that had just breached our atmosphere. Our? That was uncharacteristically parochial. From the tree line, I could see smoke to the northwest. Whatever it was had grounded behind... I wasn't sure, were they trees or bushes? It had to be trees, surely. The light was getting just that little too poor to make out shadowy detail at distance. My fears were right on about one thing, it was likely within the mile I had suspected. I am damned if I'm going any closer. Whatever it is, it will be hot. Or is it cold? I seem to remember reading somewhere that meteors can be cold because they come from space, -269 Kelvin or so? Either way, you don't get too close until that temperature has stabilised. All sorts of doubts were creeping in. You know those excuses you make to yourself when you really don't want to do something?

"Hey, Sati," you say, "you can be back here in two hours any time you like, you don't need to do this now. Get a safe distance away while you still have the light. Come back in the morning, yeah, morning, sleep on it, you'll know what to do then."

But where's the logic in that? You're here now, get a photograph, then get a safe distance away, job done, straight home at sun up. Then I had got distracted and started to wonder when sun up would be? Sunrise - sunset - it was all starting to get a bit random. I wracked my brain, convinced there was something I could do, some magical words I could say, something, anything, I just wanted to get out of there in any way possible. Or otherwise, it was no time to be fussy.

There's no place like home.

There's no place like home.

There's no place like home.

Fuck.

I couldn't even crouch in the shadows to get the picture, I'd have to be upright because of the lay of the land. And I couldn't be completely behind a tree, I would need a clear shot. And I should really take a few, be sure one 'comes out' well, adequate to study on this sad little LCD monitor. Seriously, try holding a camera steady when your pulse is so powerful you can hear it in your eardrums. Deep, slow breathing, I seemed to know the required technique. I looked for a low branch, something to hold the camera steady enough to take a shot without flash. The light was good enough, the exposure may just be a little slow. A slight jog on the first attempt, nothing serious, but milliseconds matter on photos in this kind of light. Confident the other three had worked; one full distance, one full zoom, one



somewhere in between; I packed the camera away and considered my curiosity thoroughly satisfied. I was just about to take my first step when I heard that unearthly bellowing metallic sound coming from the direction of the grounding. As I looked to see what had happened, a light flashed over there. I didn't stop to see what happened next, I ran. I don't know how long for, as long as I could see where I was going, anything felt like long distance for an overweight old man. I should have been proud. I wasn't. I was terrified. What if they had seen me? What if they would be coming after me? Be an allegory, please be an allegory. I had got inside a small thicket as I was struggling to get my breath back. The light was failing fast now. I wanted to be silent, but my panting would easily have given my position away had anything been close behind me.

The next thing I knew, it was morning. I was awoken by the sound of rain, as well as becoming conscious of some small amount dripping in through my 'cover'. I was relieved, I think. As I had been hiding myself away, I could only visualise myself sitting there like a scared cat all night, jumping at every noise, real or imagined. I must have passed out, or just plan fallen asleep from sheer nervous exhaustion. It all seemed like a bad dream, if just for a split second, but God, how I loved that split second, I wanted to live in it for all eternity. The aching and stiffness in my legs suggested it was something much worse than that. I reached inside my backpack and took out the camera. Confirmed, no, it wasn't a dream. I need to guard this camera with my life, this is a precious tool, my only physical record. I remembered the light I had seen by the grounding, trying to imagine what size of light it would have been. There were a thousand and one questions that would keep my mind occupied as I made my way back to The Base. I hoped that would be enough to stop me continually looking over my shoulder. It wasn't. Even the sound of my own footfall was making me jumpy. The moment I could see the first portion of The Base appear through the trees, oh, sweet joy, sweet elation, it was a moment I could not begin to describe. Imagine, if you will; that joy was based on my feeling safe in a cellar - with no lock on the door - in a partially derelict structure - with one corner broken open to the world. Imagine - if that feels like safety to me - how must it have felt for me last night. Can you? I doubt it. Who could really relate to the situation I find myself in? A world that has already fallen to an extra-terrestrial invasion, and they have yet to find me when they come down? And they know I'm here now. Oh, dear God, this cellar has never felt so warm and inviting.

Day 27

"Tis what I have to do." Said Q
A breach, my friend, where nowt is true
Note they never leave my hand
Though I wave, distract, to further plan
Can you comprehend the game I play
Allegorically lost, and now which way?
Would you believe I'd do you wrong
It's your lack of belief that makes me strong.

I see that doubting look you cast
Wonder I how long 'twill last
The doors are real, the locks your own
Beyond are realms you've never known
Boundaries can be made in mind
A barrier thought you cannot find
And once the truth I should reveal
Shall leave a wound that never heals.

I look upon you as you sleep
Count the sins upon you heap'd
I read your mind, I mock you, sir
I steal your recall, memories blur
I come each night to see your pain
To watch you wallow in your shame
Did you think you could just walk away
Oh no, my friend, you need to pay.

In R.E.M. you think you dream
And quite unreal this all must seem
But all you touch and all you smell
Cannot be left, this personal hell
And if you should become aware
Open your eyes and see who's there
Of that you'll know me, I have no fear
Frankly, sir, I was never here...

Day 28

So how exactly does one spend a couple of days hiding from an alien invasion? Poetry and housework, apparently. This place needed a clean up, I was fed up with the lumps of rubble laying around the floor, dust and old cobwebs. The stuff I needed was all here, one place or another, a brush, dustpan, half a broom (better than no broom at all), something that would do as a dishcloth. Time, energy and rainwater, that's all it took. Okay, maybe I was a little desperate to keep my mind from dwelling on the frankly terrifying events of late, but it is much tidier now. Some of the rubble has come in handy in the building of my latrine. You need a latrine, it was the beginning of civilisation when people stopped shitting wherever they stood. Maybe that works for animals, but then they're never going to engineer bridges and fly to other worlds. Though maybe a superior species once said that about us. "The History Of Defecation - Part One"; in a library near you.

Honestly, the things I found when I really started moving the rubbish out and dragging stuff around. There's some floor panels missing down by the north west wall, I've always been a little cautious when raiding the storage boxes at that end, but it had never occurred me to look under the floor there. I had anchored myself firmly and leaned my head round into the hole, shined the torch around. It actually looks as if the cellar was part of an underground structure at some point, then walled off separately at some later date. I don't know exactly how you're supposed to get down to it, I certainly wouldn't get through the hole. And if I could, I don't know how I'd get back out, it's quite a drop. The cellar overlaps the end of the building, only three steps down to it, so more a split-level affair. The space underneath must be three metres deep. It's very dark down there and I only have a narrow beam torch, I would have to find a way down there to see what's there properly. Maybe I could take another floor panel up, don't know how easy or hard that would be. Not big on tools.

Look, I'm not evading the issue, I promise you. I have to go back, I do know that. I can't just leave it at having seen something land, hearing a loud metallic sound from it, seeing a flash of light and doing some housework. I suppose I could go beat the shit out of the little green fucks with the half a broom. "Fuck off back to your own planet, ET scum... or next it's the rancid dishcloth!" Yeah, that would have them engaging their FTL drives, w-h-o-o-s-h! Yes, of course I'll go back, but

I find tidiness and order very therapeutic, it helps me think. Cleaning and tidying has the amazing property of creating order from the chaos that once reigned. Where there were various types of storage units in random configurations, some upright, some fallen, now they are all neatly against walls. I have a sense of where everything is; a box for everything and everything in its box. This is how I process information; I set out the resources at my disposal in an orderly manner, I learn of the full extent of their uses and attributes, I plan to deploy them to best effect. I have a small torch, a camera, a compass, some cutlery, a shovel, various cleaning implements, some basic tools, buckets, pens, paper - I am a well armed man! Who could not save the world with a pen whose words will destroy an enemy and a dustpan to sweep the wreckage of their invasion force into. Oh, friends, do not doubt me, a plan is formulating. But first; I have several more boxes to label.

Day 29

"Into the ground I plug my hands, my fingers pushed into the sand Connected, I'm one happy man, now privy to the cosmic plan My wiring runs deep through the Earth, the process of my second birth Enlightenment from inner space, transcendence of the human race"

So I am human, *homo sapiens*, it comes to me now, a great ape that shares half its genes with the bananas it eats. Not that I have seen one of those for some time. Sati Varg has a genus, he belongs somewhere. And now he sits in the woodlands, ready to join with the world beneath him, be it his or otherwise. It's the most amazing feeling, like drawing power from the core of the Earth itself. Here, there is no sand, but the top soil is soft in the woodlands around The Base. I sit crosslegged, push my fingers through the leaf mould in to the soil. I can feel no life inside, just the grass that grows and the jungle foliage around the building. Talk to me, planet, connect me to your other regions that I may detect who trespasses upon you. I saw them land, I felt it through you to my feet, tell me who they are. And tell me if I trespass also, I do not know if I am indigenous. The soil is cold, slightly moist, but I feel the energy of this world running up my arms and into my brain. I let my thoughts sink into the planet and I become one with it. I see its position in the vastness of the universe, hanging as a tiny sphere in an infinite black wilderness. I see its landmasses stretch out across it, continuing unseen

under oceans, always part of one world. We are one.

I meditate on a form of light. I imagine a gathering of photons coming together to become a planet in microcosm, and orbit they a star of life, and orbits it in a galactic arm, and orbits it in this infinite cosmic ocean. I am the beginning, I am the end, there is no beginning, there is no end. My mind is empty of the things of man, I listen only to the voice of The Source. Damn. There is chatter behind it, breaking my concentration. Some old hippy if I still cannot master the tranquillity of meditation. I could almost feel their presence. I visualised that it was a sphere that landed on this world, the bellowing metallic sound a portal opening into its bowels, the flash of light some alien entity of pure energy, long ago having escaped the matter that imprisoned it. The smashing impact into the planet would not bother an energy being, it would have no sense of physical pain, no way it could be harmed in the impact. No need to land the presumably vast starships that fill and darken the sky, just jump into a sphere and burn. And what would these beings of light want with our/this world? Do they require physical beings to work for them? To be a slave race, denied our own choice of destiny? But what if we are one day destined for the stars ourselves? It could be our future. We may only be a primitive culture at the moment, living in the earliest stages of sociological and philosophical development. As Sati Varg once said, I say it now; it is a rare and wise culture that knows its place in history.

And how shall I deal with these beings of light? Will they know and accept the principles of rights and responsibilities? Are these indeed as universal as they intuitively feel? Surely, yes. I cannot claim the right to live if I wish to kill others. If I may kill others, they may kill me, I am not special, why should I have any right they do not? If they may kill me, I do not have the right to live, so I must respect theirs in order to avail myself. Likewise, I can own nothing if I can steal. They cannot have a world of their own if they will take ours, for others would have the right to take theirs. They cannot have a right to possess more than their needs dictate; if some have more, others must have less to balance. If the share you take is fair to all men, then all men shall take a share fair to you. IF... if they are reasonable men. Are they reasonable men, these beings of light? Should I walk to the north west boundary of the woodlands, follow the track to the site of the landing, stride boldly through the smoke and demand their reason? Should I approach them as a friend or foe? Neither, of course, both would breach the

principles of *Non-Certainism* that undoubtedly apply even more so when dealing with a culture of which you cannot possibly have knowledge. Making the assumption that they have hostile intent would be wrong of me. How differently may their moral compass operate to mine? Will theirs also say the sun rises in the west?

Do I go armed? With cutlery? I think not. Possibly their laughter would deter them from harming me. Would beings of pure energy have the ability to laugh? I have a small flexible dip in the skin beneath my nose, I believe it is called a *fulcrum*, I have no dictionary here to check with. To the best of my knowledge, it serves no purpose whatsoever. Save, without it, I should not be able to smile. I love the implications of this; The Source would have us know happiness. But The Source would be responsible for their existence too, It cannot take sides, can It? Maybe the sense of morality that I have is delusional, arrogant self-aggrandisement, maybe I know nothing of true morality at all. Maybe I know nothing of anything, and if I do, should it not be my goal otherwise. As I look out at the endless depths of creation, I can only believe I know very little. Should I strive hard my entire life, should I seek that one day I may know nothing at all? My mind is opened, I am ready to come to you, beings of light, I am ready to talk upon the fate of this world, are you ready to listen? Tell me more, world beneath me.

Day 31

Cheers, cheers, yeah, great party, absolutely great. I need to sit for a while, my head is totally spinning, how many glasses of that punch have I had now? What is **IN** that punch!? Whew, I feel so woozy, the room... no... it's a garden party... the garden is starting to spin. All the voices, chattering, laughing, and I can hear music in the background, God... it is **SO** long since I heard music. Get some pictures for the album, not everyday friends have birthdays, is it? Yeah, sure, I'm fine, you guys carry on, I think I've just had one too many! Ha ha! Oh, my head. No, really, you enjoy your party, I'm just gonna sit down here for a while and look at the stars. Did you? No! OMG! You are going to be **SO** embarrassed in the morning. Yeah, yeah, I know, and... where did the stars go? Where did the people go? I can still hear them, but they're not here any more. So how can I still see them in the camera's LCD monitor? My head feels so strange, it's like I'm here

and I'm not. I'm in The Base, aren't I? Here on my empty world. So where are the voices and laughter coming from? If I point the camera and move it around, there they are, like I'm looking through it to a different world. Or a different time. Or I'm losing my fucking marbles.

Think, man, think. What were you doing? WILL YOU LOT SHUT THE FUCK UP! I'm trying to think, can't concentrate. Camera... yeah, I remember, I am checking the functions and capabilities of my equipment, preparing myself. Oh, go on, why not, just a small one though. Let me get your picture... say 'cheese'... got it. What are these buttons on the back? Okay, I know this one, that's back and forth through stored images. Oh, is it? Well, I don't want to 'trash' anything, life is precious, life is sacred, savour every magic moment, you never know how many magic moments you will have. Yes, I always get sentimental when I'm drunk. No, of course I'm not going to cry, get out of here. Oh, nice picture. 'Display'? What do you do then? Don't know that one... looks like you could play noughts and crosses on it. Push it again... a date. I hadn't thought of a date. I think I've been happy with "it's obviously Autumn" since I've been here. Not now, sweetheart, I'm just trying to work something out. Yes, I know I'm a little tipsy, just leave me alone for a bit, I'm good, really.

"20:49 29.NOV.2016": I understand that; 29th November. Don't get the 20:49 though, it's not been light much more than an hour. I check my watch - 8:43. Even allowing for the fact I reset it with an educated guess after the blackout, that seems more likely. That's what those numbers in the bottom right hand corner of this thing are too, isn't it? Time, obviously, why haven't I noticed them before? It's like they've been blocked from my perception, I honestly don't remember ever noticing them. But they are right by the shutdown button, I use it most days, every time I record my thoughts. Oh, come on, don't all start singing, my head hurts enough already. Well, yeah, you'd be a party-pooper if you were my age! Shut up, you tart! Ha ha! 20:44, that's what this netbook says. Mobile, there must be a time on my mobile too. Yeah, big one, top right hand corner. 20:50. Why is everything except my watch twelve hours fast? Idiot. Everything else is 24 hour, my watch is rotary. Having said that, my watch is clearly right, it's morning, not late evening. You'd normally play the odds, wouldn't you? Three out of four say evening, it's evening. But the sunrise said morning, I'd listen to a sunrise over a piece of electronica, however magical its battery life. This phone has a fucking date on too! There, right underneath the 'no signal' sign in the top left. How many times have I looked there and seen nothing but the fact there's nobody to talk to out there? "Tue 29 Nov." Makes sense with sunrise and sunset times, seems about right. Yeah, yeah, 'night, guys. You getting a taxi? No, I'll stay with this lot for a while, carry me home in the morning, ha ha! Yeah, it is morning, what am I like? I feel like having a date should make a real difference, but it doesn't really. 'Obviously Autumn' was enough, what the fuck does it matter when you're the only damn human on the planet? Sati Varg, last man standing, but he knows what the fucking date is. The group photo? Yeah, pour me another and I'll get it on the LCD. Here ya go... oh, it's a picture of a gun metal grey filing cabinet against a wall that's seen better days. You're not really here, are you? Thank fuck I don't have work in the morning...

Day 32 - Wednesday 30th November 2016

What a strange couple of days it has been. I've been hearing voices, seeing people, things, feeling touches on my body. But there's nobody here. Just them. Although the blanket of cloud seems a little thinner, it's grey mass still keeps them masked. Mostly. Just now and then, a glimpse of one or more of their silver craft. But the noise, definitely louder, I have no doubt of that. Something is happening. For a month now, they've hovered in the sky, waiting to pounce on an empty world. Nada. I wonder if it's like this all over the planet? Should we be waiting for rescue by one of the public service organisations of another land mass? Such power though, could we viably challenge it? I have decided the best thing I can do for now is gather information. I have this device to write things on, I have a camera to take pictures with, I have pens and paper to make notes and diagrams. When help arrives, I will have my report ready for them.

The plan is simple, if a walk on the dangerous side; to return back to the north west boundary of the woodland and observe the landing site. Since my tidying and inventory, I now know backwards everything I have at my disposal, though I have not yet worked out a way to get down to the basement that would allow me to get out again. No ladders. I did find binoculars and a monocular though. It crossed my mind that some of the indigenous species may have only one eye. I don't belong here, I think we've established that, even though it is strangely familiar. But something here interferes with my senses, interferes with my

perceptions, as if everything I eat and drink is laced with some manner intoxicating pharmaka, ready to play games with this widdendream old man. I can hear a child's voice at the moment; it sounds as if she is reading a story out loud, though I cannot quite make out her words. I need to get out of these four walls. Four walls and a hole. But I need to get out of them nevertheless. At least I know there is a suitable thicket should I require shelter for the night. Which is fine unless the woods are crawling with *them* now. It's nearly a week since I witnessed the landing, I don't think there have been more. No, I would have seen a blackout, unless it happened at night. Oh, God, I would have *heard* it. That sound sent a chill through me the like of which I had never experienced before.

My backpack is... well, packed. I have put in two days of provisions, just in case I need to keep hidden for any period. A large bottle of water in each of the side mesh pockets, they look to be about a litre and a quarter, can't tell, their language looks like so much gibberish to me. I don't recognise any of their letters. They certainly have more than the 26 I do on this machine, I've seen at least five dozen that I can recall. That doesn't surprise me, I've always found our alphabet very limited, barely fit for its purpose. Oh, yeah, while I think of it; I've been experimenting with taking photos through the monocular. I thought it would be useful to extend the range, but the resulting images look out of focus. If only there was someone around to ask. I wanted to try to get in somewhere at a very safe distance, no point taking any chances, if I could have worked out that configuration, may have bought me another hundred metres or so. Come on, they're not animals, not like they'll be able to pick up your scent on the wind. Like animals would have the technology they have mastered; the ability to cross countless lightyears of space. That's something I remember too; that our 'neighbour' is over four lightyears away. Still, if you're passing, do pop in for a coffee. Oh, fuck, what I would give for a strong coffee, a nice double hit of espresso, that would so hit the spot.

Damn, I've been overdoing it, and sleeping on a hard floor doesn't help, even though I have a comforting layer of cardboard under me now and a bit more wriggle space. My right shoulder... well, the muscle above it, behind the neck more, it's fucking killing me. I could really use a massage. Hell, I wouldn't say no to a 'happy ending' either. Hah! Forget it, probably half day closing, it's Wednesday. I saw a film once about a guy who got stuck on his own somewhere

remote, just remember bits of it, something about him making a 'friend' to talk to out of a football? All seems a bit vague, like watching through smoked glass when you're seriously drunk. Yeah, my anonymous benefactor obviously has something of a sense of humour; leaves me a bottle of some lethal spirit, but no coffee! Anyway, fuck making pretend friends out of found objects, how sad would you have to be to do that? Ask me again in another month. Anyway, I have you to talk to, my friend in the future. Assuming any fucker ever finds this. So who might you be?

Maybe you're an alien, looking over this strange artefact in a museum of worlds you've conquered? How might you feel now? Probably, after all this time, your people will have learned to translate these words, so there you are reading an account of the last being alive on a world your race decimated. Does that make you proud? Am I being judgemental? No, fuck you, others have rights too. You cannot claim a right to self-determination if you will not respect that right for others. What if bigger and badder aliens come along and fuck you over? Would that be alright? Would you just lay down and die, accept the fact that might is right and it was your turn? Just shrug your shoulders and not be concerned that your entire culture, everything your species had ever been, all you had achieved, it was all about to vanish from creation? Gone. Is that stirring any feeling of guilt in you? Do you have a child at your side, raising its eyes to you, however many you creatures have, giving you that questioning look that kids do when they find out you've done something bad? How are you going to put them to bed tonight? In our culture, we call it genocide. Do you have a name for what you've done? Hail the conquering fucking hero! And how long will have passed, how many more worlds will have been on your list of conquests, how many more peoples will you have consigned to oblivion? Cunt.

Day 33 - Thursday 1st December 2016

Ah, dear God, I have aches in places I did not realise I had muscles, I think my years have come back to bite me on the arse today. I was kitted and ready to go by 08:00, armed with shovel and provisions. My passage north west was a route-march, no stopping to admire the scenery, just a constant and steady pace towards my destination. The woodland seemed a little drier from the outset, certainly improving as one heads west. Due north, to date, is the only direction in which I was one hundred percent assured we were in the Autumn season, all others being

greener, especially further to the south. I thought that it may be worth a return walk to the north to see if the mud was easing. Note to self. And the east? No, those swamps will not be dehydrated any time soon. My brain analysed as many scenarios as my imagination could muster; why in particular had they picked my north west as a landing site? My paranoia nudges me; "It's because they are coming for you." The thought only taunts me for a moment. The light was nothing to do with me. The damned thing was still smoking from its entry through our atmosphere. I hadn't thought of that. I had assumed it had dropped from one of their ships. Now, I see them every once in a while, glimpses through the clouds. Would I be able to see them if they were outside the atmosphere? How far is that? I think it's something over 20 miles where I come from, let's assume that's likely normal for a planet of this gravity. They would have to be seriously damned large for me to be able to see them from up there. No, they have to be lower, no more than 10-12 miles? That would make them probably 3-4 times larger than an Airbus, yeah? It makes logical sense; if these were vast city sized craft, there need not be so many, and they are legion, believe me. I think there are thousands up there. You would not need thousands of mega-craft to invade one small primitive world. But I digress, my train of thought was as to why the landed object would burn. Then that is why I went out there.

I arrived in sight of the woodland boundary with time to spare out of two hours. I think I will be quicker tomorrow, I can leave the shovel, food cans and some water behind, gradually build up a stock there. No wildlife to steal the food. And if there was, I've never seen a fox that can handle a tin-opener. I had prepared plans, though it was still necessary to find a suitable site for my project. The earth is soft here, but digging by trees, I can expect to encounter many roots, and I have no saw or other viable cutting tool. I must have walked for a mile or more, keeping myself at least ten metres inside the woodland boundary, before I saw what I was looking for. A small ditch, thus less digging to do, a raised bank to the north west side, part of which was opened at the top, framed by the arch of a large exposed root; the perfect window for my hide. I take measure; from the tips of my left hand to the zip of my coat, I smiled profusely, I had found a piece of glass at The Base that I was positive would be a reasonable fit, give me some protection from the elements and still allow clear sight. But the main test was just that; line of sight. I knelt in the ditch, felt in front of me for my natural 'window' aligned my closed eyes with it and prayed again to the spirits of the earth. The gods were

with me. It was a little further from where I had observed the landing, but my line of sight to it was perfect. Almost too much so, or was that my paranoia engaging again? I defeated it with the same logic as previously; if they knew I was here and wished me harm, I would stand harmed. Or not stand at all.

And so I dug, carefully planning where to move the displaced earth so as nobody passing would be aware any 'works' had been done here. My friend, it is amazing how much noise a shovel makes in soft earth when you can see the landing site of an unknown sky craft not much more than a mile hence. But through all my rests, through all the times I rose my eyes to observe the distance, nothing moved, no sound was forthcoming. There was no smoke any more, not even a faint smoulder, but I could still see the tree-line it had come down behind. Recognising that precise configuration was hardly difficult after the profound effect it had on me. I could not see the object itself though, that would require elevation, and there was none to this side of it. Circling round to the hills behind it would take several hours and undoubtedly leave me exposed, come nightfall, and that in an area I would rather not be in. I knew nothing of these creatures so far, but the only movement I had seen, the light, that had come as the sun fell. Possibly they are uncomfortable with the ultra-violet? Any hypothesis could prove useful at this time, anything that may be used against them. I recalled seeing a film once where our world itself killed an invader, something to do with the micro-organisms that cause us no harm, but to a visitor, could be potentially fatal. Could I be so fortunate here? If only this was a science fiction story.

And I thought, and I dug, and I watched. Think, dig, watch, repeat. Come two o'clock, I hid my food, some water and the shovel as best I could, then returned to Base with a much lighter load. If with aching legs. How I would love a hot bath to soak them in right now. A 'G&T' just catching the bathroom light as it sits on the marble sink top, beckoning me to take the occasional sip as I enjoy relaxing in the hot water, bubbles crunching under my neck as I lean my head back. No work to do, the bubbles make you clean, you do nothing. Reality; I smell of sweat, I'm dirty. At least I have some buckets of rainwater to rinse myself with before sleep. I miss soap. Who would ever think you would miss something so commonplace and mundane? I also miss a warm bathroom. Don't get me wrong, I don't wash outside, I have a nice corner in The Base for that, at least it keeps the chill off, and the temperature is definitely dropping. If I am still here come Winter, God help

me. My coat is warm, but how does a man softened by civilisation get through something like this? Look at my hands; blistered, scratched. I am obviously no manual worker. And I'm damned if I can turn up a pair of protective gloves in this place. Not sure about tomorrow yet. On the one hand, they are here and ripe for observation. But then they don't appear to be going anywhere in a hurry. On the other, who knows what is down in that basement. Perhaps I could spend the day here, trying to work out a way of getting into it and back out safely. Hanging my head just over the hole in the northern corner of the floor, I can make out some large dark shapes down there, possibly more boxes. I wonder if my benefactor has placed further provisions down there. Maybe he understood it would take time for me to make the discovery and devise a solution to the problem of access, so it wouldn't be a case of having everything to start with and squandering it all in haste. But then that would make this a game? Be it that or real life, I cannot help but think myself the pawn.

Day 36 - Sunday 4th December 2016

Welcome, do step inside, though mind your head, there's not much room. It's taken the best part of four days of thinking, planning, walking, carrying and digging, but my 'hide' is finally finished. I have kept things simple. And quiet. I do not forget that they are behind that tree line, something under a mile to my north west. The small ditch I started from was ideal, it has also stirred further memories. I seem to recall playing near ditches like this when I was a child. A big hill, woodland, a small cluster of trees we used to climb and make camp at. And ditches, I think used as part of military manoeuvres. Perhaps my father was a soldier? I don't remember exactly, just that there were a lot of soldiers around while I was growing up. My ditch looked as though it had once been part of a larger complex, but was now blocked off from the rest by at least five metres. My final design was simplicity itself, simplicity as art, but I should have to confess, highly serendipitous. Every further box I open back at The Base seemed to contain something that would prove beneficial. If I did not know better, I would suspect that somebody snuck in to The Base, every time I left it, and left me something else I would soon find a use for. Only I do know better. No new boxes appear, I just get round to unpacking more. It's as if somebody read my mind up front and left everything I might need in advance. And then there is the basement, still impenetrable as yet. Who wants to wager their life on my discovering a rope

ladder in the coming days?

Now, I should be truthful with you; were you to walk across my hide, you would know as much, for you would fall through the mock roof into my lap, where we would either bond and have children together, or your extra terrestrial greenness would eat my face. So, let me try to describe it to you. As you approach, you would not see it. Maybe if you were carefully seeking such a concealment, I grant you, but not if you were just passing by. I found a roughly three by two metre rectangle of a strong canvas like material, a greeny-browny colour, and here I should confess I appear to be colourblind also. Placed above the ditch, it conceals it completely, dug in both sides, as well as being 'staked' through six punched and ringed holes around its edges. Finally, I covered the remaining visible section with the piles of fallen leaves that are building rapidly to the north of The Base. It vanishes. Facing their landing site is a slightly raised bank, topped by a large exposed root, along with a substantial mesh of other smaller ones, from the large tree adjacent to the ditch. In the arch of the large root, my 'spy-hole', I have placed a piece of glass. Do not let me exaggerate, it has not been carefully fitted and finished with putty, simply put in place as well as it's mismatched shape and size would allow, supported by large stones and other weighty forest-matter at each end. It will give me shelter should the rains return, whilst still allowing me to watch them. For its disguise, on the off chance ET may want to make like a bear and come to the woods to make room for more human face eating, I am wholly willing to confess my absolute genius. What started as a simple piece of dirty brown netting has been transformed into a work of natural art, courtesy of dried leaves, twigs and whatever else I could tie or stick to it with my fortuitous finds at The Base. Operated by two metal rods, knotted on to its two lower corners, and levered through conveniently placed holes in the root system, it can be dropped shut in an instant, obscuring the glass from prying eyes, however many they may have. I like to call it 'the curtains'.

The 'hide' itself is not dug for comfort; possibly a two metre long ditch, I can just lay down in it. Just. Certainly a fair bit less than a metre wide. Cramped, more than just a little claustrophobic, especially with the curtains closed. But I can move, on all fours, not upright. I can kneel, if not stand. I'm not a construction engineer, clearly, though I do seem to have more than adequate problem-solving skills. It's a hide. You sleep, you kneel, you watch. The entrance I cannot take

credit for, it being a natural (I would guess) opening at the end of the raised bank. I suspect the exposed roots have been caused by the tree 'falling' slightly from its original vertical alignment. Where they have lifted, part of the ground has come with them, and at the end of the bank, it leaves the perfect way in, via laying flat on your back and shuffling under. Hanging from it a natural curtain of twisted and meshed roots, helping to obscure the gap. A more thorough closure is then completed by pulling in a fallen section of half-rotten tree trunk I dragged a couple of metres to serve that purpose, taking care to disguise the drag marks afterwards, we don't want to give ET any clues, do we? It weighs very little, don't let me persuade you I've turned into some 'superman' while you've been gone. I would love to show you a photograph, but I am here and you are there, words are all we have. Yes, of course, I do have a camera. No chance, It's just that the last time I tried taking a picture here, they stirred. They stirred in such a way that caused me absolute terror. I will wish to spend time here watching them before I am so brave as to take a photograph here again. So please, bear with me as I try to share my new second home with you via the medium of the English language alone.

The digging brought home the weirdness of this place. Where I am from, you would lift an old piece of tree trunk and a thousand small creatures would dash in every direction as you did so. Or you would put the spade in the wrong place and be descended upon by a legion of ants. But nothing. Not even a worm in the soil. This place is sterile, save fauna. And myself. How can this be possible? It is so otherworldly, yet at the same time, so familiar. I have been returning to The Base each afternoon, but now my hide is finished, I plan to return here to spend a few days. I have dug small 'cupboards' into the ditch wall, shored up with the wooden cases I found in some of the other ditches. I have no idea what they are for, their language is still a complete mystery to me, but they are usefully strong, wooden sides in a metal framework with metal handles. Again, they seem familiar, but I have no idea where from. Anyway, they are good to stop tins and bottles of water getting buried. I am anxious to come back, it seems safe enough. Four days of digging and building here appears to have drawn zero attention from them, I have seen and heard nothing from their direction. I confess, this has been something of an adventure. However, as the days pass, I keep thinking of another life I have lost. There may be friends and family mourning my passing. I wonder, would they think me dead? I thought I would have pieced more together by now, but my past remains a blank, save for the plethora of random disembodied memories I have rediscovered. If I have one, I should end each day with the words; "Goodnight, sweetheart, sleep tight." Talking of which, I must leave it here. I am sat under a tree presently, occasionally glancing up and admiring my work, tapping away so you may share my thoughts at some unknown point in the future. My watch tells me it is now two in the afternoon and I have a long walk home, which I plan to follow with two or three days of extreme rest. Well, maybe an expedition to the basement, should such a thing prove possible. But Sati Varg is ready, you bugeyed bastards, and he will be watching you in great detail very shortly.

Day 38 - Tuesday 6th December

Well, that was another quite heart-stopping moment. For once, I can put no blame on those in the sky whatsoever. I had taken the most solid of the storage boxes that had been in The Base, one of those with metallic framing to strengthen its wooden sides, with the aim of making myself a 'stepping stone'. You're ahead of me, I expect. It is an unwieldy thing, probably a metre by just short of one in both other dimensions. The aim was to get it to the basement floor, without it shattering, thus allowing myself something to drop down onto, that I would then be able to climb up from afterwards. The best laid men of mice with plans, indeed. Climbing on filing cabinets, I managed to pull a good few metres of electrical cable free from the decaying conduits. As I had suspected, the power from such was long gone. I freely admit that licking my fingers, closing my eyes and touching the bare wire wasn't the safest way to find out, but there you go. Sue me. Next to feature on the menu was my knot-tying skill, lodged in my oldest memories, probably from when I was in the Brownies. I seem to recall I was drummed out for solvent abuse before I made it as far as the Guides. An hour or so of traversing my brain's inbuilt A-Z of profane language, I had finally worked out a type of harness to lower this awkward bastard of a box to the basement. Don't ask, you'll just get me swearing again and this is a family show.

Following on with my amazing run of good fortune of late, I chose this moment to discover I am afraid of heights. It was one thing laying flat on the floor, turning my head awkwardly into the hole in the floor to look under. But, actually standing by said hole, looking straight down, caused uncomfortable feelings in my inner thighs, along with a sense of imbalance and nausea in general. Even with the box

down there, and yes, I had thought to put it long side upwards, it was still a LONG way down. Being of, shall we say, a challenging mass, I was quite sure jumping down would result in a broken box and a leg to match. The nearest functional hospital possibly being lightyears away convinced me this was not a good idea. I would have to lower myself down. Oh joy. I confess, it must have been an extremely comical sight for the audience of zero that had come to enjoy the show

Ladies and gentleman! If I may have your attention. Sati Varg, old chubby extraordinaire, will now attempt the death-defying "Descent To Hell"! Roll up! Roll up!

In my dressing room, I was sick with nerves, I had never attempted this stunt in front of an audience before. So much could go wrong. It felt like the most dangerous thing I had ever tried on stage. Deep breath and tally ho, the show must go on! I heard the buzzer, a tap on the door;

"On in five, Mr. Varg." Came an aged female voice with the sweetness born of a life spent in a world she loved.

"Thank you, Dorothy."

"Don't forget your breathing exercises, sir!" She giggled. A routine we went through before every show.

"You're not too big to go over my knee, young lady!" Was how I always replied.

And she would walk back along the corridor to stage right and await my entrance. I made one final check of my make up in the dressing room mirror.

"Oh, sir," I mourned, "the years have not been kind to you. Your eyes, they sag, all bloodshot red, book your plot, you'll soon be dead."

We theatrical types, you understand, we all have our little pre-show rituals and superstitions, these 'things' we must do before we perform. You should see the palaver the thespian genus have to go through if one of them utters the name of *The Scottish Play!* Hah! Not so with me, my acting years are behind me. I can claim no real successes, the pinnacle of my career would have been playing the title role in "Waiting For Godot", but no regrets, I am perfectly content in music hall. Variety, as they say, is the spice of life, allow me to add a little seasoning to yours.

I place my white headband on to complete my costume. I stand to admire myself

in the exit mirror. My already over-sized lacy white blouse stretching helplessly across my ever expanding stomach, showing a blot of hairy pinkness where it could no longer quite envelop its target navel. My pink tutu, looking like an oversized meringue, encompassing my great fat arse. White fishnet stockings and wellington boots. Check. Oh! My wand! What have I done with my wand? Oh, be still my beating heart, there it is.

"Let's knock them dead!" I say to myself, "Dignity, Mr. Varg, always dignity. And on with the show."

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!" The bellowing voice of Dorothy's husband announces the imminent commencement of my act. "THE UNBELIEVABLE! THE INCONCEIVABLE! THE IRRETRIEVABLE! I GIVE YOU... AND NOBODY ELSE WOULD 'AVE 'IM."

A pause for laughter. He lifts his hands. Silence.

"THE DAME OF DANGER! THE MADAMOISELLE OF MADNESS! THE WOMAN OF WONDER! MS. FAIRY LIGHTFOOT!"

Rapturous applause and laughter greet my skipping on to the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs, meine damen und herren," I wink, pursing my lips to look like a bright red heart, courtesy of the pillar box shade of my lipstick, "how lucky you are to have me here!"

Much tittering.

"Tonight, for your optical pleasuring, and let it not be said you've never been pleasured by a fat fairy!"

Hysterical laughter, the women were crying. A man, even fatter than myself, laughed so much that he broke wind loudly, causing more laughter, and he broke wind loudly again. And a vicious circle followed after. The laughter rose in a terrifying crescendo, children began to tremble and clutch their hysterical parents for comfort that would not come. I could see them mouthing the word "mummy", but she would not hear them. I lifted my wand above my head.

"ENOUGH!"

The room fell silent.

"Tonight, I shall perform the death-defying stunt of lowering this fat fairy frame, through a hole in the floor, on to a storage box, nearly two metres below it!"

They gasp!

"Yes, tonight, for your eyes only, never done in a theatre before! You can watch a fat fairy in a tutu and wellies struggle to make it to... wait for it... The Basement!" A louder intake of breath than before.

"And I shall first place down my wand. No, sirs," I shake my head solemnly, "no, madams, there will be no magic here this eve. Magic, they tell us, always leads to trouble."

I wink again, becoming annoyed that one of my false eyelashes has just loosened at the nasal end.

"DO NOT ENDANGER YOURSELF FOR US, GOOD FAIRY!" Shout the audience as one.

"But a girl has to do what a girl has to do," I explain, "have you ever wondered where your good lady goes on Thursday evenings, sir?"

Everybody looks towards the fat man I directed my jest to and laughs heartily with his good lady and himself. Of course, I do not seriously cast aspersions upon the woman, it is merely part of the act. I'm not even a fairy really, only ever *visited* The Green Glade, I don't live there or anything. Did the wellies not give me away? The drum roll snapped my attention back to the matter in hand. I stood at the edge of the missing flooring, itself a metre squared, imperfect, but then so is the body aiming to go through it. I swallowed hard.

"I think I need to go down on one knee," I wink, "that's what I call my husband, he lost a leg in the war!"

A gasp of shock is filled by complete and utter histrionics from my loyal onlookers. I'll bet they didn't see that coming. Neither did I, to be perfectly honest. I knelt on my right knee, beginning to lower my left leg into the gaping chasm below me. That box still looked a very long way down. I pulled the left leg back again, the audience breathed heavily and fanned themselves with their theatrical programmes. I tried kneeling on my left and lowering the right leg instead. What was I thinking? It's not like my leg will stretch and reach the box. I pulled the trailing leg back up again, recomposed myself.

"There you have it, ladies and gentlemen," I said, a dark and macabre timbre to my voice, "can you sense the danger of the task I am performing for you here today? I will not fail you, I promise you. Watch and become bewitched, buggered and bewildered!"

"In for a penny." I think. I hope I only thought, I would not want to have said that out loud and spoilt the atmosphere.

I knelt back onto my left knee. The drummer was shaking his hands in the air. He too recomposed himself and began the roll anew. I started to lower my right leg once more, not noticing the large staple extending from the broken end of floorboard. I heard the rip.

"NOW I'VE TORN THE KNEE OF THE ONLY FUCKING WHITE FISHNETS I'VE GOT, YOU CUNT!" I shouted. I must confess my extreme anger. What's a girl to wear? The audience placed their hands on their hearts and lowered their heads.

"Let us not be beaten by the cunts that run this place," I comforted them, "we will not be defeated, you will experience and share my triumph, Cinderella will go to the ball, Fairy Lightfoot WILL get to the basement... AND CLIMB BACK OUT AGAIN!"

An awkward slip left me grasping for exposed joist. I now had one hand on it, the underside of my other arm on the flooring edge, the remainder of my body hanging through the hole. I wished I could actually look down, but the very idea of moving at this point was quite alien to me. But my public, I cannot let down my public, they watch, they wait. Come on, man, the box is in the right place, you saw to that, you just need to drop. I slipped the wink to the drummer. He began to beat his roll with ever growing intensity.

"SHHIIIIIITTTTTTTTTT"

And there I was, stood on a box, in a basement, all around me dark, the hole in the floor above me, just beyond the reach of my outstretched arms. Heart-stopping moment indeed. How the fuck was I ever going to get out of here? And what were the odds of finding a needle and cotton to sew up the knee of the only pair of jeans I had? I shuffled round in a slow circle, not jumping down from the box. It was a veritable Aladdin's Cave, boxes stacked all round the walls, all looking much newer than those upstairs. Now, if I could just get out again. And this was my leap of faith. I cannot help but believe this is some kind of destiny. I do not know if it is maybe a punishment for something I have done on my world, but I believe what I do here on the Second World will echo back there. Is this my redemption? For this, I must make gargantuan effort. For this, I must believe that those who would teach me this lesson will have allowed me the means to redeem myself. Spurred on by the rapturous applause from my enthralled audience, enveloping me through the hole in the floor above my head, I jumped down from the box into a small circle of torchlight. I directed my torch back to the walls of the basement. Ah, what wonders will be inside those boxes? What joys will be hidden away behind their outer shells. And fuck me sideways, is that not a manhigh step-ladder stood in that far corner? There is a God, there are thousands of them, I thank them all. Oh, this is going to be such a spellbinding end to my act,

and at no more cost than a ripped knee in my white fishnets.

Upstairs, the audience held their breath, clinging to their seats, tense, waiting. As the hand of Fairy Lightfoot appeared through the hole in the floor and its fingers wiggled a wave, the place erupted into pure joyful elation. They jumped to their feet as one, they were chanting my name and banging their feet on the floor as they clapped with such enthusiastic aplomb. I took the first tentative steps on the ladder. Then my head came into their view. A gasp. Silence. I puckered up, blew them a kiss and threw my arms up into the air.

"DA-DA!"

Dorothy's husband began to play climactic seaside favourites on the house organ while the audience jumped up and down, smiles branded on to their faces with a hot iron. I have rarely felt such a sensation of pure pleasure, such rapture. It was as if the woes of the world had been lifted from me in a single moment. As if they had gone back to their own world, as if the life of this world had returned, as if I would soon be back in Kansas. Laugh!? I thought I'd never start. So now I sit here, alone on a planet, my knee poking through my jeans, tears getting in the way of my typing. Elation? I just found a way to get in and out of the fucking basement, okay? I want to go home.

Day 39 - Wednesday 7th December 2016

Depression, the dark curse. Okay, it's not surprising when you consider everything I have been through these last several weeks, the lack of human company et al. But. Oh yes, there is always a "but". But that this does not feel like a stranger to me, is that not a surprise either? The darkness comes with the comfort of a long lost love. She knocks upon your door and waits patiently, knowing you will not be able to resist the act of inviting her across your threshold. She almost smiles as she sees your face, long and drawn, eyes red from the tears of irrational frustration. Almost. But she doesn't. She remains poker-faced, looking straight into those bloodshot eyes, while you get utterly lost in the bottomless voids of the dilated pupils in her own.

"Come in," you say, standing to one side, "you know you are always welcome here."

[&]quot;Mmmn." She need say no more.

[&]quot;May I take your coat?"

She nods slowly, removing her cloak seductively.

"Thank you." Her voice brings back floods of memories, makes you want to sob again, but the most emotion you can raise is that which is required to stare blankly into space.

She sits opposite you, not once removing her eyes from yours. She shakes her head, knowingly. You move to touch her hand, seeking the smallest part of comfort from the experience. She withdraws it, frowns and shakes her head.

"No, the comfort *is* the experience." She whispers enigmatically, knowing that *you* know exactly what she means.

And it continues. You sit together. In silence. In close proximity. Quite alone. And you think of every dark day you have ever lived. You think of everybody you have loved and lost. Oh, the fools; they say it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all!? Oh no, that is not the truth at all. It can't be. It is devastating. When you give your heart to somebody so completely, entwine your life with theirs, fastening each aspect of the ribbon that binds you with knots you do not believe it humanly possible to unfasten. With her, the ground was solid. When she was no longer there, the ground became soft and I sank into it. At first, I simply could not move my feet, I could not leave the site of my torment. Soon, I could only move my arms and would raise them in despair, skyward, as if seeking angels. Then, finally, I would sink so far into the ground that only my head remained above it, so I could recount my pain to eternity. Until I sank beyond trace. And the dirt filled my mouth and my lungs. And I would suffocate. But I would still live. And for all that, the fools are right; could I truly imagine if I had never loved her?

I lift my head, my dark friend is still there, gazing down at her own knees, modestly hidden under her long black dress. She senses the tear my memories have caused. She nods knowingly. I cannot even put a face to this love I lost, if she ever truly existed at all, but the pain is no less real. Somewhere in my past, in my before-life, there was much of this, I am sure.

[&]quot;Yes." She whispers.

[&]quot;I have not talked to anyone, save you," I tell her, "for many a week. I am alone." "I know," she acknowledged coldly, "but it is not for me to offer you company. I come unwanted. Always."

[&]quot;But," I pause, she looks up, curiously, "I want you."

She tilted her head slightly to the left, blinked her eyes in slow motion.

"I could not imagine my life without you." I sat back in my armchair, talking as much with my hands as my lips, "Even in my childhood, I can remember your visits. How you would sit and watch me struggle with the traumas of emergence, how you would always grace my crises with your presence."

"How could I forget?" I assured, "Even when they drugged me for years, you stood by me. Maybe you did not stay as long, maybe your visits were not so intense, but you never forgot me. You are a friend I can rely on. "I will stay."

Should I still feel this way in the morning, I will turn over on my cardboard bed and return to the world of the soporific. If I do not, I plan to explore the basement. Yesterday was all about finding if it were possible to get down there and back out again. Perhaps I should count my blessings, what would I have done if I could not? Should I have learned to fly? Today is all about darkness. I have sat and dwelt in my own self pity the whole day. I have done nothing. I have not eaten. I have produced nothing. I have reasoned nothing. I have achieved nothing. I am nothing. I have sat and stared at a piece of rubble. Not for seeking any great meaning in it; it is of atoms and star stuff, such as we all. Not for conversation; it is inanimate, it is made of cold, hard, lifeless stuff, such as we all. Not for any reason, save that it was in my eye-line. One would think that yesterday, an achievement in itself, would have spurred me on to greater things, no? You wouldn't? Then you, my friend, have the perceptive ability to recognise a fool when you see one.

Day 41 - Friday 9th December 2016

"You do?"

Morning. I shall omit the "good" for reasons that will not be unknown to you. It's the frustration, isn't it? The complete and utter powerlessness to change your predicament. The realisation that you are as nothing to the sheer scale of all that there is. I am a bug on the arses of gods; at best, I might be able to tickle them; more likely, I will be sat upon without them ever knowing I was here. One moment I am all mighty plans, the next I have crumbled into the depths of hopelessness. I mean, what's the great plan here? Do I design a great notebook, carefully made with neatly lined columns and headings? Do I sit in my hide, watch them for night after night, fill in forms, tick boxes and catalogue them to

death? Why do I draw so much more satisfaction from developing systems to enhance projects than actually undertaking the execution of them? Yes, I have come up with a lovely book, lovingly constructed from the remains of the slightly damp notepad I found. Well, I didn't want to spend yesterday as I had the day before, staring at nothingness for its own sake. I am not now certain how I feel about my achievement. I am in agreement with myself that I need something to record what I observe. But how much information is too much information? Clearly, although the temptation of creating a delightfully cross-referencing series of spreadsheets on this device is a heavy burden, I cannot spy on them through a piece of glass that will allow the light of its monitor screen to be visible from the outside. Easier to have a paper based recording system. When I observe something of value, I simply switch on the torch, low down, hidden from alien gaze, make a quick note, and continue my watching.

Fuck you, laughing at yourself. You are the only friend you have and you can't even get along with that one. It **IS** the frustration, isn't it? Living a life that you have not chosen, that you do not want, that you would never have agreed to, had you been made fully aware of the circumstances. Powerless to change it. "That's it, honey!" You can shout, if you think it will help, "I'm leaving and I'm taking the kids!"

"Wha...?" She will exclaim, quite oblivious to your plight.

"I've had enough, I just can't take this any more. My life is a cellar, a derelict building and a walk in the woods. All I have to look forward to is exploring the basement. 364 days of mundane soul-destroying sameness, looking forward to Christmas"

"But," she pauses, shakes her head, "I didn't know."

"Didn't know!?"

"Most men would give their right arm for a cellar and derelict building, especially with such beautiful walking country around them. What makes you so special, why do you want more?"

"And what about them?" I asked, knowingly, raising my eyes skyward.

"We all have our limits, Sati. And if you leave, where will you go? Do you think the grass is any greener beyond the bank on the other side of the waterway?"

"I need more than this, I'm sorry if you think that is wrong, but surely it is what defines us? My instincts drive me to breathe, sleep and fuel my body. But I am more than instinct. I ask questions. I ask how I came to be in the cellar? I ask who

put me there? I ask what is my purpose in being here?"

"Questions," she said, "are a burden to others, answers a prison to oneself."

"I've heard that said, but not as truth, do you miss the irony of it, my dear?"

"Then go, Sati, take the children," she spoke coldly, I suspected emotional blackmail would not be far away, "take them and hear their screams for their mother every yard you walk, hear their pleas to return to the security of the life they know. Or we can all stay together here. Where we are safe."

She speaks as if she is one of them. Is this what they want? They want me to stay here? My God, are they studying me? Is that what I am, a fucking lab rat?

"But that, my sweet heart," and I calculatedly ensure eye contact as I deliver the line, "that would be mere existence. It is not enough for a man to live, to breed and die. What on Earth would be the point of that? If we want for nothing, we will seek for nothing, and nothing is what we will find. Stagnation. As frightening as it may be, and I confess it scares the shit out of me, change is a necessary engine. Without it, we are just suspended in oblivion. We need to progress, we need to strive, to learn, to improve. We know of no greater purpose, the gods have not come and spoken to us in terms and methods that have not caused millennia of doubt and argument, and man without purpose is nothing, so we must create our own. We can be certain of nothing, so the goal is ours to create. You see the sky up there?"

"Sky?" She raises her head.

"That is just the beginning. They are a symbolic obstacle to be overcome, and who knows what we may learn in doing so. Does that challenge not fill with you with the wonder of life?"

She shrugs.

"They are a barrier, but once crossed," the words make me happy, I almost feel I could sing, almost, "there is forever."

"Would you not rather have a wank?"

"What?" I look around, there is nobody, I am alone in The Base, sat on a crate, writing my journal entry on a netbook.

"And that's exactly my point. You're a man, you're all alone, you can do whatever you like! Feck the aliens, crack one off!"

Has it come to this? Am I so alone I now invent a little red devil to sit on my shoulder and shout nihilistic suggestions in my ear. In an Irish accent? What the fuck?

"Oh, come on, there's nothing nihilistic about a good wank."

Oh, that we had control of our own brains, that we did not need to argue endlessly with ourselves. While understanding its necessity, the fact one half of my brain seems to work against my wider interest infuriates me. You wake to the day with an aim, you know what you wish to do. No, you know what you need to do.

"Then you end up having a wank instead, hah! Go on, get the little feller out, go on."

Shouldn't there be a counter to my satanic leprechaun? Shouldn't I have a little harp plucking angel on the other shoulder telling me I'll go blind?

"Ah, you don't want to be listening to that daft fecker, you give the little feller a good shuffle, go on, ya should be flying by now."

Any more than I want to be listening to you, you sick little mythical shit.

"Well said, sir!" A pompous voice now, so irritatingly self-righteous that you could slap its face without ever having seen it.

"And you can feck roit off, ya feckin' lickspittle!"

Am I sure I shouldn't be on medication for this?

"Oh, you don't want to be taking any of that stuff, that'll stop ya cracking one off altogether, go all floppy on ya it will."

"Pleasures of the flesh, hmmph," grunted Seamus O'Nick's angelic counterpart, "quite disgusting you should even be considering it, shame on you."

Why don't you fuck off, you pompous little twat?

"Oh, I feckin' loike that, I do, I loike you. Ha, you're alright. But you're a cont."

"You foul mouthed goblin of the underworld!" Exclaimed Cherubis Nauseas, "Here, listen instead to some soothing harp music from the heavens."

"Stick your feckin' harp up your arse. Where are ya going? Ya can't leave me and this feckin' eejit hovering in air, we're supposed to be on your shoulders, you know, loike representing your conscience an' all."

But I did just that, I walked away. Yes, paste tense. That was several hours ago. I am heading through the woodlands now, fully laden, due north west, not expecting to be returning for several days. Sincerely hoping my imaginary friends will have gone by then. Assuming they were just my imagination. It has occurred to me, on more than just one occasion, that *they* might have the ability to get into my head, even from that great height. This whole place seems at times so counterintuitive, it leads you to question anything and everything. If I ask myself a question now, I find myself asking myself why I asked it. I need this... um... 'mission'. Hark at me, Sati Varg, Secret Agent, da da DA!

"They are here! Sati Varg has seen them!"

But he hasn't, has he? Just an occasional glimpse of those strange metallic craft hovering high up in our atmosphere. Just an unidentifiable streak of light in a strangely blacked out sky, burning out of sight behind a tree line. Just the constant sound of that droning hum. I'm not going to win any court cases, am I? But I am very conscious that my thinking processes don't seem as I would expect them to be. I grant you, I don't have a comparative history, but I think I'm getting to know myself now, and I don't think I am who I'm supposed to be. Does that make sense? Probably not. It does inside my head, I promise you, perfect sense. Depression, self-doubt, self-delusion, self-conflict. Does that sound like a normal person to you? I wish I could hear your answer, what I would give for the ability to cross-reference. I stopped typing briefly, looked down at the ground and felt a compulsive need to move a twig that didn't point the direction I felt it should. Right. Well, I think I've exorcised my demons for now, I need to continue to the hide. get w e 11 bedded i n before nightfall. "Ah, ya fecker, did ya crack one off or not?"

Oh, come on, Seamus, a gentleman would never kiss and tell.

Day 42 - Saturday 10th December 2016

42? Wasn't the answer to an important question somewhere? Something about life, the universe and everything? I think that rather sums up my work here. God, I hadn't realised how small this hide was until I spent my first night in it. As a working space, it's not unreasonable. I spent several hours watching them yesterday. It's... shall we say; 'practical'? Yes, that should do. A bit hard on the knees. I ended up taking my coat off to form a pad for me to kneel on. It's not that the soil is hard or anything, very soft, but when you kneel for hours on end, your body tends to remind you how many years it's been around. So, what do they get up to in daylight hours? Nothing. They in the sky; nothing. They on the ground; nothing. So I'm trying to rebalance my sleep a little, give me the chance to do some observation at night as well. It was twilight when I saw the light, heard that God awful noise. It'll be dark in half an hour. Then it'll be time to power this thing down and open the curtains, binoculars and camera at the ready. I don't know how long I'll be able to stay awake, I don't even know what periods they are likely to be active for. Perhaps if I could figure out what they were doing here, it would provide some clues as to when they might do it? I can't help but feel I'm chasing my own tail here, then who else is there to take up the good fight? I don't even know what form the fight should take yet. Violence? One against thousands? Oh yes, come and have a go if you think you're hard enough. Olive branch? Never works out that well in the movies. But this isn't the movies, this is real life. Those aren't actors in rubber suits the other side of that tree line, it's not a scale plastic model that came down like a fireball from the sky. Those are real bona fide extra-terrestrials, that's a real spacecraft. The ray guns won't be kids' toys, they'll be shooting some genuine green ray shit. What the fuck am I doing? Does someone want to check my head for me?

I can't see anything outside at the moment, curtains still closed, this device has to be off first, the light would show quite clearly through the glass otherwise. And I do **not** want to be advertising my presence. I can hear though. I have suspected for a week or so that the volume of the sky-hum has been getting gradually louder. I think I am now convinced of that. I used to be able to filter it out if I was concentrating on something, that isn't so any more. It's there always now. It's coming, I can sense it. My skin is tingling, there is like a light in my head that this is triggering, a sense of alarm. Oh yes, it's coming. I only wish I knew what. The timbre hasn't changed, the pitch hasn't changed, just the volume. In the dark grey light of day, they are still largely invisible, it's not like they've dropped any lower in the atmosphere. Except for our unwelcome guest, merely a track, field and tree line over yonder, of course. They work on the strangest timescale. It is almost like this world runs on slow motion, like they are looking down and observing only hours passing, while I here, looking up at them, experience the same as weeks. The only thing I like about that hum is its distance. Though, if truth be told, I am not sure how comfortable I would be with the absolute silence that would pervade in their absence. There is something quite alien, no pun intended, about silence. It only comes about with the absence of things, it is representative of nothingness. Death, oblivion, they are all silent. Fuck, I didn't like the sound of that, got to go.

Day 43 - Sunday 11th December 2016

Report for hours of darkness, Saturday - Sunday

Filed by Sati Varg at 10:18

15.51

Status - curtains closed

Occurrence - extremely loud clicking noise, two bursts of

Action - I was in the process of making yesterday's journal entry at the time of the noise. As a matter of precaution, I powered down this device and prepared for a period of silent aural observation.

Hold on, I need some water. Got to the point where I'm scared to drink too much at night because I don't want to leave the hide to urinate. The gods curse me with age, my bladder never seems to survive a whole night without calling for the bucket. No bucket here. And I refuse to soil myself. I may be alone on this world, but when we give up some basic standards of decency, we must wonder why we believe our survival important in the first place. What benefit to *the great all* would there be in a species ready to soil itself when the going gets tough? I think not. Water.

Okay, better. Made myself a nice cup of coffee, put a liner in the food caddy, another in the utility bin, wiped down the kitchen island worktop, cleaned last night's dinner tray and put it away. The breakfast things; did I remember to tidy the breakfast things? Yes, all done. Why are there breakfast things for three when I am alone? Of course, none of it is real. I like to imagine doing 'normal things', keeps me connected to the real world. Normal. Now there is a charged word if ever I heard one. What is the most 'normal thing' I would love to get my hands on right now? Oh, a pair of nail scissors to trim this awful moustache that insists on penetrating my lips whenever the notion should take its fancy. And the forests growing out of my ears. My face is covered in that unpleasantly coarse hair that grows on us now. How long have I been here? Six weeks is it? That's what... half an inch a month, I believe hair grows. Three quarters of an inch then? Where's a rule when you need one? And it would probably be a damnable millimetres if I could find one. Come on, enough digression, you were writing a report.

[&]quot;I was, sir!"

[&]quot;Carry on, you 'orrible little man."

Action (continued) - I remained completely motionless for some 30 minutes, making a notation mark on my chart for each period of 15 minutes that elapsed without incident. I made the decision to open the curtains circa 16:30 to make first visual observations this evening.

16:29

Status - curtains closed

Occurrence - close external sound

Action - I closed my eyes to better interpret the sounds I was hearing. I would take them to be footsteps, possibly one hundred metres or so from the hide. They were light steps in comparison to my own. I believe it safe to assume they are much smaller than us. I would say the footsteps sound like that of a small child walking in the woodlands. It seemed unwise to open the curtains to try to get a look at the creature, the moving of the rods is not silent and there would also be the added visual disturbance. I must not mistake their diminutive size as a mark of weakness, it is impossible to know what abilities they may possess. They certainly do not lack courage, there is clearly only one of them, walking alone on a strange planet in darkness.

It was at this point that an unfortunate thought had occurred to me; what if it had just popped out of the saucer for a piss? Who knows how or why such ridiculous notions get inside your head, but there it was. Like one of those irritating 'earworm' songs we all hate with a vengeance. They get in between your ears and keep going round in a loop, driving you to despair. You would think we would have adequate control over our own minds, so as to ensure we did not have to spend hours listening to a song we loathed, wouldn't you? The joys of human existence, our creators must be so proud. And this idea of a little green man nipping out of the saucer to relieve himself. Picture the scene, my friend; I am hiding silently in a ditch, desperate to avoid detection; outside is a member of an alien species, not more than one hundred metres from my location; if it discovers my presence, I am a dead man. Is that the time to get the giggles? I would argue that whoever designed our brains made a fatal flaw there. Sat there in fear of the end of my days, I was biting my lip at the mental image of a little green willy watering a tree! There were tears streaming down my face, and I could hear it coming closer. The strange duality of emotion that one experiences at a time like that is extremely interesting; on the one hand, I am absolutely terrified as it grew

ever nearer my location; on the other, I am struggling to hold in an enormous belly-laugh and the urge to roll from side to side in my ditch, banging the soil. By the fact I am still here to report the matter, you will be able to make an accurate assumption of which instinct won the day. But is it not curious? As if there is something deep-seated in our nature that would constitute a denial of fear? The psychopath with the chainsaw is chasing you through the woods, your heart pounds, you struggle for breath, you turn to him; "Okay, cut, take five."

Report this, report that, status? Oh, for fuck's sake, you're the perfect clerk, Varg. Work for the company for fifty years, here's your gold watch, well, gold-plated, now fuck off.

"Thank you, master," you bow, "may I go home and die now?"

"Not till you finish your shift, shirker!"

Fuck 'report'. The footsteps must have gone on for ten, maybe fifteen minutes. I'm only guessing, I wouldn't have dared use the torch to check precisely once it was close. Obviously, I've not been able to stand outside the hide in the dark while I was inside using the torch. Can't be in two places at once. Where's an electron when you need one? No, I'm not prepared to trust some random roots and dirt to be 101% light-proof. It seemed like the damned creature was circling my position for ages, but that's the old 'time is relative' thing, isn't it? If you leap from the top of a mountain, everything falls into slow motion; if you get yourself a large block of marzipan, it goes in comparative seconds. I miss marzipan. And don't understand why the laws of physics should be so prejudicial against it. Anyway, as I was saying before I drifted off... fuck, I do that quite a lot, don't I? Is this who I am in the First World? A man that has the concentrationary ability of a marshmallow? I can't believe my brain would normally be like this, they must be doing something to it. Maybe their ships, you know, the sky flotilla, maybe they bombard the planet with some mind-bending rays. Maybe that's how they conquer worlds? It makes sense, no? Think about it; there's an irrationality in attacking an enemy's world. If you lay the whole damned place desolate, what is there to conquer? You wouldn't bomb something to rubble and then say; "You see all this rubble, son? One day, it will all be yours." Senseless. Now, if you could just turn your enemies into idiots, leave everything they have standing, that would be a protrusion in the pants of every tyrannical megalomaniac in the known universe, wouldn't it? Just reduce us to confused old men who wouldn't know

what day it was if they didn't have some electronic device to tell them. Walk on in, take what you want.

Yeah, the night; I left it a good hour after I had last heard the footsteps, then cautiously opened the curtains. The right hand rod chooses this moment to catch on something, which I fully plan to get out there and check now it's daylight again, but I could have cursed it last night. After eternal minutes of fiddling, wiggling it from side to side, the damned thing finally gave way and lifted the net veil, but not without causing the snap of a twig and dislodging of a stone. Silence again. Nothing. It had gone. In terms of observation, I could see a light glowing out above the tree line over at the landing site. Not just of static illumination, there was movement there too. Smaller, brighter lights, they appeared to hover over the site, making slight movements every so often. Nothing from ground to sky or sky to ground. In fact, nothing from the sky at all. Just the noise. I can see a part of the sky above the landing site from here, but not much. That wasn't my main concern in selecting the site of the hide, that was to be able to watch the area of grounding itself. Nothing to see up there anyway, not like they ever break formation, just sit there, above the cloud, which I am positive they generate for camouflage. Then maybe give us the odd glimpse. Busily hiding themselves from this world's population of one. One that I rather hope they don't know is here. If this is my world, I'm fucked. If it's not, how the fuck do I get off it?

And that was the night. A glow, a few smaller moving lights, the occasional metallic clanking sound. Like they are building something over there? Not sure. I kept watch till about three in the morning, after which I was struggling to keep my eyes open. I plan to get my head down for a couple of hours this afternoon, try to make it a bit easier on myself for tonight. Actually, it's probably better if I do sleep more in the day. Reasoning thus; they don't seem to move around in daylight at all. Okay, so I wouldn't necessarily see a light in the daytime, however dull the days may be, but I don't hear anything while it's light either. Night time, that's when they seem to become active. I wonder if they come from a world with an older duller sun? Maybe that's the attraction with our world, a relatively younger sun, maybe theirs is nearing the end of its viable life and they want to get well clear before it goes nova and fries them all. Don't mind us, just call the exterminator, he'll put something down to get rid of us for you, no worries. So anyway, sleeping at night, if that's when they are moving around, that's

dangerous. Sleeping is when you have no control over yourself. I snore. I know I snore. It must be loud too, I wake myself sometimes, God alone knows what it must sound like to anything awake out there. I don't think I'd like to be awoken by some little green bastard with a ray gun in my face.

"You die now, hoo-man, I hear your snore!"

ZZZZZZZZZI! GAME OVER

No, I fancy being a little more savvy then that, at least until I can find a sound-proofed ditch. Well, I can't sit here chewing the fat with you all day, the fate of this planet lies in my hands. And I need to take a shit. Yeah, I know, thanks for sharing.

Evening 19:50

Just woken up from a few hours of beauty sleep (it's not working, planning to sue). Time now to put in a few more hours of observation. The metallic noises have already started, quite low-pitched 'guttural' sounds. If one had to associate an emotion with an unknown noise source, I would assign this one to dread. I don't know what it is about it, just makes me uneasy. It's always accompanied by the smaller lights that seem to hover above the tree line, slow moving objects, whatever they may be. The thought has crossed my mind that moving in closer would be wise, but I will need to be cautious if one of them is straying over this way, I really don't want to risk being seen. I think the hide is about as close as I can reasonably get, the woodland edge and track begin to veer away from the landing site only two to three hundred metres further on, so I would be moving further away again. I remember seeing an advertisement for a camera that could zoom all the way in to see craters on the lunar landscape, what I would give for one of them now. That and night-vision goggles. Mind you, who knows what will prove to be in the basement, The Base has been uncannily excellent at predicting my needs so far. My latest train of thought on this is that I may not necessarily have been placed there hastily for safety. It seemed rational at first, a small amount of supplies, a hastily scribbled 'pocket' on a file cabinet drawer insert. But I can't help but wonder further. Virtually everything I have opened / unpacked has contained something else useful. It all seems just that little too convenient,

almost deliberate. I am starting to believe that something deeper may be going on, think 'mouse in a maze'. What if this whole thing is some kind of experiment? Place a human on a recently deserted world, several miles from anywhere, give him basic supplies, sit in the sky and watch him. Maybe crash something a few miles from where you've based him, play with the lights a bit, see what happens, see what he will do. Intriguing notion, isn't it? But what would be the point of that though? If these are intelligent beings, and you don't get to travel across countless lightyears of space otherwise, there would need to be a purpose. Or would there? Are our species not guilty of merely doing things because they can? We, I believe, are space-faring. I take as evidence the knowledge of space travel I seem to possess, I doubt I would have that if I came from a race that lived in mud huts. Why should they be different? One would suspect them to be superior. But would a superior species invade and destroy an inferior one? Would they know that would necessarily be the outcome of any contact with us regardless? What would I be doing if I had placed one of them on a familiar, yet deserted planet? What possible reason could I have for noting their reactions? But then, are they actually playing me in any way? Apart from whatever it is that landed over there and the footsteps, they've just hovered up there, just out of sight above the clouds. And got subtly louder. Gradually. At the sort of gradient you wouldn't generally notice. If you put your fingers into water over a fire, it starts cold, then gradually gets warmer. You probably wouldn't notice too much until it began to get actually hot, then you may need to withdraw said digits rather rapidly. It was like that with the noise, it's only because I observed a comparative difference in its level one day that I realised it had changed at all. Now, I am constantly 'aware'. They are noisy tonight. Not the sky they, the grounded they, much activity, by the sound of things. I should get to work, begin to note the pattern of light movement. It is my hope that studying the pattern of movement will provide insight into what they are doing there. Whatever it is, I cannot help but feel it something bad. If you can think of a good and positive reason why they would eliminate the natural inhabitants of a world, then land and start building something... well, answers on a postcard, you may offer me some hope. I won't hold my breath, I haven't seen a postman. The bootprints I saw... whenever that was... weeks ago? They were bigger than the alien's footsteps sounded. That creature's footfall was soft and light, certainly didn't sound like boots. Rather more delicate. Am I not the only human here then? That was only three miles or so from here, if there was somebody else around, might they not also know about me? Conjecture is not always such a helpful thing. I have a million and one versions of the truth rolling around in my head. At best, only one of them can be accurate. I can be reasonably certain that I exist. And frankly, any further thought exercise, if I did not, would be utterly without purpose. I know they are up there. I know something landed just over yonder. I know I have not seen any living thing since I have been here. I know something was walking around outside last night. That doesn't really tell you much of anything, does it? There's almost a part of me that wants to hear movement upstairs, wants to hear a descent, wants the absolute certainty. You never know, tonight could be my lucky night.

Day 44 - Monday 12th December 2016

Observation notes from Sunday evening / Monday morning;

20:37 - the glow appears above the grounding site, I have been watching for 15-20 minutes.

I had only woken up around twenty-five to eight yesterday evening and had not so much as glanced outside prior to the official start of my observation. I pulled the rods to expose the window circa 8:15-20, it was completely dark. If there was a visible moon, it was obviously buried by dense cloud. Then at 8:37 (by my wristwatch), the lights went on. Quite suddenly, the 'overglow' appeared above the landing site. I am not sure of the nature of the lighting, it has a strange greenish tinge to it, I think. I don't know; there is not much in the way of colour information at night anyway, add in to that the fact I am colourblind, I am at a loss to explain why I hold such a conviction. But I do. Greenish, positive. Not bright, just a subtle hint of it. Overall, the lighting has a vaguely fluorescent appearance. Obviously, I cannot see its source, merely its effect. And it does not cast light on anything, it is merely present behind the tree line. My assumption that they may only be active in darkness naturally becomes open to question, they would already have missed several hours of it. Having said that, so did I. Perhaps I should not read anything of significance into this as yet. Further observation required.

20:53 - intensity of glow increases

Would this be in conjunction with a power boost? There had, at this point, been no

accompanying noise, the 'guttural' sounds I had heard an hour earlier having ceased approximately when I opened the curtains, purely the light going on, then its increasing in brightness. It did not look like more lighting had been engaged, the effect was far closer to the turning up of a dimmer control. I have no clear thesis at present.

22:47 - hover light appears above left side of grounding area, metallic 'impact' sound accompanies, apparently in synch

This was the first sound of the session. And, had there been any sound out there prior to my commencing observations, it had obviously not woken me up. There had been some noise between 7:45 and 8:15ish, but as I have said, that stopped around the time I opened up. So that amounts to some two and a half hours of lit silence, following half an hour of some kind of work in the dark. Bizarre species. Having said that, I can think of a lot of animal species with far superior night vision than our own. I find this odd; I have so much apparent knowledge of things that I can recall no evidential backing for. To the best of my knowledge, I do not remember ever seeing an animal, but I know what a vast number of them look like and appear to know something of how they live. Including this information about night vision. I find, personally, when it becomes dark here, with its lack of star or moonlight, my eyes become effectively useless. I flatter myself that if I wiggle my fingers inches in front of my eyes, I can actually 'see' them, but I believe it more likely this is other sensory input. Or pure imagination. I see what I want to see. Maybe they have good night vision? Then why would they need the light? Why not just continue working in the dark, effectively invisible to any remaining indigenous survivors? Every answer raises more questions. But the more I watch, the more I hope to learn.

00:12 - three further hover lights appear simultaneously

There were now four active objects giving off light and moving around above the landing site. The movement did not give the clear impression of being mechanical. Were it a machine, I would expect the movements to be more deliberate and precise. I observed one of the hover lights start to move from the right side of the site towards the left, pause briefly, return to its starting point, then recommence its journey left, this time to completion. This was not part of any

repeating pattern. In fact, none of the light sources appeared to show any discernible pattern of movement. I only saw the one appear to return for something it had forgotten though. Maybe I am placing human behaviour onto something alien and incomprehensible to us. These are just my thoughts. I learn more by re-reading them, so they have value, however questionable their accuracy. All reality and experience is truth to the subject.

03:15 - the four hover lights have aligned to form a diagonal line, approximately 30 degrees from the horizontal plane, running from high on the left side of the landing site to lower on its right

For a little over two hours, they remained that way. The alignment was perfect, seeming wholly deliberate, rather than a coincidence of angle or just a close approximation. When whatever this action constituted had run its course, they all appeared to rotate several times and then vanish, leaving only the glow. It's hard to be accurate about whether or not the movement was genuinely rotation, but that was certainly the impression I formed from watching them. To this point, I could not make even the wildest guess as to what they are or might be doing. This really is annoying the living hell out of me, I'd expected to be able to make much more sense of it than this.

05:24 - hover lights appeared to rotate several times, then powered off

I think I covered that commenting on the previous entry.

07:00 - no change, lighting remains on, no activity seen in last 90 minutes, ceasing observation

After which, I crowned a relatively fruitless night shift with a bottle of fruit juice, convenient to urinate in afterwards, and settled down to sleep. I was awoken, must have been five-ish, the footsteps again. I don't remember what time they were last time. To be honest, days are blurring. I forget what day of the week it is, only have two concepts of time, e.g. dark / light. It's only when I actually look for this information that it comes back to mind. One day seems to run into another. It's not like any differ. Footsteps, I was telling you about the footsteps, wasn't I? They seemed to circle again, doubling back on themselves, walking away a bit, towards

for a bit, but never really going anywhere. Light again, small, childlike. I'm repeating myself. Small species of ET, clearly. This must have gone on for a couple of hours, I'm really blind in there if I can't use any kind of light. It's different for logging occurrences; I have a small torch, keep it well below the glass level, right down by the ground, on just long enough to see the time and make a quick note down there. But if there are sounds outside, close, well... there's no way on Earth I'm going to take that risk. Well, it'd been all quiet out there for at least half an hour, so I thought I'd get last night's obs typed up and get ready for another shift of watching. I hope to fuck I learn more than I did last night. Give it a couple more, then I think I'll need a break for a bit, head back to The Base for some R&R. Wish me luck

Day 45 - Tuesday 13th December 2016

Observation notes from Monday evening to Tuesday morning;

19:48 - grounding site illuminations go on

Earlier than last night, I think.

21:02 - several hover lights appear simultaneously above the site

This was definitely more than I have ever seen before. I didn't make a note of an actual number, I don't think I was sure, but it seemed to be six or seven. They appear fairly small from here, though distinct enough to be seen clearly. I am beginning to think that chancing a photograph may prove worthwhile. The problem is that there is no surrounding light, so I wonder how useful the photographs may prove in positive identification of the light source.

00:20 - lights begin to move in circular (?) motion

This is an interpretation of what I saw. Observing several small moving lights from approximately a kilometre away, it is difficult to be sure of the actual nature of movement. I went through several hypotheses during the observation of this phenomenon. Once I had postulated the idea that they were moving in a small 'orbital' pattern at the outer edges of the grounding site, I could no longer see

them in any other way. From my angle, both sides of the circle / ellipse were almost on the same vertical plane.

00:36 - one light moves centrally above others, approx same height above them as the others are above the tree line

00:42 - light drops back into orbital formation

00:59 - another (?) rises to the same position as the first

01:05 - light drops back into orbital formation

01:23 - ditto (?)

01:29 - ditto

01:54 - ditto (?)

02:00 - ditto

This was a curious period, going on as it did for some ninety minutes. Were I a neutral observer, I may have thought this to be some manner of performance art, like a mechanical aerial dance. I am, however, far from neutral and remain convinced of a sinister intent

02:29 - hover lights move off slowly north west in apparent linear formation

This was disconcerting. The clear impression I got from their movements was that they were conducting a search. I have began to wonder if they may have seen something over that way. Accessing the area would be difficult for me, the landing site being right between us and there being much open ground that would need to be covered. I could possibly make the journey during the daylight hours when they do not normally move, but I am bothered by the thought of having to spend a night that side in the open. My hide is far from perfect, but I do feel relatively safe in it. This 'search' went on for more than four hours before I realised I would have to sleep. It is not physically tiring to be here, I do get out and walk about a bit

during the day, but it is emotionally and spiritually exhausting. I feel like I could sleep for a month. But, if anything, I am starting to move in the other direction, suffering with periodic insomnia. I am going to spend one more night here, then return to The Base. Maybe just for a single day, pick up some more supplies, but I feel like I need a break, however short. I feel like I am being watched. Constantly. It's ridiculous. If they knew I was here, they would simply pull the cover off the top of the hide and kill me. Or worse, but I do not wish to dwell on that prospect. The footsteps I have heard, they are clearly walking, if such a term is appropriate to their species, around this area. They have not stumbled upon me. Well, you would have to step ON the hide for that to happen, and you would not do that as it is not the most obvious path.

I wish I could better explain the manifold thought processes entertaining my head at the moment, but my mind seems continually fogged, I am finding concentration difficult. When I wake up, I am seldom convinced that I have slept the number of hours my watch tells me I have. There have been no further blackouts as far as I am aware, but I fear little or nothing would surprise me in this accursed place. Sometimes the pent up anger really burns; I could burst from my hiding place at the first sign of footsteps, torture the little fuck into telling me what I want to know. At other times, I wonder if they truly are our enemy. I possess only one part of the story, my own, little of which makes any real sense. Life is, I believe, not lived in the extremes of dark and light, rather experienced in the manifold shades of grey between. It is too easy to interpret a situation as extreme as this to be dark or light, but life is rarely so simple. I've been out walking in the woodlands this afternoon. In all honesty, looking across to the landing site in daylight, you would not know anything was there, no signs of the onset of an alien invasion scar the landscape, it is as rural a scene as any you may find in this area. If not for the continual drone from those still sky-bound, for the occasional glimpses I have had of their craft, I would doubt my conclusions with extreme prejudice. I would simply think myself the victim of an accident, a case of amnesia, and find far more plausible explanation for the phenomena I have witnessed. I need to eat. Same time tomorrow then. But first, a word from our sponsors...

Day 46 - Wednesday 14th December 2016

Notes from last night's watch;

19:01 - the lights go on

I refer to the illumination of the landing area, all sources for which are underneath the visible tree line, hence I just see it as a rising glow.

19:43 - three hover lights appear

I do not now recall why I did not add more detail at the time, but do remember quite clearly that they immediately began to rise up to a considerable height (I am not a good judge, but would think several hundred metres) over a period of twenty seconds or so. They remained at the apex for a few minutes, before beginning their descent again at approximately the same speed. This pattern repeated without interruption until;

21:03 - three more hover lights appear behind the others

I am one hundred percent certain they were behind as they appeared slightly smaller and, when they began to join in the rise and fall pattern, the distance for them top to bottom was shorter than for the others, though they remained in perfect synch with them.

21:03 - white noise blasts

My watch does not have a second hand, or indeed any numbers, but I would guess the two entries for that same time could have no more than a +/- two minute error margin. I doubt if there was an entire minute between them. This was just the beginning of the noise. The blasts came in regular pulses, more or less in line with the rising half of the crafts' motions. It reminded me of the white noise generated by analogue synthesizers, or de-tuned television sets in the days before digital services took over, that ultra nostalgic remnant memory of the creation of the universe. And they were loud. This wasn't the gently relaxing sound-blocking type of white noise, these were industrial strength blasts of it. I'm glad to back at

The Base for tonight. But I have another tale first. One thing at a time, I do not want to lose my thread.

23:53 - synch broken

The two lines of rising and falling hover lights / small craft were no longer performing this function / ritual at precisely the same time. I had not been aware of them gradually going out of synch, but as I looked up this time, they were something approximating half the duration of the movement up or down out with each other. I confess, I do not and cannot look constantly, I simply have to avert my eyes every so often. The pattern of movement of the lights is positively hypnotic, especially in tandem with the bursts of noise.

00:18 - hover lights, all of, break away to the south west

As with the previous night, this resembled a search pattern. My original thought had been that someone was hiding the opposite side of the site from myself, now I wonder. The thought has occurred to me that they know somebody is out here, but do not yet know where I am. If the search was north west the previous night and south west last night / early hours of this morning, I was rather pleased that I would not be here this night. If they were sweeping in a counter-clockwise direction, south east would be the next, and that would lead them right to my hide. Should they discover it, I would rather not be there when they do. I watched for a couple of hours, but moving to the south west, they were soon out of the sight-line of my hide window. Only occasionally would one come back into my view, dropping briefly above the landing site, as if to report back to it. Not a comfortable experience knowing several alien craft are a few hundred metres above you, but you are completely unable to see them. They seem to fly silently too. Maybe the main armada above the clouds does also, maybe the hum is purely generated when they hover. Who knows what kind of power their civilisation has discovered, they could have tapped in to the energy of the universe itself, genuine God-power, unleaded.

04:26 - lights out

The main lighting at the landing site went off without the craft returning. Possibly

one, I am not sure. Fool that I am, I looked away, merely for a few seconds, after I had seen it return to 'report in'. When I looked back, it was no longer there. But, whether it had moved away again or landed, who knows? I watched until sunrise, somewhere around a quarter past eight, no further activity, no further return of craft. Again, whether this was due to their being virtually invisible in daylight or that they genuinely did not return, I have no idea. I left 'the curtains' open for a while, had a carton of fruit juice and some manner of wafer biscuits for breakfast, looking out as the sky turned from black to grey. With daylight as established as it gets in these parts. I packed my things away and prepared for the journey home. I wasn't tired as yet, thought the walk would be a pleasant way to make it happen. No sooner had I put the last item in my backpack than darkness fell again. I felt around for the torch to check my watch; a little after nine. Obviously, it was another blackout like the one I had observed previously. I knelt carefully, it was absolutely black inside the hide, looked out of what I thought should be the window. I felt cautiously in front of me; it was. No streaks of light, no noise, just blackness. Then, some 10-15 minutes later, try judging time in the absence of all significant input, the daylight switched back on again. I looked at my watch, it hadn't moved. It had stopped last time, but simply picked up where it left off once I had reset the time manually. I pulled the rods in to close the viewing glass off from outside eyes, then got to the floor to reach through and push the section of partially rotted trunk away from my exit. As I moved crab-like outwards, dragging my backpack behind me, I looked skyward through the tree tops. The grey cloud had lightened and thinned enough to the point where I could now see the sun again. Not in all its radiant glory, but the brighter outline of it behind a layer of cloud. It was almost directly overhead. I had watched the effects of the sunrise barely an hour ago, now the sky was telling me it was noon. I think I lost about four hours in the last blackout, only three this time? For me, it doesn't feel as if more than a quarter of an hour has passed. I feel surprisingly fresh for someone who has been awake for, apparently, a little over twenty hours. The last time, the blackening of the sky had scared me half to death. Had there been an accompanying noise last time? I don't remember properly, I will have to re-read my journal entries to find out. There was nothing this time, just the blackness and the pocket of lost time. I didn't hang about, I wanted to be back at The Base long before the sun went down. Again. I made it without incident, though still cannot shake off the sense of being watched. I've decided to spend a couple of nights back here, so I get the whole of tomorrow to unwind, maybe have a quick look around the basement. Frankly, after what I've seen and heard over these last few nights, I cannot believe how serene I feel. Even been playing games on this netbook. Found this stupid thing where you shoot at balloons, aim with the mouse sensor-pad, shoot with the 'left click' button, burst the balloons, et voila. I like to pretend they are the alien invaders and I am Earth's last warrior, valiantly saving the world! Childish? Fuck it, there are no rules in this domain. I've changed since I've been here, whether towards or away from my natural before-life nature, this Second World version of myself has little time for convention. I would never normally espouse the values of a "do what thou wilt" philosophy, it's extremely self-indulgent and ultimately counter-productive. But here? Does it matter? That sounds so wrong. It has to matter. If it doesn't matter any more, what would my victory be for? What would its purpose be? And what manner of being would I become? It's just a game, it doesn't matter. It's something deeper that's troubling me, I'm sure. Yeah, excuse me, I have an alien armada to shoot down with a mouse and a clicker, our civilisation may depend on it! Yeah, I know...

Day 48 - Friday 16th December 2016

I sat down yesterday evening to make my journal entry. You'll deduce from its absence that the following question is rhetorical; and did I do it? Did I fuck. "I'll just have a game of shooting bubbles first." I'd said. That was about ten after seven. Next thing I knew it was midnight. What kind of sad wanker plays a stupid, pointless and repetitive computer game for five hours without a break? Fair enough if you live a maniacally busy and productive life and it's your only respite, but I'm alone on a world and facing some rather big problems, it's not like I have any need for hobbies or pastimes! Surviving, trying to work out what to do about an invasion force, shit like that, it's enough to keep me busy, I assure you. Is this in some way indicative of the pathetic and vacuous culture that spawned me? Maybe I'm better off not going back. Maybe I would do better to stay here and take my chances with them. For fuck's sake, what a complete waste of an evening. I'd actually had a productive day. I'd slept soundly on Wednesday night, it was good to be back in The Base again, away from that minuscule hole in the ground that had played host to me the last few nights, while I enjoyed watching 'Dances With Small Unexplained Flying Lights'. Of course, I'm back here in the hide now, getting ready for another night of observation. Or two. Or three. But Thursday, I should tell you about Thursday. I slept late, as well as soundly,

probably because I was up till gone midnight playing that fucking game. Oh, don't worry, it's on the banned list now. What kind of dumb fucking culture invents pathetic time-wasting shit like that?

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Thursday was spent in the basement, wisely, I would say. It's like a treasure trove down there. I'm still not sure all this stuff was left for me, it looks more like someone was preparing for a siege, now the poor bastard isn't around to enjoy the fruits of their labours. Life is hard. Then you die. That's a gem of wisdom, where did I get that one from? I've left the dust alone down there. Although it went against my instincts, all of which were busily screaming at me to clean it up, practicality won the day. It's an enclosed area, no bigger than the floor above. Actually, a little smaller, I think the cellar cuts into it at the far end. Now, if I'd had a watering can, no problemo, scatter a little water across the floor, then sweep up, dust reasonably controlled. But I haven't. Well, yet. There are still sealed boxes down there. Honestly, it was like Christmas, every opened container was bringing beaming smiles to my face. Especially when I found what looks really quite like a CD player, only the discs with it are completely transparent, and I have a strong recall that ours are silver? I don't know why I was so enthused really, there's no mains power here, the cables and sockets are all quite dead. Don't ask me how I know, you'd think me an idiot. Seriously though, electricity doesn't seem to bother me too much, just kind of an interesting feeling pulsing its way up your arm. But don't let it pass across your chest, naturally. Is it just me? I don't know, not as if I have any kind of base marker to go by. If I find somebody else, guess I can always say; "Hey, stick your fingers in there, will ya?" Lights blue touch paper and retires to safe distance.

A tent! Anyone fancy a camping trip? Well, I say a tent, I think that's what it is. I'm no expert on camping, I'm pretty sure of that, but I don't believe I've ever seen anything like it before, can't even figure out what it's made of. Don't know that I fancy a night in it, it's getting chilly now, but then we are rapidly approaching winter. Probably it is milder than it would be for the time of year. It would be on the First World, I'm making a lot of assumptions about this one

being the same. But it is so damned familiar. Everything looks and feels right. Except the sky, I just know it's not supposed to be covered in dense grey cloud all the time. Something is nagging at me, telling me I couldn't have covered as much ground on the First World as I have here, not without coming across a road. I remember a lot more about it now, it's just names and things like that, they are the only things that remain vague. That and how I got here. Yeah, tent, I was telling you about the tent. Odd shaped thing, sort of like half an egg in shape, silvery colour, quilted. It took fifteen minutes or so to work out how to put it up, nothing obvious about it. Not even sure if I can explain it in terms that will make sense on a page; there are two rings on one side of this six inch deep semi oval thing, put your fingers through and make as if you are throwing it away from yourself, then all this matter seems to be magicked out of the ether. Honestly, no word of a lie, it looks like spontaneous creation to watch, piece of design tech genius. I hope whoever invented it was suitably rewarded. How do you collapse it again? I'm working on it.

The tent was probably the most exciting thing, one of the first, kind of stood out amongst the mundane. But there was plenty of other very welcome stuff down there. And, like I said, many more boxes to open. I'm still a little stunned by the scale of what I've found. 'Convenient' would be the most incredible of understatement. This is no accident. I may not belong here, but I am most certainly where I am meant to be. Meant by whom? That remains a key question. Tools aplenty, way more than I had found upstairs. A lot are familiar and I am sure I will be able to make good use of them, but some are just generally weird. Maybe I'm no craftsman either and simply don't recognise the tools of somebody else's trade. Boxes of electronic components, fat lot of use they'll be here. Not found more food as yet, but I'm only a little over half way through checking everything out. I was hoping to find some books or magazines, you can learn a lot about a culture from its literature. Not that I would be able to read it, of course, but looking at the pictures would be cool. I wonder what their cities are like? Deserted. Must have been some talented engineers to make that tent. Weird thing, it actually feels warm inside. Maybe I should give it a try, sleep outside The Base one night, not as if I have to worry about being dragged off by wild dingoes or anything. Don't even need to worry about being bitten by irritating little flying fucks here. What the fuck have they done to this place? What kind of beings would wipe out all life on an entire planet? Why hasn't whatever they've done affected me? And, thinking about it, where are all the bodies? I should see dead insects at least, even if I'm not tripping over wild animal corpses on a daily basis? It's not right, far from it, there is something just distinctly wrong about this Second World, I feel it deep down. Like the 'being watched' thing. When I was walking through the woods today, I'd keep hearing what sounded like twigs cracking underfoot. There was never anybody there when I looked up. Is this just paranoia? Hah! Didn't we used to say; "Just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they're not out to get you?" All seems so long ago. And somewhere very elsewhere.

It all looked the same when I got back here; the hide sat undisturbed, not a leaf out of place, just the way I remembered leaving it. I had wondered. You do, don't you? With those apparent search sweeps the hover lights were doing, I thought they may have uncovered this place while I'd been gone. I witnessed two of the vectors, figured the other two would have taken place in my absence, and it was the south east one I was concerned about; that would have brought them straight overhead. Okay, there's nothing much to see from the outside, you'd have to get close. But then there have been those footsteps, the small alien exploring out there. Was it looking for me? It could just be out on a whim. Who knows, maybe they don't have trees and woodlands on their homeworld. It could be a novel environment to wander through. I think I would do that were I the visitor to some far distant world. Imagine landing on one where there were just beautiful purple / black rocks, rocks as big as articulated lorries, strewn through a landscape of cerise sands and bright green fauna. You'd explore it, wouldn't you? Quite different to the world you came from, how could you resist it? Especially when you had the might of the armada up there to watch over you, make sure you came to no harm. But then, if I were to sneak out and secrete myself, lie in wait for it one night, break its little green neck, what could they do to stop me? It has to be armed, doesn't it? If it's that small and light, and it's alone in an alien woodland, it has to be armed. But then it thinks this world dead. Fuck, wouldn't I be a surprise? Rising up from the piles of leaves, as if some avenging earth spirit was bursting forth from the ground beneath its feet, seeking restitution for its sins. Why are you here, green devil? Are we not forged in the same stars? Is the metal in the hulls of your ships not from the same source as the carbon atoms in my body? We should be exchanging wisdoms as brethren, this is wrong, so very wrong. And yet, for all my bravado, I cannot stop you. It is just my job to catalogue your presence, cross reference your activities, file your species away for the benefit of some future survivors. Or historians who may be passing, should there be none of the former. Unless luck comes my way. More so than the discovery of stashes of food and drink, more so than a magical tent and a plethora of tools, more so than finding myself somewhere safe when I first attained consciousness on this God-forsaken sphere. I mean true luck - the fortune of finding a chink in their armour, some way in which I can learn to take the fight to them. I have been fighting a secret war against them for nearly seven weeks now, I cannot help but think they will be furious when they find out.

Day 49 - Saturday 17th December 2016

I watched until early hours of the morning. No lights. Total darkness. Total silence. There was actually a little moonlight that broke through, the cloud is definitely starting to thin. Although a little more brightness is largely welcome, what it may yet prove the harbinger of is not. If, as I suspect, the cloud is of their making, it is perfectly feasible to believe its thinning may be for a reason. Perhaps the time has at last come? Possibly, by this time tomorrow, I will be seeing fleets of craft descending into our lower atmosphere, finally putting in place the pieces to clinch the mating move. This may, therefore, be my final entry. If so, I do not wish to ramble on in self indulgence. Save it to say that I hope this historical document will prove of use one day. My final hope being that I may know the truth before I face death. Good journey, friend.

Day 51 - Monday 19th December 2016

I have lost a day. In spite of my certainty that doom was making its way to the world around me, I had fallen asleep with great ease, sometime before the sun had risen. I woke about half an hour ago to find I had slept well and long, my wristwatch informing me it was a little after two. There is a small amount of light that creeps in around the hide entrance that confirms it is daytime. So I had slept for approximately eight hours, I believed. Though, perhaps strangely, I felt better rested. After the usual morning ritual of urinating in a bottle, a light snack and some fruit juice, I turned on the netbook to make a journal entry and checked a note I had made on my phone to that end. To my consternation, the date was staring at me; Monday 19th. I have checked on the camera and discovered the

same result. Can I really have slept for thirty-two hours? I find that unlikely. I need to recap, go back over the events of yesterday. I mean Saturday, all but the first six hours of Sunday do not appear to have happened. It is an error I will likely keep making, so simply assume it is Saturday I refer to at any time I use the word

As with today, I had bedded down late after watching the landing site for most of the night, then awoken early afternoon, soon after which I made Saturday's brief journal entry. The Friday night / Saturday morning watch, as I have said, was a complete and utter waste of time, absolutely nothing to report for the entire night. I was filled with an ominous sense of doom, reasoning that the gradually thinning cloud indicated something was about to happen. Perhaps it is, but it has not vet done so. The moon appears nearly full and is visible as a hazy disc behind a layer of cloud. It is the first time in some weeks now that I have seen it at all. My eyes have become so accustomed to the dim light that it actually hurt when I accidentally looked into the torch beam. I was extremely concerned about the prospect of imminent invasion, yet some bizarre logic suggested to me that I did not remain in the hide all day to wait for it. The days are cold now, but the air is delightfully fresh to breathe. It had rained overnight, the petrichor was sheer heaven, I could smell its scent as I lay near the hide entrance ready to leave. It was a welcome distraction from the sense of trepidation I felt. I emerged wetted by the moist leaves and bark, dirtied by the damp soil, elated by its freshly watered aroma.

Mere metres inside the woodland, keeping one eye on the adjacent track for safety, I walked slowly, watching the ground at my feet, treading with care, but also with appreciation of the artisanship that had gone into the creation of this world. Where there were leaves to make it comfortable, I knelt and raised my arms to the sky. "Blessed be the spirits of air." I whispered. I did not mean those above in their metal craft, of course. Although obvious, I feel the need to state it clearly. There were distinctly lighter patches in the cloud today. Predominantly, the sky remained dark, but there were definitely areas where it was thinning. Before my very eyes, a small craft dropped through the grey veil and hovered. It was very obviously not one of the much larger craft I had caught occasional glimpses of, this was much smaller than they, but large enough to be clearly visible to the naked eye. I froze, marvelling at such a prolonged opportunity to see

one of our visitor's transits. I had not seen them move in the daylight at all before. In fact, I was starting to suspect they created the blackouts when they wished to move in light, as if the ultra violet were their natural enemy. And now this, there, bold as brass, this small craft dares hover in the sky above me. Irrationally fearing any sudden movement on my part may scare it, I reached slowly into the in-breast pocket of my coat for the camera. I sat back on to my heels so as to make myself as stable as possible, pointed the lens in its direction and pressed. I could see nothing but cloud on the small illuminated display, though that is not to say nothing shall be there should I ever get the opportunity to view it on something larger. Hearing a different pitch being added to the ever present background hum, I hastened to take a few more pictures, as quickly as the camera would allow. The craft chose this moment to begin its descent, heading to my left, straight towards the landing site. It was quick, too fast to see clearly, behind the tree line above the grounding area before my eyes could register it with any real clarity. But the camera was a lot faster than my eye, capturing as it does small moments in time, reducing actions to stillness for posterity. Excitedly, I checked the small display screen, convinced that I had caught the craft before it had moved. I closed my eyes, clicked four times on the left pointing arrow to return to the first picture I had taken. I opened them. Nothing but cloud. And the silhouette of a tree top in the bottom left hand corner. Close your eyes, click right, picture two. I was positive I had caught its light before it had moved. Open them and prepare to shout for joy. FUCK! Cloud, it had just been damnable cloud. Despondently, I had flicked on to the third picture, and there it was. It may only appear as a small dot to the bottom left of a cloudy sky on this small screen, but I was more than satisfied I had at least one good image of their vehicles for a physical record. Well halle-fucking-lujah. There didn't appear to be anything in the final photograph, but one out of four was more than enough for me. Got you.

So, what manner of craft was this? Some sort of ship-to-shore transporter? It would surely be impractical, if not impossible, to land such massive craft as you would need to traverse interstellar space. It would make sense to have a tender, as you would on a boat. So you drop your mooring in high atmospheric orbit around the planet of your choice, hop over the side and into your dinghy, then paddle to shore. This is obviously what I have photographed, the boatmen paddling to shore. Would this be the same thing I see as a hover light in the dark hours? No, surely not, they only ever seem to move in those dark hours. Was it the same thing



The Descending Craft

I had seen fall to Earth during that first blackout? No, I would have seen a streak of fire, the camera would have captured that as a long illuminated blur. So where does that leave me? The first craft streaked down on fire, sat smouldering behind the tree line for many an hour, and there was an impact I felt through my feet when it landed. Was that a crash site, rather than a landing one? Is this craft a salvage mission? They've taken their time, why no attempt to rescue the pilot(s) beforehand? Tonight was going to be interesting, of that much I was positive. It was about that moment that a thought entered my head that did not bring me satisfaction or joy; I could have gone to the site the day after the crash. The hover lights were not yet there. How did they get there? Where did they come from? I hadn't thought of that. But nothing would have stopped me getting a close-up. Damn it. Had I known it was a crash site, I could have a stand-next-to photograph of a half wrecked alien craft. Nobody there to stop me, nothing there to harm me. This thought would proceed to nag at me for several hours afterwards, even though it was little more than conjecture. Yes, it may have been a crash. It may

also have been something unmanned that did not require a gentle landing. It could be leaking deadly radiation or toxic alien fuel. I knew all of this, I still possess the power of reason amidst my fracturing grip on sanity. But the doubting thought would persist. The joys of being human. An irritant indeed, but not so much as to dampen my sense of enthusiasm when I thought of creating a *special* spreadsheet for yesterday / Saturday night's obs. Oh, are systems of recording data not a joy whose every moment exists to be savoured? This night would indeed be a special one.

And that is what I remember of Saturday afternoon. All real, no dream involved, I have checked the camera, the four pictures are there. Now I sit here wondering if my observations of Saturday night / Sunday morning will prove as concrete? Give me a minute. Yes, my notes are in the log, covering from early activity soon after 17:00 Saturday, all the way through to 05:30 Sunday morning, soon after which I had gone to sleep to find myself waking more than a complete day later. But I remember nothing else that could have happened during that time. There is nothing here to indicate any activity other than my own, nothing appears to have been disturbed, at least nothing on the inside of the hide. I have shone the torch all the way around it, nothing out of place, nothing that should not be here. This is perplexing in the extreme, I have lost an entire day of my life. I understand now the anger of the peasants of England back in the September of 1752 when Parliament 'stole' eleven days from them. Hah! The poor uneducated souls, how were they to know it was not *real* time? But I am educated, my anger is borne by the frustration of knowing this **IS** real time I have lost. Is it humanly possible to sleep for thirty-two hours? I do not believe that I have ever done any such thing in my life, though I freely accept I do not remember. I need to check outside, I can type up my obs notes later. If anything strange has happened that may account for this twenty four hour loss, there may well be some evidence of it outside this hole in the ground. I can hear my heart beating in my ear. I can take that with a sense of joy as it tells me I still live, or I can acknowledge the fear that they may be out there waiting for me. It was not yesterday afternoon I saw that thing descend from the sky, it has been here for two days now. And who knows what it may have done in that time.

If my eyes are to be trusted, it would seem I am not alone after all. I checked all around the hide this afternoon, looking for signs of anything that may lead to an explanation of my lost day. The mind willingly plays tricks on those who are susceptible, those who want to believe, but I will not be fooled. I was immediately aware that some of the carefully placed natural camouflage around the hide had been moved. These were not the kind of regular usage movements that you might expect, rather the small movements you would find when someone, or something, had sought to replace disturbed items, seeking to disguise the fact they had ever been there. This may have worked adequately with a normal person, but I do not appear to be one of those. I have an eye for detail, almost to an obsessive level, I will notice the slightest of discrepancies with that to which I have become accustomed. It only took one glance for me to become convinced that all was not right. I wondered if the walking alien had returned, effectively frozen time for me, performed whatever experiments had demanded such action, then returned to its craft. Most likely with new friends from one of the mother ships above. It is feasible that they have technology that would appear as magic to us. If somebody appeared and vanished before your eyes, you would think it was sorcery. To somebody familiar with matter transport technology, it would appear as an everyday occurrence. I wondered if the technical issues with such transport may have been solved elsewhere. They talk of galaxies in the billions; a universe, to all intents and purposes, infinite. Is it not, therefore, conceivable that someone out there would have solved the problem? Thus sorcery becomes reality to us of a lower ilk.

I walked for an hour or more in the woodlands, never straying from the sight of the track, reducing my chances of losing my way when traversing directions I had not previously explored. My thoughts were of what I had witnessed last night. The activity levels around the landing site / grounding site / crash site had been high. My plan had simply been to mull them over in my head, then type them up some time this afternoon, but the absent twenty-four hours had somewhat phased me, played on my mind. The walk seemed more therapeutic. While I could not have been one hundred percent certain with regard the nature of the first 'craft' to 'land' the other side of the track, there was no doubting the one I had seen in controlled descent on Saturday afternoon. If I was not already positive of their

presence down here, which I suspect I *almost* certainly was, I am now, beyond any doubt whatsoever. Can it just be coincidence that after seeing this landing, my hide is disturbed and I have lost an entire day? I become conscious of every ache and pain throughout my body, wonder if something they have done may have contributed to it. Be logical, composed. Had they 'taken' you, why would they have put you back? Surely, if they had found you, job done. Why would they even care about one man being where once there were billions?

Walking helps me think, connects me with nature, takes me from the bedlam of modern life. Not that this is a problem here, of course. But the act of walking still brings peace at times of stress, and this would appear to be such a time. I think a part of me was hoping I was wrong, that there was nothing more behind that far tree line than a meteorite; that the craft in the sky were some kind of optical illusion, caused by the density of the clouds; that the complete absence of life... don't be a fool, there is no rational explanation for a complete absence of life. None that would not include some very sophisticated 'sorcery'. God alone knows what kind of weapon could have achieved such an aim. God alone knows what kind of stone-hearted being would have designed such an arsenal. Hold that thought, for it was while I was trying to conjure a mental image of a small green scientist, trying to make it look like anything other than a child in a rubber costume, that I again felt I was being watched. I stood motionless, closed my eyes to accentuate my aural ability. That damned hum. But then, the cracking of a twig, I was positive. I opened my eyes, looked first in the direction I believed the sound to have come from, the opposite from that of the landing site. Yes, definitely 'the landing site' now, there is no further cause for doubt. My field of view contained nothing but trees. Slowly, I turned in a circle, counter-clockwise, observing the smallest detail. It was only a glimpse, but it was enough. I have company. Small, ves, when I got to the tree I had seen her by, I could ascertain her height from a gnarled piece of bark that hung from the side of it. She would be a little under one metre tall, approximately. And she was no alien. Though I did not get a good look at her face, I could see her clothes and the hair that blew loosely from the hood of her coat. She was human. But how on Earth would a small child, possibly five years old, have survived on this post-apocalyptic world, without adult help, for even just as long as I have been conscious of being here? Unless there were other humans present and she was just one of them? But then, is it likely they would let her walk out alone, near the edge of a woodland, where an alien craft, two possibly, sit merely a kilometre the other side of the track? I think not. So she cannot be with adults, she surely cannot be alone. Other children? Nonsense, have you read "Lord Of The Flies"? I rest my case. So what then? Calling out to her did not strike me as sensible. Although hearing my human voice would at least have alerted her to my being a member of the same species, it may also have alerted them to the two of us being here. I looked intently at the ground around the tree she had stood by, allowing my obsessive eye for detail to do its thing. I could see no indication of which direction she had moved away in, she may as well have vanished into space. But I know she is out there. And I will find her.

Day 52 - Tuesday 20th December 2016

What to make of it all. It is around a quarter past nine in the morning, I've been up all night, feeling very tired and confused. I have filled four sheets with my brief notes over the past two watches, there has been so much going on. Nothing new has come to join those on the landing site, but those that are already there seem extremely busy. The first landed... whatever it was... it has not been seen since. Though possibly heard, I cannot account for which object over there makes which sound. The hover lights flit around, performing their coordinated aerial dance. And the new kid in town, the craft I saw descend from the heavens, that seems to guide the smaller ones. It is considerably bigger than the rest, as a passenger jet to a microlight. Possibly occupied by more than one pilot. The small ones, the hover lights, they can only be one man... one 'thing'... surely? I cannot make up my mind whether their activities behind and above the tree line involve repair, construction or both. The patterns of movements vary, it is not the repetitive task of factory conveyor belts, rather there is design and purpose. Whose design and what purpose remain posed questions with yet little possibility of answer

In spite of the larger craft's descent in daylight, there has been no other activity while the sun has been above the horizon. I feel safe enough sitting outside this morning, having found another piece of fallen trunk rather less rotten than the hide entrance's 'disguise' one. The woodland child is out there. I haven't seen her this morning, but then I have barely sat here fifteen minutes as yet. But I keep hearing her. A foot moving through matter on the woodland floor, a coat brushing against bark or low branch, a twig breaking underfoot. I would estimate she is no

more than two hundred metres from me, currently at eight o'clock, somewhere off behind my left shoulder. Would she come closer, I would try to talk to her, try to reassure her of my good intentions, tell her that I have food. Surely, were she in collusion with them, that would be her only other source of food, save the secreted group of human survivors I had previously postulated. I still find the latter more likely and palatable. What would extra-terrestrials want with a five year old girl? I cannot imagine she would be a good source of intelligence for them. "Here are sweeties, hoo-man child, go watch the bad man in the woods." It sounds too comical to bear truth. She is moving again, past my shoulder line now, edging round to my front. I feel her eyes burning into me, yet I do not want to look up and meet her gaze, I may startle her, she may flee. Strangely, just knowing she is there is solace of a sort. My first human company in many a week, albeit it over distance. But if I never look up, can I expect a small child to make the first move? Not if her parents taught her any sense. But have we not gone beyond sense now? Is this not more a question of survival? The quick glimpse I got of her; she did not appear wet or dirty, I could not see her face to read signs of desperation. She must have shelter, supplies, and nearby. If she is alone, she may just be watching me from a safe distance, trying to work out if I am a safer bet than remaining alone. I would not want to be in her position, she must be terrified. I know my bowels have nearly exposed my cowardice on at least one occasion. How it must be for a child. Empathy, Mr. Varg? Maybe you are a parent after all?

To the task in hand. She seems to be wandering in a circle, they seem to be quiet, I have work to do. With each entry, this journal seems to take on more importance to me, it is all consuming, it is my life at this moment. It is my one vehicle of expression, it is my only method to record the thoughts and emotions of my experience here, it is my one source of literature. Would it not be sad irony if I were to die here and it remained forever undiscovered? Well, that cannot be, *you* are reading it, I am worrying about nothing. I jest, I do not believe myself a worrier, it does not appear to be in my nature. It is quite a voyage of self discovery to have all of your memories stripped from you, find yourself elsewhere, where you have not the means of finding any information that will confirm or deny any theory you may develop. Though plenty of memories have returned, they are not of a personal nature, just a kind of "this is the world you came from" type. I do not recall interpersonal relationships, just vague memories of those that may have been friends, no faces, no names, no numbers. An odd

experience indeed. All one can do is examine the core of one's own nature, see the quintessential part of your being and learn who you are from that. And do I like what I find? Only within reason, I fear. There are dark corners into which I do not wish to journey, but I seem to have... what do they call it... "a good heart"? I appear to care about things; infringements of freedom, injustice, abuse of power. My reaction to them in the sky is one of anger and revulsion. What they have done here is beyond genocide, it is the destruction of an entire eco-system. Surely, come the Spring, little will grow? Where will the flowers be without the bees? What will happen to the atmosphere without billions of living creatures breathing it in and out? Chances are, I will not live to a ripe old age to see the answer. We and the plant life of our world live in symbiosis, without one, the other must surely perish. And they looked down upon the seeds of destruction they had sewn. And they saw that it was good. Is this it? Revelation? The end of days? I feel no fire, I smell no brimstone, I see no angels. Just a small child, keeping a safe distance from me

Evening - 19:10

Caught a few hours sleep today, don't feel significantly better for it, but I guess it was better than none. I awoke to the sound of footsteps, probably forty minutes ago. Bless her, she seems so much braver when I'm in here. She must watch me, be aware that it's not a rapid process to get in and out of the hide, so she comes and circles around it, just far away enough to run, if necessary. Hopefully, she'll soon see I'm in the same predicament as she is. Maybe that's expecting a lot of a young child, but what else do I do? No good leaving her a note; a) no guarantee she can read very well at that age, and b) I don't know their language. But maybe gestures of friendship are fairly universal. I wish I had some sweets to lure her with. Actually, scratch that, it could be misconstrued. So, on to the business of the evening, ready for a fourth night of observation. That sounds odd when it will be my fifth night here, but still I remember nothing of the lost one. Friday night / Saturday morning watch I had seen nothing, Saturday daytime I had seen the craft descend, Saturday night / Sunday morning had been an incredibly active night at the landing site, Sunday night / Monday morning watch had vanished into the ether, and yesterday had seen the confirmation that I was not the only human down here. May I live in interesting times. I am well stocked here now, so I can stay for several more days if need be, and I believe there is reasonable argument for that now.

The two of the last three nights that I have actually been aware of, things have been highly active across at the landing site. I've heard not inconsiderable noise while writing this too. If the sound were in the hide with me, I would think someone was frying sausages, but it is a kilometre distant, what might that be? Banging, scraping noises, what sounds like drilling, the frying sounds; all carrying on together, creating an unholy cacophony that jars the ears. I have no idea why, but I find it strangely enjoyable. What is disconcerting is that it is not a piece of aural art that somebody has created for my pleasure or indulgence, it is a potential threat to me. I dearly wish there were more cover, but from the woodland's edge, there is just the track, followed by fields. The hover lights and newly descended craft often rise above the tree line, so I would be horribly exposed if I tried to reach the landing site. The only place I may get a better look is from the hilltop on the far side, but how the hell I am supposed to get all the way around there, undetected, eludes me. What do I do? Grab the child and run for safety? What if they know she is here? What if she is the one they have been looking for, not me? What if I'm the one who does not belong? Am I deluding myself I am part of this game? I hadn't thought of it in those terms. If I took the child, they may notice her absence, then I put myself on their radar. Maybe not. So what then? Kneel here and watch? For how long? To what end? Who am I kidding, I can't just leave her at their mercy, God alone knows what they may do to her, and she's hardly in a position to resist. I need to stay here a little longer than I had planned, I think. Four nights would have been it. Five if you insist on losing one. Best make sure you don't lose any more nights, you'll be here past Christmas. What I'd give for a Santa costume! Don't be ridiculous, Varg, how do you even know they have Christmas on this world? What are the odds of two cultures developing in which both think maxing out their credit card is an appropriate way to celebrate the arrival of a messiah? Did I miss out the excessive eating and alcohol consumption? Not that I would say no to that right now.

Fuck, it sounds even busier out there tonight. The Saturday night / Sunday morning and Monday night / Tuesday morning watches had been bad enough, four pages of notes. I was already scribbling things about the noises I could hear tonight, and the watch hadn't even officially started yet. Sunday night / Monday morning? Come on, you cannot just lose a day and I refuse to believe I could

sleep for thirty-two hours. Even under such exceptional circumstances? What if they took me? Isn't that when happens when they abduct you? The time just goes from your memory. They could have been sticking needles in me for a day, I could have been strapped to a laboratory table, screaming in torment, then remember nothing about it all afterwards. Et voila, the day gone from history. Or there could be a far more rational explanation. Maybe she would know something, the woodland child, I hadn't thought of that. I've had that feeling of being watched for quite a while now, that must have been her, I just kind of tuned in to the attention being paid me. So maybe she was watching at the right time, maybe she saw something, maybe she knows what happened. All I have to do is track her down, get her to trust me, then ask her all the questions I need answers to. Yeah, right. Note to self; when you get back to The Base, strip and check yourself over for marks. Damn, no mirrors, how do I check my back. Selfies, of course. Taking photos of your own arse, hah! You have to laugh, don't you? It may be the end of the world, but the thought of a fat old man taking pictures of his arse is still funny.

What the hell are they doing over there? Crackling, it sounds like the world's most enormous bonfire. You cannot seriously trust your senses in a situation like this. You will hear what you want to hear / expect to hear / fear most. Whatever you do hear, your brain will process, change it to make it more threatening, because you are in a potentially threatening situation. For fuck's sake; writing stupid bloody entries in your notes - "it's a grinding noise", "scraping metallic", "frying giant sausages" - what damned use is that? You know your brain deciphers audio and visual input, it's not like you see and hear what is really there, what you receive is the result of a complex process and anything but absolute reality. In terms of hearing, how you perceive a sound is very much dependent on the accompanying visual information. You are sat in a ditch, shut off from the outside world in terms of light, hearing sounds from a site that scares the living daylights out of you. Seriously, how do you think you are going to interpret them? They are going to be "constructing a death ray", "terraforming our world to the poisonous domain that will sustain their hideous goblin bodies", "they are making a machine that will grind humans into Soylent Green." You see? The evil intent becomes self-fulfilling prophecy. You **NEED** to get closer. There is a little room for manoeuvre, stay inside the woodlands until you are lower down the track, there must be some kind of cover down there, a hedge or something? Come on, what's the worst that can happen?

Day 53 - Wednesday 21st December 2016



The Night Of The Full Moon

What an inspiring night that was. I don't know that I'm feeling any braver about trying to sneak up on the landing site, but it certainly was inspirational. Finally, I plucked up the courage to come out of the hide at night! And I lived to tell the tale! I'd started my watch last night not long after I'd finished the journal entry, maybe around eight. The landing site was dark, all out there was completely silent, no machinery, no craft, no footsteps, just the pure stillness of night in remoteness. The neighbours were sleeping, it would seem. Strange hours they keep, irregular sleep patterns. Active sporadically, then days of silence and inactivity, I am completely unable to figure them out at the moment. I imagined giant dark shadow creatures in the tree line as I watched, looming menacingly across the landscape, looking for human souls to devour. It stirred childhood memories. I don't know who I was with, where we had been. I must have been quite young, maybe seven or eight, younger even. I was in the back seat of a car and we had just set off on a long journey. I seem to recall I had watched an old

monochrome science fiction film with great black jelly monsters in, and the road home was dark. And there they were, in the trees, these horrendous dark shapes, threatening, nightmarish. Well, they couldn't have eaten me or anything, I don't remember much else from that journey, guess I must have fallen asleep, that's what little people do when they're in cars. I wonder where the girl has been today? Not heard or seen her, no footsteps after sundown. Sorry, going off on a tangent there. It was just the accessing of that childhood memory, strangely depersonalised, as are many of the memories I am rediscovering. I never know the people around me, I can never see their faces, so it is just as an incident that I recall whatever it may have been.

The watch; I think three hours must have passed, it was really dark out there. Mind you, it's not much different any other night. The only illumination you ever see is from them. And tonight, nada. The thought began to enter my mind that this could be the perfect night to make that approach I was trying to bolster myself to make. While they sleep, they are not out there watching. A daylight approach is one thing, but something about the night brings comfort. It is like a veil we can withdraw into when we feel threatened. The switch on the torch can illuminate my way, or cause me to vanish into the blackness of the woodlands. It's almost an additional weapon in the arsenal of the spy. If for one moment I suspect they may have heard me, light off, stand still, breathe slowly, wait. Interesting thought, but I haven't even been out of the hide at night before. "Try." I had thought, it was silent as a graveyard out there. You could have heard a mouse breath, if there were such a thing on this necropolis of a world. I looked through the glass again, still nothing, not even the smallest of lights flickering. "So," I thought, "what if you just slide out on your back, eyes alert, cautiously?" It was not as terrifying a thought as I would imagine in hindsight, though it crossed my mind that the small alien could be waiting for me, the darkness and silence a trap? Nonsense, the footsteps had to belong to the woodland child, I was just filling in blanks with my own fears

What happened next, I find it hard to explain. Quite suddenly, the darkness outside the hide lit up. Light reflected on the ground, enough for me to see the nearer trees, the forest floor, the child, standing looking in my direction, though I could not quite make out the expression on her face. Was she with them after all? The irrational thoughts that flit through your mind when you are up against

something you don't understand. The light was not the brightness of something unnatural, it was soft, warm, enveloping. But strange. I had seen nothing like this in the weeks I had been here. The hover lights and other silent craft, their lights looked clearly unnatural, they were harsh, obviously artificial. But this light, it was different, clearly another category of craft. I felt for my notepad, tried to write "new craft" by touch alone, which I could barely read come the cold light of day. Valiant effort, Mr. Varg. So, what do you do when confronted by an alien craft, hovering silently overhead, and when you are being watched by a small child that is clearly in league with them? You go outside to say hello, of course. Yes, I am being ironic. Exposure should be the last thing on your mind, but there it was. Inexplicably, I began to slide out from the hide, moving very cautiously. I had in mind that if this was my time, then so be it, I was not about to depart this mortal coil as a worm hiding in the soil. I was of a mind to confront my destiny. Maybe a part of me could sense there was truly no threat? With the gift of hindsight, oh that we could receive its wisdom in advance, it seems obvious now.

I emerged to find myself looking at the most beautiful full moon, smiling warmly down at me through a gap in the clouds. I had not seen it clearly since my awakening, I had forgotten just how compelling it was. A small break in the swirling clouds above allowed it to pierce through and cast its light upon the earth. I brought my eyes downward to seek out the child. She had backed off some distance, but did not appear unduly nervous. Her face was only partially in light, but it seemed to possess wisdom beyond its years. I raised my hand to her, wiggled the fingers in a gesture she should understand, from a child's view, to be intended as a wave. She raised her hand in mirror fashion, repeating my gesture, the half of her face I could see in the moonlight breaking into a soft smile. I raised one finger.

"Minute." I spoke quietly, so as not to break the atmospheric silence.

She stood on the spot, not taking her eyes off of me. I reached into my coat to get the camera out

"I must take a photograph, so beautiful."

She backed up, moving entirely into the shadow of a tree.

"No, no," I hastened, "not of you, sweetheart, I meant the moon."

I pointed at the glowing celestial body, trying to fight its way free of the clouds. She looked up.

"Not that you are not beautiful, I'm sure," I continued, pointing the camera

skyward, "but I would consider it quite impolite to take somebody's picture without their consent, I assure you."

She smiled again. I had no idea if she understood me. Maybe it was a 'tone of voice' thing, like with a cat. I looked at the monitor on the back of the camera. The image looked blurred near the centre. I stepped back towards the tree whose roots form a key part of my hide, the child started.

"Just looking for a tripod substitute," I assured, "don't panic."

The tree had a low thick branch at just about the right height. The light was still poor from a camera's viewpoint, so I would need something to steady it for the long exposure necessary. She watched me intently as I fiddled with the camera, looking up to the sky, back at the monitor, then back to the sky. She seemed more curious than anything else. I wondered what my words would have sounded like to her, probably just gibberish, if their written language was anything to go by. I took three or four pictures, I'm sure one of them will come out well. If you are the person or being that finds this journal, look for my camera, that picture alone will most likely be worth it. With that photographic task completed, I looked back at the child, pointed at the camera, then pointed at her.

"May I?"

She didn't react.

"Come closer," I beckoned with my finger, "I'll take your photo, would you like that?"

The child just stood her ground and looked at me, half in shadow, half out.

"You don't understand a word I'm saying, do you?"

My first human contact in nearly two months and we have no common language. And probably no common interest if we did.

"What do you know about quantum mechanics, kid?"

She looked up at the moon, stared at it for ten to fifteen seconds, then lowered her eyes slowly, as if to follow the passage of its light from source to her body. She began to laugh, dancing to imaginary music, looking up at me every so often to be sure that I was still watching. And, of course, I was, I couldn't take my eyes off her, it was all quite bewitching. I must have watched her for half an hour or more, one of the sweetest damn things I ever remember seeing. Eventually, she stopped, yawned, stretched her arms above her head and moved to turn away.

"I haven't even seen your face properly yet," I said, "step into the light, let me look at you before you go."

She looked at me, as if to acknowledge I had spoken some words, though gave me

no reason to believe she had understood their meaning. And then she walked away. I let her go, it seemed the right thing to do. I think if I had made any kind of move towards her, she would probably have ran, and there would be a risk of her hurting herself in this half-light, not something I wanted to be responsible for. I had my reasons for wanting a photograph, it was no spontaneous or casual request. To be honest, I am not *certain* she is real. A photograph would seem the best way to be sure. But what a night this had been; to look at a beautiful glowing moon, to watch a child dance, to sit outside at night and fear nothing. I felt a lightness in my soul that had been absent for many a week. I looked up one last time, just to see her fade into the distance, but she had already gone, and there was silence once more. I skipped back to the hide entrance, laughing. What the fuck, who was there to see me? You think aliens would know that a fat old man skipping like a child is embarrassing? Nevertheless, if you would do me the kindness of keeping it to yourself, it would be very much appreciated.

After this, I returned to my watch, and the moon was once again swallowed by the clouds. Oh, but the hour it had reigned supreme, it had been one of the most beautiful hours of my life. And the rest of the night passed at the speed it passed, eventless, but I cannot say that I cared, I think I spent it in reverie. By four in morning, I had come to the realisation that nothing, in terms of them, was actually going to happen. I pulled the rods back to 'close the curtains', drank some fruit juice by candlelight, pissed in an empty bottle and laid down to sleep. My dreams would be a source of some fascination, this night, I was certain. Though when I awoke today, I could remember none of them. Well, maybe for some seconds when I first awoke. For those seconds, I was struck by how enchanting a dream I had just had. Then, as I was thinking about how happy an experience it had been, it began to dissolve from my memory. The more I tried to recall its detail, the more it evaded me, until it had gone completely, before I had any serious chance to add it to permanent memory. I cursed, I would have liked that one to stay with me forever. Why? What was it about? Oh, I have no idea whatsoever, call it a feeling.

Day 54 - Thursday 22nd December 2016

Another eventless watch, they were still and silent for the duration. And no other 'distractions' this night, quite an anti-climax. Fuck, look at the date, three days

from Christmas. By the feel of the beard I have now, and knowing how grey-white it's been looking on that camera monitor... well, I think I could be my own Santa this year. If only I could find a piece of red cloth, I could put on something of a show for the woodland girl. Cultural differences would probably mean she'd have no clue as to what was going on, but maybe she'd smile. Maybe I could wrap something in some paper to give to her as a present? If I could get near enough to her. I wonder where she was last night? I thought we'd made a connection the night of the full moon. I seem to be the master of self-delusion. I wonder if I'm on the 'naughty' or 'nice' list this year?

"Oh," muttered a voice, inches from my right ear, "I'm sure you've been a good boy, have you written your letter to Santa yet?"

The things our imaginations construct will never cease to amaze me. It was the obviously symbolic representation of evil on my shoulder again. A psychoanalyst would have a field day with me.

"Come on in, doc, my head's open for business."

"Who are you talking to? Sign of madness, talking to yourself." Came the voice in my right ear again, adopting a somewhat startled tone. This time, he had forgone the jest of appearing as a satanic leprechaun. No, this time, we were pulling out all the stops; this time we had a traditional devil, all red with pitchfork and horns.

"Fuck off." I murmured. I confess, I'm not at my best when I've not long woken up.

"I like you," the little red devil winked, "show me a man who doesn't use profanities, I'll show you a cunt."

"Honestly, language!" Came the response from the other side. I looked at my left shoulder to see who was representing the forces of light today. A priest, complete with glowing white dog collar. The man should be advertising washing powder, not peddling morality to the masses.

"Does it matter?" I asked, hindsight would suggest a sense of rhetoric.

"Of course your choice of words matters, young Sati, of course." The priest pushed his hands together as if he were about to burst into prayer, "A thoughtful choice of words and avoidance of profanity is essential to show your respect for others."

"What a load of old bollocks," sneered the little devil, "if God had any respect for the clergy, do you think he'd have called them something that rhymes with knickers?"

He broke into hysterical laughter, banging his pitchfork on my shoulder until it left a small red mark. I smiled. Involuntarily, I would suspect, but it was quite funny. In an immature kind of way. The priest tutted.

"Seriously," I said, "why is 'fuck' offensive and 'bonk' not? They mean the same thing, honestly, the very notion of swearing makes no sense, grow up! Why don't you lecture me on things that actually matter, you pompous little twat."

"So you're on my side? Hah!" My comments cheered the little red one, not that it had been my intention to do so, it is just that I have little time for the pious and irrationally self-righteous, life is too short and there are far more important fish to fry, "I thought you were a decent cunt."

"A decent cunt," I repeated, "yeah, that'll be me, as decent a cunt as you could ever hope to find. What are you here for? What am I questioning about myself now?"

"I wanted to make sure you'd written your letter to Santa, it's only three days to Christmas, you know."

"Christmas," interjected the priest, "is a celebration of our saviour, not something to be mocked by hellspawn!"

"The one that got himself nailed to a piece of wood?" I inquired, expressing my clear fondness for sarcasm.

"It's not a celebration of the holy at all," the little crimson imp smiled, charmingly scratching his rectal orifice with a jagged red fingernail, "it's a big commercial greedfest, I love it! Did you know Santa is an anagram of Satan? Makes you think, doesn't it?"

"Oh yes," I muttered, "I will be analysing the implications of that for the rest of the day."

"What do you want for Christmas?" The words were whispered into my left ear.

"Um..." I paused to gather my thoughts.

"It doesn't fucking matter!" Exclaimed the priest, angrily wagging his finger in my direction, "Santa will be bringing you nothing! He doesn't appreciate your flippancy, young man. You are on the naughty list. Again."

"I'm heading for the step as we speak."

"My kind of guy!" The little devil smiled and winked at me, "Hey, why don't you give me a call sometime, si?"

"I don't know your number." I replied.

"Oh," he looked at me with a degree of incredulity, "come on..."

Day 55 - Friday 23rd December 2016

There's a serious chill in the air today, then it is officially winter now. All alien operations appear to be on a festive break, so I thought I would join them. I don't mean to imply I'll be banging on the saucer door, claiming to be a friend of one of the gatecrashers, just that I'm going home for Christmas. I'm about half way back currently, sat on a seat carved from a tree stump. I'd never noticed it before, but then I'm not sure I've taken exactly the same route back. There are no obvious pathways in these woodlands, so it wouldn't be difficult to go off course. However, all roads lead to Rome, and so long as I check the compass every so often, I seem to end up in the right place. I thought I might spend Christmas Eve sorting out the rest of the containers in the basement, who knows what joyful presents I might find for myself. And little woodland girl? She's coming with me. With me? No, okay, so that's something of an exaggeration. She doesn't know that I know it, but she's behind some trees, about four hundred metres behind me. I first spotted her following me about twenty minutes in to the journey. I hear something every so often, just so I can be reassured she's still there. I don't know quite what her plan is. There's plenty of room inside The Base if she wants some shelter, which I gather she's used to having, or she would be looking quite dirty by now, I would have thought. I figure it's probably best if I let her do her own thing for now. I'm quite a big guy, I can see how someone that small could be a little unnerved by my proximity. I did enjoy our 'moment' on the night of the full moon though, it was quite beautiful.

As I said, I'm suspecting our visitors are taking a break, it was all quiet and dark again last night. I actually folded things up quite early, I was probably laid down by two, think I was asleep before my head hit the pillow. Had an unpleasant nightmare; the little woodland girl was my prisoner, I was keeping her in the cellar back at The Base. She was sat there crying while I was waving a gun in her face, then suddenly the two of us were hanging over a precipice and I had no idea where we were, just that I was in grave danger and I wasn't giving her a second thought. Then I let go, quite deliberately. For no good reason. It wasn't desperation or pain, I had a good grip on some kind of vine, it wasn't cutting into my hands, I felt I could have held on forever. But I let go. Weird. Normally in a dream, you are aware what you are thinking, dreams tend to be first person experiences. But, at the moment I let go, it was like looking out of somebody

else's eyes. It was a very unpleasant feeling, and I woke up. About eight-thirty, I seem to recall. Not quite the long night's sleep I had planned before returning home, but it would do.

I stood out in the open on the track this morning before we left. Maybe walked along it a few hundred metres. Although the track veers away from the landing site a little, walking along it that far was enough to bring me closer than I had been before. Sadly not close enough to see anything before my bottle went, but there ya go. Well, I say 'anything', what I mean more specifically is 'anything not of this world'. I could see some scorching around the tops of the trees, but no burn marks lower down. I don't know what the significance of that might be, but I wrote it down, drew a small diagram, I can always refer back to it later. As well as all my other notes, neatly stored in my backpack. It has a large interior pocket at the back, I suspect for some kind of water bladder, there being holes for tubing above it. If I have one of them, I clearly didn't think I'd need it for this trip. Assuming the backpack was mine in the first place, rather than something my mystery benefactor had packed for me.

Drifted off there a bit, daydreaming. Wouldn't it be astounding if I found a crate of festive spirit in the basement? Do you think my benefactor may have been that considerate? No, probably not, he was likely just thinking to ensure my survival. Doubt if that would have extended to decorations, a tree, gifts, turkey roast and beverages. A part of me would love to see a white Christmas. Another is sensible enough to know that would be a little colder than I'd like to experience with the complete absence of heating here. Not that the cold seems to be bother me much anyway, but I imagine I probably have limits. I wonder if my own world is colder than this one, hence the lack of warmth at night here not being much of an issue. Mind you, the little woodland girl, she didn't look particularly bothered by it either. The full moon may have been enchanting, but it doesn't give off any heat, can't have been more than three or four degrees Celsius. I wonder if they even have that scale here? I seem to know one called Fahrenheit too, confusingly. And metres and yards and kilometres and miles and pints and litres? I don't know just how scrambled my brain is, but it seems odd that I have knowledge of at least two different measuring systems. Can I be from two different cultures? I suppose I assumed that the First World was my point of origin, native, but that isn't necessarily accurate. What if I were a visitor there as much as I am here? Maybe

one set of measures is from my homeworld and another from the First World? Ah, if I carry on chasing my tail at this speed, I'm going to disappear in circles up my own arse. Probably wise to plough on. Should be back in a hour and half. Maybe two, suppose I should keep an easy pace, allow my little friend to keep up. Not that she's had any trouble in that department so far. But just in case. Wonder if she even knows what Christmas is? Whatever, two days time, she certainly will. Ho ho ho!

Day 56 - Saturday 24th December 2016, Christmas Eve

So, what's the plan for the holidays? Shall I spend it with family? When did they last call? Fuck 'em. Book into a swanky hotel somewhere, have it all laid on for me, sauna treatments et al? Not seen a single advert, wouldn't know where to go. Sit here and look at the pre-formed concrete blocks all day? Now you're talking. Seriously though. It's Christmas Eve morning, and you wouldn't know it from any other. No lights in the trees, no fake snow sprayed on the windows, no stocking hanging up over a blazing fire. Oh, come on, Varg, you don't actually LIKE all that shit, do you? You know, I believe I do. It all seems very out of character, but I really feel like I'm going to miss it. I'm currently sat on a packing crate in the basement, it's about eleven in the morning, and I've just found a box of handkerchiefs. Hah! If I had two dozen uncles here, I'd be sorted. I'll tell you what I'd really like to find in some of these boxes; clothes! I've been stuck in the same jeans, t-shirt and coat for nearly two months now. The t-shirt has had a wash, God bless buckets of rainwater. I have a change of underwear to rotate, but there's no way these jeans are going to dry in the cold damp weather we're having. Not good. I doubt Little Miss Woodland 2016 smells any better close up. I have found a couple of sleeping bags to go with the magic tent. Having said that, it's not so magic as to be able to get two people in it. Very definitely a one man tent. No problem, my date couldn't make it tonight anyway. I want to get away from all of this, go somewhere special. I wish I knew where somewhere special was on this spherical corpse. I've walked half a dozen miles in all directions, and all I've found is this building and the wreck of a car in a waterway. But... I do have some good thermally sound camping equipment here. The Green Glade! It's the only place here I have felt true peace. It's as if they can't get to me there, it feels absolutely safe. I wonder if my little friend would like to come? She followed me all the way back here yesterday, no idea where she slept last night,

but I've heard her out there this morning. Even heard her creep into the upstairs at one point, she's getting very brave, wish I had a sticker to reward her with. Well, if she's up for a trip, she'll follow me again. I suppose I could take the extra sleeping bag, accidentally/deliberately drop it a couple of hundred metres before camp, give her somewhere warm for the night. Actually, I can't sit here yakking all day, if I'm going to go, I need to put some things together, give myself plenty of time to get there before nightfall. Yeah, doing it, can't think of a better place to wake up on Christmas morning.

Evening - 19:50

Sweet serenity. It is so absolute, the sense of peace here. The walk down was one of pure joy, each footstep recharging the smile on my face. The woodland girl followed me again. I feel fairly certain she knew that I was aware of her this time. it didn't seem to bother her. I guess that's nice if she no longer sees me as a threat. I still wonder how she has managed to survive for so long without any apparent adult help. Remarkable child. There's quite a chill in the air again this evening, I can see my breath in the light from the netbook screen. I could leave it on all night if need be, here in this magical land of everlasting battery power. There is something so unnatural about this world. Not in its feel; it's soil, rock and water, nothing synthetic about any of that. The trees feel like trees, everything feels entirely as it should. But the complete lack of life, yet no physical signs of any great holocaust. Could you have Armageddon without hellfire? The sky is very dark, not sure about moon phases, do you get a new moon after a full or before it? I don't know if the darkness is lack of moon or excess of cloud. It has been clearing quite a bit over the last few days, but maybe it's naturally a cloudier night. I would love to see some stars, see if the constellations are familiar, see if the pole star agrees with my compass. Strange enough that the sun appears to rise in the west here, and the more I have thought about that, the more I have decided it is wrong, so maybe north would not be north, up could be down, forward could be back. Who knows? Welcome down the rabbit hole. Thank you for driving carefully.

She's moving, Santa's Little Helper. She can help me set the table tomorrow, lay out the crackers. Have to make sure we get the seating plan right, can't put Uncle Barry next to Grandma, boy, do they argue! I wonder if I have an Uncle Barry? I

suppose I have a grandma. Or two. But long in the tooth as I am, probably not any more. I bet she has uncles and grandparents though. Probably all dead from the attack. Poor kid. What a complete fucking nightmare it must have been for her, that she alone has survived the onslaught of an alien invasion. I doubt if she even has the vaguest fucking clue what has happened here. I mean, I'm an adult, I've been around the block a few times. I grant you, I don't know what the block is called or where it is, but I must have been round it a few times. Even so, I don't have the vaguest clue what happened here. Or if I was a part of it. I could have been a victim of the first wave of the attack, maybe my memory loss was a result of it. Maybe I've been home all along. Maybe I'm one of those survivalist nutjobs and The Base and all of that was my escape plan. So why didn't I think of sticking a gun in there somewhere? Still a dozen packing cases left, vou never know. I could go all special ops on the little green fuckers, then launch a guerrilla war. Urban guerrilla, make bombs in my cellar. Didn't I know a song like that once? God, it all seems so long ago. And... wherever it was. Damn, I wish I could remember more, some specifics, something I could use. Turn it off, Sati, Christmas is a time of good will. Well, that and excess. Not that there will be any of that this year. No drunkenness, no gluttony, the Christmas spirit will not be coming at forty proof this time around.

Peace on earth and good will to all men, those words really resonate this evening, don't they? I feel the earth beneath me, and there is peace, however threatened by those in the sky and their compatriots at the landing site. I wonder why they haven't come this far south? No strategic advantage? I don't really see any strategic advantage in simply remaining aboard your own ships. Then again, there's not much I can do to them if they are up there. They must have a plan, you don't travel fifty billion lightyears to get somewhere if you don't have a plan. I suppose if you've already cleaned the house for your arrival, there's no great rush to move in. Unless you're unhappy to let the dust settle again? What's so special about the landing site area? Unless my theory about it being a crash site was correct, in which case, they would just have followed where their craft came down, probably no particular reason, could have gone down anywhere. And, point of interest, exactly what do you intend to do if they do turn up here tonight? There's no shelter here, just the magic tent and a sleeping bag, that's nowhere to hide. Unless they're stupid enough to accept it as a quilted silver rock. Why do I doubt that? Come on, think Christmassy thoughts. And what might those be then?

I just seem to have these memories of gift giving, lights, decoration, gluttony and drunkenness. Is that it? Shouldn't we sing songs and worship Santa or something? Anagram of 'Satan', that was funny. Wonder where the little red bastard is tonight? Probably hiding under a rock somewhere, hopefully not a silver quilted one, feeling quite nauseous with all that good will in the air. Well, I don't have a stocking, but I do have my spare socks. Still a little damp, but they'll do. Tack hammer in hand, couple of small nails and a tree, one sock for me, one sock for my little woodland friend. Be kind to us, Santa, the two of us are having something of a tough time right about now.

Day 57 - Sunday 25th December 2016, Christmas Day



Well, what do you know? Turns out there is a God after all. I woke about nine this morning, long long sleep. I know what you're thinking;

"But Sati, weren't you excited to see if Father Christmas had been?"

No, not really, I'm sure it would just be ties and handkerchiefs at my age anyway.

In fact, I know it will be handkerchiefs, I found some in the basement and wrapped a pack for myself as a Christmas present. I'm nothing if not a traditionalist. Hah! Am I? I doubt it actually, just seemed seemed the right thing to say at that point, I don't want to spoil the atmosphere. It was so warm and cosy inside my tent, wrapped snugly in the sleeping bag. I have no idea what these things are made of, but I'm impressed, they manage to keep you comfortably warm without making you overheat and wake up covered in sweat. Fit for purpose, well done designers, what more could you ask? As soon as I unfastened the tent opening, I knew. There was a kind of childish excitement, a throwback from years earlier, I could smell it in the air. I felt the cold come in through the opening, saw my breath turn to vapour as it took hold, it chilled my fingers as I removed my hands from the sleeping bag. I'm dreaming of... open the flaps wide... yes! Snow! It shouldn't matter, should it? I mean, here we are on a defeated world, cowered at the feet of a technologically advanced and hostile race, it's all over for humankind. And there is me with a smile that could light the darkest night, as if none of that matters, as if this moment in spacetime is the only one that exists. The only one that could ever exist. All of spacetime is now,



captured within this one steamy breath.

I unfastened the sleeping bag, embraced the cold as it traversed my naked body. I don't think I have ever got dressed so quickly, the novelty of the icy air soon wore off, but not nearly to the extent where I would wish it begone. Excitedly, I ripped the writing paper wrapping from my gift.

"Handkerchiefs! Yes!" I yelled with glee, "Just what I wanted!"

I switched the netbook on, this is a moment that needs to be chronicled. I poured a beaker of bottled water, toasted the new day. A coffee would have been nice, but you can't have everything? Why can't you have everything? Note to self; check who makes these rules, sort the fuckers out. So, where is my little friend? I trust she found somewhere reasonably sheltered to put the sleeping bag I dropped off for her, there's no shortage of rocky outcrops around here. I'll go look as soon as I've come round. I'm not a 'morning person', that much is painfully obvious, I rather doubt I've ever been a milkman or a postman somehow. I seem to come alive later. Mornings would be fine if they started later. But today, well, it really didn't matter, I wanted to go outside and sing carols to the world. If only I could remember some. One even. Maybe I wasn't normally a Christmas fan, but there seemed something very special about it today. I wonder if she's found her present yet? I made her a necklace. Some fuse wire and coloured beads of some sort, best I could do, it's not like I have access to vast amounts of craft materials. I thought it would be a nice gesture, I doubt she was expecting anything. I wonder if they have Christmas here? Fuck it, they are today. Right, if you'll excuse me for a bit, I need to go outside and greet the day formally, see what Santa has put in our socks? My bet is something cold and wet...

Noon;

The sleeping bag had not been slept in. It didn't actually look as if it had been touched. So where did she sleep? She was already up and about when I left the tent this morning, I could see her two to three hundred metres away as I put my head out of the flaps. I'd deliberately set the tent up with the opening facing where I'd left the other sleeping bag. And there it was, scattered with snow. She put her hand up when she saw me, wiggled her fingers, I think we had established a greeting. I crawled out of the tent and stood to my full height. I pointed at the sleeping bag, shrugged my shoulders. No discernible reaction. I tried pointing to

the present I'd wrapped for her. I wished I'd had something water resistant to wrap it in, it was probably going to be wet. She's a child, like she'd care. I could see she was looking for what my finger was pointing at, though still seemed nervous about coming any closer. I indicated to her right, made a gesture in the rough shape of the tree I was trying to direct her to. Ultimately, I suppose curiosity would get the better of any child, but as I think I've already said, this one appeared to have a wisdom beyond her years. I walked from the tent towards the stream, away from where she stood, hoping the extra space would encourage her movement. I turned to look back at her, pointed to the tree again, brought my hands up to my chest and opened them out together in her direction. I was sure I had read or seen somewhere that it was a universal gesture to say "this is for you." Of course, they may not have included other worlds in their concept of 'universal' when they decided that. Nevertheless, they were right, she indeed made her way to the tree, looked to the bottom of it and smiled when she saw the small package. But didn't make any attempt to touch it. Much the same with my efforts at passing her items of food. I would approach to a reasonable distance from her, raising my hand when she began to look like she might run, showing her I had something for her. Then I would place it somewhere while she was watching and retreat to where I had been before, look in her direction, make the "for you" gesture and wait. Each time, she would approach whatever I had left for her, look at it, look at me, smile, and walk away from it. The second time she did this, I walked to where I had left the first two items, picked them up while sure she was paying attention, unwrapped them and took a bite. This didn't seem to surprise her, I think she had figured out it was food, but just didn't seem interested in eating anything herself. So, I have a little smorgasbord of things to set up for Christmas dinner, a kind of best of compilation drawn from all the various types of foodstuffs I've found at The Base. Let's see if I can tempt her with anything from that lot.

Afternoon - 15:45

I'm sure I'd said it in this journal somewhere before, but; the best laid men of mice with plans. I tried every method I could think of to demonstrate to her that the food was tasty and safe to consume, but the only interest she showed was curiosity. And now, with the sun vanished behind the trees, she too has disappeared into the fading light amongst them. I am finding it difficult to hide my disappointment, though she is not here to see that sadness. What kind of child

will eat nothing for a whole day, does she not get hungry? She had not gone away for any sufficient period of time to eat elsewhere, so I can only assume she is starving. Yet she looked as healthy and happy when she turned to leave as she had when I first set eyes on her this morning.

It seems to have gone dark in a matter of minutes. It truly brings home the wonders of the discovery of electricity and the power of artificial light. Here I sit, in what is effectively the middle of the afternoon, and as it was for early man, it is the onset of the night, the beginning of many hours of darkness. I suppose they must have lived by the sun, but I find that simply does not work for me. Probably the dark hours were a time of much danger for them, they would have needed fires for protection. Here, well, there is nothing to be protected from. Save for those in the sky. Somehow, I do not see naked flame proving my salvation in that case. The sun had little heat in it today, as would be expected, more so through the heavy cloud. Now, with it gone from sight altogether, the cold is really starting to bite. But seeing snow has made the day something special, like reliving the night of the full moon, quite glorious. Had I seen a bearded man in a reindeer-drawn sleigh flash through the sky, I think the perfect day would have been complete. Seriously though, aside from being worried about that poor child, I have rather enjoyed my Christmas. It's like a tether, something from my before-life that I can cling on to, in the absence of so much else. Never have I felt so alone. Mostly, it doesn't appear to bother me, I seem quite content with my own company. I gather I was something of a lone wolf back on the First World. No matter, we are what we are. But today, even though we have not broken bread together, nor shared a word, she has been such welcome company. I wonder more now if I am a father in that other life, if some poor young child is missing her daddy, crying tears instead of enjoying the wonders of the season. God, I'm getting sentimental in my old age. I wish I could raise a glass to all of those I have known and loved, I fear it would be nothing more than fruit juice though. Oh for a bottle of a fine single malt, or another spirit of similar ilk, to feel it gently warming my throat as I swallowed, to feel it warming my soul as I clutched it to my heart. I wish I could see stars. Stars would be amazing in this natural darkness. I could lay on my back and look up through the flaps of the tent, watch them play with the moon. But then if the sky was clear, I would be able to see them with greater clarity too. I am not convinced I really want that. It would be like replacing the bars of a cell with a transparent forcefield, just so one could observe one's jailers more often. I don't want to see them. And I do. I'm stuffed, definitely eaten too much today, but isn't that the whole point? Let us celebrate the coming of our saviour by reminding the poor of the world how much more than them we have. Saviour. Yes. Guess them up there didn't get the message. Hey, you listening?

I We wish you a Merry Christmas I
I We wish you a Merry Christmas I
II We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year II I

Now fuck off

Day 58 - Monday 26th December 2016, Boxing Day

So, the Easter Eggs will be in the shops about now then. There are certainly some things about the First World I don't miss. Another cold and crisp morning, but then I shan't be hanging about. I wish I'd learnt to make fire. In the absence of matches or a lighter, neither of which I have yet had the fortune of finding, I am hopeless. I would kill for a hot coffee. Not that I've found any coffee either. Do they not have coffee here? What kind of sick and monstrous world would not have coffee? That's just plain wrong. Hot fruit juice may not have the same ring, but it would assuredly help take the chill from the morning air. Anyway, as I was saying, I don't plan to hang about today, just get packed up and make my way back to The Base. Yes, the tent, I did work out how that packed down. Quite simple really, then how easy is it to regularly overlook the obvious? I suppose my little friend will be following me back too. I see her now, she's just walked into my line of sight. Possibly she's been there for a while, I've only been out of the tent briefly. For the obvious reason, so no need to go into detail. And she still doesn't look tired or hungry. I suppose there is little value in concerning myself over it, what can I do? Quite illogical. Yet I can't be angry with myself for demonstrating humanity. I just gave her a little wave, our customary wiggling finger one. She returned the gesture. Please tell me she is not just a figment of my imagination.

I've just realised that many more leaves have gone from the trees, I hadn't really thought about it before. The seasonal change seems quite odd here, almost artificial. I have for a while been toying with the notion that they may be

attempting to change the place. Have I said that before? Terraforming, I believe that's what it is called. But not by them, I'm sure the 'terra' is reference to the First World. Is that it's name, I wonder? What does it matter, First World is as good as any. And what might they call their world? Terror-forming, that would be an amusing pun, if not for the dark reality of the situation. Christmas is over. It was a welcome distraction, I will not deny it, but I think I need to return to the thick of the battle now, albeit a cold war. And a silent one. But come on, what can one man do? Throw stones? Well, I suppose to walk home would be a valid start. I wonder if the snow has fallen back at The Base as well? Knowing the insanity of this place, that is not necessarily so. The bizarreness of Autumnal variance between places not even ten miles apart, that is just damned strange. I seem to recall the word "micro-climate" from my before-life, I think I lived in one. Perhaps this place is geographically unique, maybe there are big hills or mountains, something that shelters it in some way, or parts of it, creating these variances. I suppose they are not so drastic when you think about it, a season can not befall an entire world at once, it must travel, and probably no more than a few miles a day. And then, if you get one or more of these micro-climates, might not that explain the rest? How desperate am I to find answers? Must I analyse everything around me, constantly? Can I not have a break every now and again? Is my whole species like this? Or is it just me? Ah, to hell with it, I'm hungry. Quite how that's possible after all I ate yesterday, that's another question. Breakfast, I think, then packed and home. And think of fire.

Day 59 - Tuesday 27th December 2016

I was watched all the way back from the Green Glade yesterday. I had thought it paranoia to begin with, so I decided to sleep on it, which I understand to be beneficial in clearing one's head. This morning, I still believe I was watched. I do not refer to the woodland child. I would see her occasionally on my journey home, somewhere out of the corner of my eye, skipping behind a tree as if to play 'hide and seek'. Somehow, I do not think she would let me find her if I should attempt to. If she is watching me, she is being extremely blasé about it. Some might suggest a small child would be the perfect spy, perhaps with a small camera mounted somewhere on her clothing. Or perhaps they had taken her and inserted some infernal mechanism inside her head. No, I do not believe any of that. She does not seem troubled, almost simple, too stupid to know what to worry about.

No, that sounds unnecessarily cruel, lacking empathy, forgive me, I should not allow myself thoughts like that. She is just a child, probably lost in her own fantasy as a sole means of escape from the inevitably of death on this world. A pretty little thing, as much as I can make out at distance. I only found reading glasses in my backpack, I would imagine I could use some for distance too. What a waste. What glorious future could she have had? Now, all those choices have been taken from her. I think there nothing more important than our right of self-determination. To not be able to choose how you live, well, it is tantamount to slavery, a betrayal of your humanity. They have much to answer for, those in the sky, those who lord over us and take that choice away. Am I being unfair to them? Do our species think anything of pouring a kettle of boiling water on the entrance of an ants' nest, dare they burrow in an inconvenient place? No, they do not, but would they still take the same action were they aware of the nature of those creatures? Are we just ants to those in the sky? Do they not realise we are intelligent beings, with hopes, with dreams? Did they ask?

The basement; this is the target for today. There are still a number of boxes and containers down there, any or all of which may contain useful items and/or substances. It's still early, the sun has been coming up as I have been writing this entry, sat here in the upstairs of The Base, where best I can take advantage of the beauty of the sunrise. As it barely back-lights the murky grey cloud. Hah! Call me superstitious, but I have noticed that things I subconsciously wish for just seem to turn up in this place. "Oh, woe is me, where will I ever find food and drink?" And there it was, in filing cabinets and storage boxes. In my head, I am blowing out the candles on my cake, I am dropping a threepenny piece in the well, I am pulling the wishbone of a chicken with my father. If only I could see his face. I'd like to see his face. I wish I will find fresh clothes in the remaining boxes, I wish I will find some matches or a cigarette lighter. Oh, and a nice single malt, one not inconsiderably sized bottle of. Strange flavours, the food here. All of it tastes vaguely familiar, but I could put a name to none of it. I remember odd things from my before-life; marzipan, yes, I definitely remember marzipan. I cannot quite place what it looks like, but I can remember it's taste, very sweet with a... a type of 'tang', I really don't recall the right word for it. How annoying. Coffee, yes, I remember that too. Short and dark ones that strip the skin from your lips and have you climbing walls. Joy. And toast. I can almost smell it when I think its name.

It's warmer here, no snow. That had vanished before I had walked for twenty minutes, probably no more than a mile from the Green Glade. Well, not so green as it was a few weeks back. But still hauntingly beautiful. That's probably no bad thing. Although I do not seem overly sensitive to cold, I don't want to take any chances. Clothes, yes, let's hope my wish comes true. This building would be quite exposed if it snows again, with that gaping open corner, there's nothing much to stop it coming right in and making itself at home. God help me, I do not want to be forced back into that fucking cellar. I'm getting used to open space again now, changing light throughout the days. Freedom, it is not a word that rings hollow any more. I begin to think more on the nature and illusions of freedom as the days pass. I recall it was an issue for me in my before-life, something I felt was fundamentally important. I don't know if this was for me personally, whether there was some intolerable strain on my own ability for selfdetermination, or just that I had seen others suffer. God, do I belong anywhere? I am at loggerheads with the powers that be wherever I am. What has brought on this wave of melancholy? Christmas was a minor joy, a welcome escape from the constant mental analysis of my situation. I've seen snow, I've touched it. I love snow. There is something so pure about it, so tactile, so sensory. I know I will enjoy foraging through the remaining boxes and containers, cataloguing and sorting their contents. That is my vesterday and my today, I should be happy. I suspect I am thinking too far ahead, a well set trap for fools. If I stop to think how life here will be in the coming months, into years, into decades, I fall into despair. But if I live it one day at a time, it becomes a manageable target. Reality does not change, reality will not change, reality cannot change. The only choice is how I deal with it. I could sit and plan the fighting of a great battle against our unwelcome intruders. But a wise man knows a battle cannot be won my fighting it. It becomes all about the battle, all consuming. There is no longer any question of winning or losing, it becomes enough that you remain in a state of battle. Not for me, I refuse to be drawn into such idiocy.

Please, do not think me to be in denial; I remain aware of the threat that fills the skies above. In fact, I believe something is happening now. On the way back yesterday, I noticed the predominant pitch of the hum has changed. I had not been aware of it before, I black it out whenever I can, you understand. But yesterday, on my return, simply looking around and absorbing the experience of being, I heard it. A drop of nearly one third of a tone, I would speculate. Call it an

educated guess. I would bet my life on that being correct to within two decimal points. As I looked hard around me, I noticed a faint redness in the light. I suppose it could be pollutants in the atmosphere, who knows what foul and toxic exhaust gases their craft emit, hovering high above us. I'm sure I read somewhere that pollution makes sunrises and sunsets more beautiful to be behold. What do you know, our gods understand irony. Okay, so this is the easy answer, the more palatable. But what if the effects on our atmosphere are not accidental? What if this is their desire? I need to get back to the hide as soon as I can, continue my observations. But I am determined to complete my recon of the basement today. What kind of fool goes to war without fully assessing the weapons at his disposal? I suppose I could just inquire of the quartermaster, but the lazy bastard always seems to be on a break when I want him. Come, Mr. Varg, roll up your sleeves and labour. Enough.

Day 60 - Wednesday 28th December 2016

I have worked up quite a sweat over the last couple of days, unsealing every remaining box and container down in the basement. I would love to know what this building was previously, just to answer a question; is this all for my benefit? Perhaps if it were, I would have found some more clothes, God knows I need some. And some books or magazines, anything just to flick through, see words on a page, however alien the language may be. See what the indigenous looked like, what kind of world they occupied. If this was some sort of storehouse though, why the pipework? It's all questions, isn't it? No clever trick of language intended. Well, end result; I did get one of my wishers, an electronic lighter. Not for cigarettes, I shouldn't think, not unless the indigenous have twelve inch long lips. Must be a firelighter of some sort, but the timing couldn't have been better. Although the discovery of a sleeping bag has made a huge difference to the nights, even allowing me to get out of my clothes and air them for a few hours, the idea of being able to warm food up and have a hot drink is a very uplifting one. In a situation like this, the most minor thing can make a massive difference. But no serious game-changers, no anti-saucer bazookas or anything like that. A part of me was kind of hoping I'd find a ray gun! Hah! Come on, Varg, this isn't a second childhood, this is the real world. The real world? Correction, a real world. Possibly, likely even, not my own.

Something else that's been bothering me this week; even though we passed the Winter solstice several days ago, the days are still getting shorter. I've been checking them by my watch, first glimpse of sun to last, and they are definitely still getting shorter. Only a couple of minutes, but surely they should have turned around by now and started drawing out again? I can rule out an opposite, e.g. December being the summer solstice on this world, the sun cycle timings having been exactly what they should have been so far. Only they seem to be running late. I don't know if this could be anything to do with them and the redness I've noticed in the daylight. My fears about them beginning to transform the atmosphere to support their form of life could actually turn out to be well founded. And what would my life look like then? Hiding in a cellar as they slowly go forth and take over the occupation of the entire planet? Oh joy. And how long would I survive the atmospheric change? What might it entail? In terms of temperature, I'm sure I could cope with twenty degrees in either direction. But, in terms of atmospheric content, that could be a different story. I doubt the plant life here would take kindly to different gases either. Worlds are finely balanced eco systems, at least for the species that live on them. If there is some type of catastrophe, the world will go on, but we won't. We? I. The two of us. Obviously, whatever they have done has already killed off all animal life. Ultimately, the plant life has to go too. So what then? Re-seeding, both in terms of animal life and vegetation? Are they turning this world into a mirror of their own? Note to self; knock on saucer door with clipboard, pretend to be conducting a survey.

I never thought it would end like this, that I could ever end up in a *situation* like this. What was it I wanted to be as a child? A spaceman, I think. Hey, look at this, little Sati, sshhh, be careful what you wish for. Ah, those rocks, I used to love sitting on the rocks at World's End, looking out to sea as far as the edge of the planet, hearing the roar of its water cascading over the side into the space that awaited it. I used to wonder what happened to it after that. I can't remember. You couldn't pass the red buoys in an unpowered sea craft, I remember that one. If you did, you would no longer be able to escape the currents, being slowly drawn towards oblivion. Would there have been air there? Would the underside of our floating diamond have an atmosphere too? These are all the questions that toy with the mind of a child, all the incredible wonders of creation, so hard to get your head around as a youngster. I'm not sure I understand it all yet. But I would sit on those rocks for aeons and do the theoretical physics, desperately trying to

imagine, if it turned out not to be cyclical, what kind of event may have created a universe like this? They would talk of the quantum world where things can be in two places at once and particles jump in and out of existence. From nothingness. I never did understand that, it never sounded plausible. Of course, this was before they had discovered ours was not the only universe that existed. After that, the answers came thick and fast; some of them still play with my head now. You know the thing that plagues you as a child; if the universe does not continue forever, what is there after it finishes? Do you fly past the very last particle of matter/energy, then find yourself in nothingness for eternity? Or what was that other idea we had back then? Oh yes, that the universe was infinite. Honestly, have you ever stopped to think just how big 'infinite' actually is? Imagine the most ridiculously huge number you can think of; let's say ten to the power of a true billion, as in one million squared. That's a '1' followed by 999,999,999,999 noughts. You wouldn't live long enough to count to it, it's bigger than the amount of atoms in the observable universe. So, take that number and multiply it by itself. Don't try to work it out and write it down, life's too short, trust me. You've now got a sum, the first half of which was already so huge that nobody in all of creation could ever possibly have a use for, and then squared it, making one that is beyond even imagination. Yet still, your number does not even constitute as much as one billionth of a percent of infinity. You wonder now that anyone ever believed it. But then we used to believe our world was the centre of creation, all of which worshipped it from distant orbits, that the world...

"Sati!" The voice came from the com-badge on my belt, "Tea in fifteen minutes!" I have to go now, my mum is calling me.

Day 61 - Thursday 29th December 2016

So that's the year nearly gone. Seems quite short when you can only remember a couple of months of it. It's funny, the Christmas thing really did introduce a degree of melancholy into the proceedings. Strange how a joyous time can do that. It got me to thinking about whether I had a family that would be missing me. Christmas must accentuate things like that, must make the pain and sorrow all the harder to cope with. Which rather makes you wonder why they do it at all. I experienced what I would think are probably paternal feelings for that poor woodland child, it's lead me to believe that I probably am a parent, even though I have no memory of a child. Or a wife. Or a family home. But if all of those things

exist, it makes me sad to think how different the festive season must have felt to them. I've been gone for two months that I am aware of, it may even be longer, I have no idea how long I was here for before I regained consciousness. I wonder if they still have hope of finding me? Would they know I was so far away as another world? And that being invaded by yet another? Or would they have written me off for dead by now, be mourning my loss instead of celebrating with everybody else? They know nothing more than I do. Across time, space and whatever else we are unaware of, we have that connection, my possible family and myself; we do not know how the others may be suffering, if they live, what their fate may be. It gives me a sort of comfort, a bond, a tether to the First World. It is not how I would choose things to be, not knowing has to be the worst thing of all, but the sense of mutual not knowing links us, gives us a bond we may not otherwise have. How sad that I have to reach so low to find solace. And New Year nearly upon us, when they must suffer more of the joys of others, hear their celebrations. Where would I rather be? There, wondering if I am alive or dead, or here, wondering if they exist or not? Life can be so strange at times.

Day 62 - Friday 30th December 2016

The melancholy still pervades my every waking moment, coupled with a sense of resignation that this is my lot in life. I have formulated a plan; I will see in the New Year at The Base, then I must leave to confront our enemy. Whether or not they are currently aware of my existence is irrelevant now, they soon will be, then they will do what they will do. It had not at first occurred to me, but I am now armed; fire. Petrol and milk bottles would have been a welcome accompanying find, but the rural guerrilla cannot have everything. In fact, I have nothing in the way of accelerant or delivery methods, so I will need guile I have not previously demonstrated. And what do I burn? Do not burden me with your questions now, I have much to think on. Fear not, I will find things to burn, I will make them rue the day they ever set their covetous eyes on this world. What, I hear you ask, has brought on this spite and quest for vengeance? They have harmed the woodland child, damn them. I could not deal with it on a personal level before, I had no idea where I was, let alone any knowledge of the people who had once lived here. But now, the vanished have a face. I wish it was one I had seen clearly, but the lack of any glasses, save those for close up work, has made that impossible. They have crossed a line. Perhaps it was not truly my business before, they had done nothing to me, I had done nothing to them. Okay, I'd watched them. Filed them. Taken pictures. For all I know, they have been doing the same to me for two months. But we had not harmed each other, neither had we caused harm to come to anyone or anything that either of us cared about. I had felt no sense of duty to defend this world, just the occasional pique of anger or frustration, but I think that speaks more of my own nature than of my opinion of their invasion. I am no fan of humanity, it is a despicable species, capable of great evil. Why should I believe the former occupants of this world were any different? But now, now they have attacked something known to me, something I felt positive emotion for, something too young to have yet sinned.

I had heard her this morning, skipping through the woods around The Base, singing to herself, either in nonsense words, or perhaps her native tongue. She had retreated to a safer distance as I had left the building, though no longer behaved as if she had even the slightest fear of me. I had raised my hand, wiggled my fingers in the waving gesture the two of us had established as a greeting. She returned the same and smiled. I looked to the sky, the clouds thinning still, more blue sky showing. And still, I think, a reddish hue to the light. As I looked down, the child looked up, and vice versa. I think she was actually playing a game with me, our connection was clearly growing. I would love to be able to tell her that The Base can be her home too, even if she is only comfortable there while I am gone. Maybe she does have shelter elsewhere, she certainly does not have the appearance of one who sleeps rough, but surely a home with company would be more desirable? It had taken several days just to establish the most basic level of communication, I gathered it would be a long haul to take it any further. Still, what did I have if not time? I had not particularly come outside to see her, though I do not deny the pleasure her presence brings, rather the purpose of my exit had been simply to walk. Just a stroll in the woods around my home, there are still bits of it I hadn't explored yet, but there was no great agenda, just a relaxing stroll, setting down one foot after another.

Although my intention had been to empty my mind and allow nature full access to my senses, it seems that 'other half' of my brain had different ideas. My thoughts turned to the landing site and whatever way I may find to approach it. Rationally, should I make said approach when they are at rest, I would probably have a better than sixty-forty chance of getting to the cover of the tree line. From there, they

may be no more than a few dozen metres from me. Possibly, I may even be able to see through the trees and finally observe in detail what stands there. If I can solve the problem of an accelerant, even the finding of adequate kindling, I might just be able to burn them out. In the absence of any conventional weapon, I believe that is the best chance I have. Oh, I'm ahead of you; once I've done that, they know I'm here, they come after me, what's the plan then? You and your damned questions again. No, I haven't thought it through fully, I don't know what else to do. I was half-hearted about the whole thing, kept asking myself what they had ever done to me? The trouble was, I was not sure whether I was being the voice of reason or speaking the excuses of cowardice. Why I should do anything at all rather than nothing? Well, yes, that is a significant question. Believe me, I had realised long ago that if I simply left them alone, they may well leave me in peace also. If, however, I attacked them, I become a threat. Were I in their position, what would I do then? Think about it; you travel umpteen million lightyears to take a world, you exterminate all life on it, then someone you did not even know was there commits an act of terrorism? And that is how they will see it; an act of terrorism. History has always been that way; if they battle for the same cause as yourself, they are freedom fighters, they are the resistance. If they battle for the opposite cause from your own, they are terrorists. They will not negotiate with me, they will have to erase me. There will be no fear of martyring me when they have left nobody to revere me as one of the heroic fallen.

And for all of my inner conflict and self doubt, they were winning the battle. Until they crossed the line. Of course, the little woodland child came with me on my walk. Always a protective buffer between us, it had reduced to a hundred metres now, but it was still there, as was she. I would throw her a glance every so often, she would giggle and duck behind a tree. Again, I think we were playing a child's game, but no matter, I actually found it rather therapeutic. Deep in thought, I continued walking, my aim being to circumnavigate The Base at a distance of approximately one and a half miles, thus providing myself with a pleasant hike of some nine miles or so. It would kill a few hours, at least, and hopefully help my mind to clear. I thought of the strange bottle of alcoholic liquid I had found not long after my arrival, I wished I had saved half of it for New Year's Eve. I could have poured a glass... I do not have a glass... I could have poured a beaker of it just before midnight, drank a toast at the sound of the bells, then sipped it as I went tree to tree, first-footing. Temperance leaves much to be desired. And I had

daydreams of this ilk for an hour or so before I realised she had gone. I started to whistle, thinking she may just have lost track of me and it would alert her to my position again. Possibly this was a bad idea, I seemed not to have the acumen for it. It wasn't the first time she had disappeared off to do her own thing, so I was not at first overly concerned. Not until I saw the dark shape in the near distance. I had no idea what it was, but it was not a child, and it was moving. The logic was simple; the only living things I knew of on this world were myself, the woodland child, and them. It became clear; if she vanishes and one of them appears... I don't want to think about it, not now. Later, when I am alone, when the threat has gone, there will be tears, I will mourn her passing. But for now, I have seen it, it has seen me, let the games commence.

Seriously, I was prepared to go toe to toe with one of them, I was honestly angry enough not to give a flying fuck what became of me. I had simply glared in its direction, thrown my coat to the ground and started walking towards it. At first, it appeared confused, I suppose the lion does not expect to be confronted by its lunch. I fixed my stare at it as I approached. It was humanoid, two arms, two legs, a head. I could not see the details of the head, it wore a black mask. It did not appear to be breathing apparatus of any description, just a piece of clothing, but one that would not normally be seen on anybody not in the process of robbing a bank. Time seemed to slow as I strode towards it, both of us looking straight at each other. The mask had no openings, but patches of white where the eyes and mouth would be. As I came closer, I could make out that they were partially opaque. Closer still and I could see that the eyes behind them were not human. I froze. For these past two months, I had visualised them as small and green, now I was confronted with the reality. I could not see the colour of its skin, it was covered from head to toe, if such an expression could be even vaguely appropriate. But I could see it was not small. It was easily as tall as myself, a good six feet, and was not merely large in terms of height. How strong would it be though? How would the gravity of its own world compare to this one? How would this affect the density of it musculature? It obviously regarded itself hard enough to take on a small girl, let's see how it likes fighting someone more its own size.

I took a deep breath, put my head down and ran straight towards it, screaming at the highest volume my straining lungs would allow;

"CCCCUUUUUNNNNNTTTTTTT!!!!!!"

The fear I should have felt had no time to establish itself, the adrenal gland had taken full command of my system. Though I was no more than ten metres from it when I had frozen, no more than that same ten metres from it when I began that final lunge, contact did not come quickly. Everything around me reduced to slow motion. I watched the leaves slowly rise as my feet lifted from the ground after each step, saw them ponderously twirl in the air, away from the direction of my momentum. I heard my heart beating hard, but oh so very slowly. For some minutes, I felt as if time may even have ceased to move altogether. Why had I not made contact with it yet? How long does it take a man to cover ten metres? Seconds, surely. I felt something block my right boot, causing me to begin falling towards the ground. God help me, I will be at its mercy if I end up at its feet. I knew the fall would cause me no pain, the ground approached too unhurriedly to cause any damage. Instinctively, I put my hands out in front of me, ensuring I could protect myself when eventually I reached the woodland floor. I would need to roll from its path, the very second I hit the ground, or it will be upon me. There will be no advantage for me down here, not against something as big and powerful looking as that thing. After what seemed like an almost endless descent, the ground hit harder than I had anticipated and a small amount of pain followed. I became aware of a twinge of discomfort behind my right shoulder, but I had no time to stop and think about it now, the slow motion had mercilessly abandoned me in my time of need. I swiftly rolled on to my back, ready to take evasive action and to try to get back on my feet, at least as soon as I had established my position in relation to its. It was then that I realised I had passed where it had been stood. I should have lifted my head, damn it. So where had it gone? I sat there on the leaves, the chill damp of the woodland ground creeping up my spine, began a full 360° visual sweep. It had gone. Where the fuck could it have gone? There's nowhere to go, it's just trees, nowhere something that big could hide. Then I saw the necklace laying on the ground, just within my arm's reach. I hadn't even realised she had picked it up that day. And I just sat there staring at it, just fuse wire and coloured beads, but so wishing I had seen her wearing it. And the sadness came. And it began to overwhelm me. And the tears fell. And I sobbed, sobbed uncontrollably, desperately choking out the words;

"This isn't over. This isn't over. This isn't over."

Day 63 - Saturday 31st December 2016, New Year's Eve

- "Hello," said the little pixie, "my name is Nimble Pimble, what's yours?" Sati opened his eyes, rubbed them and looked at him.
- "What the fuck?" He said.
- "No, no, no," muttered Nimble Pimble very quickly, "you can't say words like that in a children's story."
- "Children?" Sati repeated, "Oh, yes, I understand. Hello, Nimble Pimble, my name is Sati Varg."
- "Pleased to meet you, Sati, welcome to Sleep." He danced a little jig in his bottle green wellington boots.
- "Sleep?" Said Sati quizzically?
- "Oh, well done, very good word, that will help the children's reading." Nimble Pimble smiled, "Yes, Sleep, you know, where you go when your mummy puts you to bed, you go to..."

He paused, waiting for the little boy to answer.

- "Sleep?" Said Sati.
- "Yes, well done! This is Sleep, it's where we live."
- "We?" Asked Sati.
- "We are The Dream Pixies. When your mummy puts you to bed, you go to Sleep, where we'll be waiting to give you lots and loads of lovely dreams."
- "But I'm not a little boy," Sati argued, "I'm an old man."
- "Little boys of all ages are welcome here." Nimble Pimble assured him.
- "In Sleep."
- "Yes."
- "Hello, Nimble Pimble!" Shouted a little lady pixie voice, "Who is this then? Have we got a new little boy to play with tonight?"
- "Yes, Betty," Nimble jumped up and down, he was very excited, "his name is Sati Varg. But he's not a little boy, he's an old man!"
- "Oh, don't be silly, Nimble Pimble," she giggled, "he looks just like a little boy to me. Hello, Sati, my name is Betty Petals. Look! Here comes my sister, Rose!"
- "Rose Petals?" Sati sniggered.
- "Yes," Betty said, sounding a little bit cross, "Rose Petals. What's so funny about that?"
- "Oh, nothing," Sati bit his lip, knowing he was being just a little bit naughty, "nothing at all."

- "No there isn't!" Shouted a very grumpy sounding pixie.
- "Hello, Lomby!" Said Nimble Pimble.
- "Hello, Lomby!" Said Betty Petals.
- "Hello, Lomby!" Said Rose. She liked to leave the 'Petals' bit off. It was a *bit* funny. She knew that really.
- "Hello, Nimble Pimble!" Said Lomby, "Hello, Betty Petals! Hello, Rose! Who's this cheeky young fellow then?"
- "Hello, Lomby!" Said Sati, "My name is Sati Varg, and when my mummy puts me to bed, I go to Sleep!"
- "Like all the little boys and girls!" Said Nimble Pimble, Betty Petals, Rose and Lomby as one, then they began to sing a happy song;

I Like all the little boys and girls I

I The boys they smell, the girls have curls I

I We play some games the whole night long I

I We like to sing our happy song I

I Dream Pixies, we are they I

I We await when ends the day I

I Little children must not weep I

I So every night they come to Sleep! I

And the four Dream Pixies all held hands and danced round in a little circle.

"Do ALL the little boys and girls come here?" Asked Sati.

They stopped dancing and looked at him.

"You ask a lot of questions." Said Nimble Pimble, tugging at his pointed pixie ears.

"So when I grow up I can know lots of things!" Said Sati, with a big smile on his face.

They all laughed.

"Of course they do!" Said Betty Petals, "Every little boy and girl comes here. Why do you ask?"

"Does SHE come here?"

They all looked at each other solemnly.

- "She... she did." Nimble Pimble bowed his head.
- "This is getting very sad," said Betty Petals, "shall we sing our happy song again?"

- "I'm sorry to make it sad," said Sati, "but I wondered what I was doing here."
- "Every little boy and girl..." Betty Petals began.
- "I need to know," Sati interrupted, "I think the bad man did something to her."
- "That's very rude," said Betty Petals, "didn't your mummy tell you not to interrupt people when they are talking to you?"
- "I'm sorry, Betty Petals," said Sati, "but the little pretty woodland girl matters."
- The four Dream Pixies went very quiet, Sati thought he must have upset them, which would have been very thoughtless of him, and no little boy should be thoughtless, what would his mummy say?
- "Of course she does," said Lomby, removing his pointy hat to reveal a pointy head, "yes, the bad man did something to her."
- "Oh dear!" Said Sati, "Do you know where I can find the bad man? I should tell a policeman about him!"
- "At the landing site, of course!" Said Rose.
- The other three Dream Pixies looked at her accusingly.
- "What?" She said angrily, "He's got a fucking right to know."
- "I was *trying* to keep this pleasant." Nimble Pimble thumped his walking cane down on the floor. "So what are you going to do, Mr. Varg?"
- "Set the cunt on fire!" Growled Lomby.
- "Yes!" Betty Petals nodded enthusiastically, "Set the cunt on fire and poke him with a stick!"
- "Absolutely!" Rose agreed too, "Set the cunt on fire, poke him with a stick, and smash his feet up with a hammer!"
- "Oh, fuck pleasant!" Nimble Pimble scowled, "Set the cunt on fire, poke him with a stick, smash his feet up with a hammer and piss in his eyes!"
- "But won't that put out the fire?"

Day 64 - Sunday 1st January 2017, New Year's Day

Resolutions. The word comes readily to mind when one thinks of a New Year; resolutions. I have no vices whose demise I should aspire to this year, this place allows me nothing of that nature. So, where shall my resolve lie? I have not woken nursing a hangover, I have not started my day late as a result of being up later than is sensible. I have, however, started as I intend to go on. In preparation. In my heart, I know it is not enough to watch these creatures from a safe distance, but I also know it is unwise to take on a fleet in an all-out assault. I fear the tactics of the partisan are all that is left to me, and my war begins in earnest today. I do not believe vengeance is something we should seek, a wise man once said that before seeking revenge, one should dig two graves. I wish I could recall who it was, so as to give him the credit he richly deserves for such wisdom, but I do not. Vengeance is an evil, it eats away at the vengeful soul, it is not a war you can win. Hate will always do more damage to the hater than the hated. But I cannot love these beings from another world. And I cannot begin to empathise with the heinous crime they have committed here. I have made my peace with the powers that be, I am ready for whatever may come. No, I am no hero, a hero would not tremble inside as I do. I am a coward. I would never do this if I had any viable choice. But I fear I do not. And I fear them, And I fear death, Or worse, But it will come, one way or another. Whoever cast me adrift on this ill-fated world has taken my right of self-determination from me, my choice is gone. I do not seek to lay blame at their door for it, possibly they had no choice either. My only remaining choice now is to choose how I might fall. Of starvation. Of suffocation. Of violence. I know which will be quicker. But can I be sure I can avoid being taken alive? I would not wish to fall into the hands of these vile creatures, and the inhuman eyes that lie behind their masks. I'm not sure I would have the courage to take my own life either, if such an act can be so construed. Nevertheless, my final journey begins today.

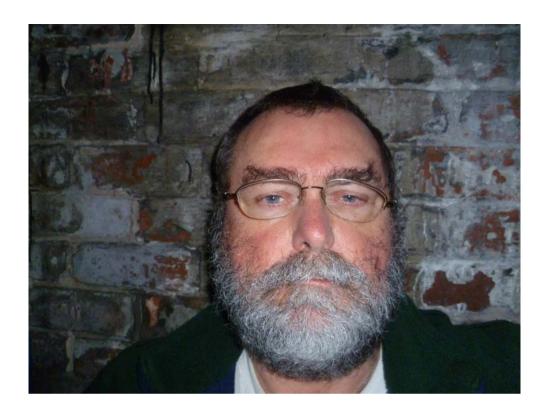
I am as armed as I can be, I think. I have my firelighter and a backpack filled with dry paper. I have a hammer, a screwdriver filed sharp, several pieces of dowelling the same. I have no weapons of mass destruction I could deploy within 45 minutes, I have no weapons with which I can eliminate combatants from a distance, I have just the crudest tools of bloodshed and the ageing muscle power with which to deliver them. Who will the gods favour? Save your money, friend, I

doubt I will exit this in one piece. And never believe that I would not rather run if there were anywhere safe to go. But there is not, so my destination must be the landing site, the only place on the nearby surface it could have run to. It is no bigger than I, this thought I keep playing in my head, it is no bigger than I, and I do not fear it alone. Vengeance. That word again. Will I have regrets if I am successful? What sort of man will it leave me if I manage to slay it? Self-tainted? Guilt-ridden? What is wrong with me that I would feel guilt at killing one party to genocide? And that poor child, does she not deserve justice? But perhaps this is the crucial question; is an act of vengeance truly just? Can I rightly punish a killer with death? Does that not make me the same? What comfort will be my reason and logic if I become guilty for the crime I tried, sentenced and executed it for? Is this war? Is that a fair excuse for it? It is one I shall live with. It is the only one I have

Do you know what scares me most of all? I could not tell you this were you not a stranger to me. And, if I have friends, family, if they should ever read this, what may they think of me? If one must be damned, then be damned for doing the right thing. I am guilty of nothing, I have committed no crime, I simply have a fear. All of us hide our darkness, why pillory a man for his honesty? Do you now suspect what scares me most of all? Yes, stranger, that I may take pleasure in the act. How will that make me feel? If I burn it and revel in the flames, if I stab it with sharpened wood and find elation in its pain, if I break the bones in its feet with my hammer and become drunk on the power I have over it. Another wise man, I recall, stated that we should not do battle with monsters, lest we become one also. Please, our gods, their gods, if they have them, all powers that be, all spirits of the earth and sky; if there is a way I may escape this terrible fate, bring me to that state of enlightenment. Illuminate my mind with wisdom beyond my genus, show me ways I may never dream of, take me from these manifold shades of grey in which I live. Do this for me and I will serve you for eternity.

Day 65 - Monday 2nd January 2017

The gods mock me. Today is the day I set forth, say farewell to The Base, most likely for the last time, AND I BREAK MY FUCKING GLASSES! I have just one pair of reading glasses with me, but no case to keep them in, and life in my pockets here has fatigued them to the point of fracturing. I was planning a



photograph for posterity before I left, one of a dignified looking man, a man about to face his destiny. I end up with a picture of a sad old fuck wearing broken glasses. Yes, laugh at me, fate, laugh at me and go fuck yourself. I do not care what omens are thrown at me this morning, I am going, enough said. Do your worst. No, maybe I shouldn't have said that, no point in tempting fate further. Where the fuck do I find an opticians on this God forsaken ball of death and decay? Now, my dignified parting becomes a scramble to find some electrical tape or similar to try to stop my glasses falling apart altogether. Why now? I have them balanced on my face at the moment, so I am even robbed of a dignified parting journal entry. Why mock the lone defender of this world? What did I ever do to you? The glass is falling out of the left side, the metal has broken, and these are the only damned things I have that enable me to see to write this or check camera settings, see its LCD monitor clearly. When I get back to the hide, I will need them to fill in my watch forms, note the observations that will lead to my attacks, will allow me to see any fine detail I may need to when out in the night. Why I would not have brought with me the distance glasses I clearly need as well.

Damn, it's not like me, I don't feel like that kind of person. I am *not* disorganised, I am *not* forgetful, that is *not* me. I am methodical, ordered, structured and planned, that is who I am. Something must have happened. Fuck, I wish I could remember what it was.

I don't think I am a superstitious person, I really do not strike myself as the type to live with such irrationality. No, I would not allow myself to be a slave to anything. But. Yes, you knew there was going to be a 'but', didn't you? But... things like this do seem to happen to me at the most inopportune moments. I mean, seriously; I am just about to set off to do probably the first damn thing I've done in my life that will really count for something... and that's the moment the powers that be choose to be decide my glasses should break. It's the sheer banality of it. Why couldn't they break my leg or something? And that is NOT a challenge, should they be listening. Make a fucking change if they were listening to me. At least that would have been something appropriately major. I've just had to experience the death of a child, the only other human company I've had in two months, and I want to avenge that death. Does "I've broken my glasses" seem the kind of trivial shit that should thwart such a noble plan? Perhaps the sole of my boot can start coming loose too? No, my flies should burst, that would be it. Or the elastic go in my underpants. What do I need to do, oh powers that be, that you should take me seriously? The fact I have a sense of humour does not make me a joke. I exist, I deserve the same respect as does any member of my species. Right now, I might be all they have left. Why do I even talk to you? This is one world in a universe beyond perception, I am one man on a vast ball in space, why would you give a shit? So one planet out of billions blinks out of existence.

"What was that that just ceased to exist, Mrs. G, have that aggressive masked race been committing acts of that genocide thing again? Shouldn't be allowed."

"Pots and kettles, Mr. G, what about that flood, eh?"

"Good Me, is that the time? The snooker's on in ten minutes, make us a cup of tea, pet."

Have we all been forgotten by our gods and masters, or is it just me? Do they not empathise with us any longer? If ever they did. Are they so far distant from us that we are an insignificance for them? They create worlds, we merely occupy them. And briefly at that. We're just an afterthought, aren't we? We are the six minutes to midnight genus. And who knows if we will be here beyond the witching hour...

Day 66 - Tuesday 3rd January 2017

I am at the hide again, with sufficient stock of food and water to last a week at least. Sensibly, I have over-stocked on each visit, carrying as much extra as I have been able. I think it now exceptionally wise, in light of the observations I have already made before sunfall. Within ninety minutes of The Base, I began to notice small changes, shoots beginning to appear, as if Spring had come early. The days are already growing longer, the solstice on this Second World approximately a week later than on the First. But this does not seem an entirely natural Spring. I have misty recollections from my before-life that Spring was not a fixed point in time, that our climate could be somewhat erratic, snow in Summer, growth in Winter. But this seems like something other than that. My suspicions fall on the redness I have seen in the light, I am now convinced they are doing something to the planet. This is a very bad thing for myself and the indigenous plant life, even two to three degrees can be utterly catastrophic. They must realise the destruction this will rain upon those of us with the greater right to be here. I include myself in that, this world is clearly more appropriate for my species than theirs. Humanoid does not make human. And those cold eyes, like a reptile, I still shudder when I think of them. But I will not avert my gaze from them when it is caught in my trap and suffering. I do not know how or why, but I seem to have some knowledge of building traps. God help me, maybe I am one of those survivalist nutjobs after all. Hah! Doubtful, I don't think I could kill an animal. Maybe if it was me or it. But not for sport, not even for food. And if I were hungry enough? I would hope not, and I thank the powers that be that theory will not be tested here.

I was outside at about three o'clock this afternoon when the first signs of an active night came. Our previously night-dwelling guests are now worshipping the nocturnal sun. In daylight, and it has most certainly grown brighter in the brief period since last I was here, I can see more clearly what rises over the tree line. To be more accurate, I will be able to when it happens. I will be able to observe colour and size in more detail, as much as my aged eyes will allow, but definitely more than just lights. Something had jumped briefly into view several times, causing me to start and duck for cover, but by the time I had looked again, they were out of sight. Of the woodland floor, I saw the first shoots of ferns appearing. Looking up, I saw green buds appearing on trees. And I could see them, those in the sky, more often. I wish I had a tripod, God knows I wish I had a tripod. I

should set it, point it at the sky, then be ready on one of those sparse occasions they show through. And I heard that infernal hum, louder than before. Are they lower down in the atmosphere now? Or is it just indicative of some technology they have begun to use recently? Beyond doubt, there is far more activity over at the landing site now than before. Judging by the amount of noise, I would not be surprised if there are more of them there. An academic point, I am not about to launch a frontal assault. Whatever I was in my before-life, it was something more delicate than a soldier. Not that I will flinch from picking off stragglers, especially the one I saw after the woodland girl vanished. I wonder what colour its blood is?

It is long passed seven now, a dark night again, save for the intensive illuminations across the track, field and tree line. I have seen at least a dozen of the smaller hover-light craft and one of the larger sky-fallen. Well, their lights, I have come to know their lights well. I have just to see the shape, size and colour of one to know exactly which craft it belongs to. And they do their dance, accompanied by the clanking and scraping of metal, the grinding of machinery, the chorale of their factorie sinistre. It makes me uncomfortable, there is no shame in that. I do not flee, I do not flinch, I merely do not rest in comfort. Because of the increased activity, I am operating by a different methodology this evening. Rather than making notes on paper by torchlight, I am keeping the netbook on, so I can make better use of its spreadsheets. I need to cross-reference what I am seeing, thus I keep the netbook in a low corner, lid tilted so as to be almost closed. I am opening the 'curtains' for thirty minutes at a time, then closing briefly while I enter notes in the spreadsheet. I could use a database, but there is no point to covet that which does not exist here. I have searched through all the software on this machine, it is basic at best, but still serves a useful purpose. The spreadsheet will suffice. This system is allowing me more 'on duty' time to think about what I have seen and mentally process the information. A couple of nights of this and I do believe I will be ready to make my move. I await the sound of footsteps. They will be heavier than those previous, she is gone now, the poor child. But that monster is out there somewhere, it is no stranger to these woodlands. It may even have been them that were responsible for the bootprints I found. I just made the assumption they were human. But these creatures do not wander with naked feet, they too have attire that does not look dissimilar to our own. Oh, do come and walk in my woods, I have matters I am keen to discuss with you. Back in thirty...

Day 67 - Wednesday 4th January 2017

I stand confused. Hell bent was I on vengeance, now last night has thrown me into confusion. I expected to be making reports after my thirty minute watches, but, as they say, be careful what you wish for. "Oh, do come and walk in my woods." I had beckoned. Allow me to elucidate; during the watch that I never returned from to write up, the larger craft hovered some two hundred metres over the tree line at the landing site, slowly rotating, as if scanning the area. I determined that once I had made my notes at the end of the watch, I would move outside to attempt a photo, I had never seen it stay in the one position so long prior to this. The numerous smaller craft, the hover lights, they went about their business, making brief appearances above the tree line, though none to the same elevation as the larger. I am beginning to suspect a repeat pattern in their movements, but it is not an immediately obvious one. There is an element of repetition to them, if one allows for regular random variation. I need to check back over my notes to see if I can correlate enough to give my theory a sound basis. Meanwhile, I continued to watch, almost hypnotised by the dancing illuminati. The more I observed the position and rotation of the master craft, the more I came to believe it was acting as a watchtower. The same feeling came over me as often does when I walk in the woods; the sensation that I am being watched, my every movement, like a rat in a maze. Perhaps it is not mere coincidence that I have yet to eliminate this possibility from the list of ideas as to why I might be here. The noise and visual activity were relentless. Whatever they construct or repair over there, I think they must very nearly have completed their mission, be it the advance guard or whatever else I have not yet considered.

As the watch was coming to its close, the master craft started to descend, slowly, almost imperceptibly. This event ostensibly forced my next action; I would have to abandon the remaining twenty-seven seconds of the watch and move outside to attempt my photograph now, I may never get a better, or as good an opportunity. It was then I heard the footsteps. That light touch, as if the masked brute was made of something much less massive than muscle and bone. I pushed the lid nearly closed on the netbook, slid it into one of the recesses I had burrowed for food storage. I did not think it likely that any light, however small an amount, would bleed into the night, but this was probably not the occasion to test that hypothesis. My knees ached from kneeling, I wanted desperately to get my weight

off of them and sit back in a relaxed position. But I dare not move. It was close. Very close. I would hazard a guess at three to four metres distant, no more. I breathed slowly, taking great care not to inhale or exhale any louder than I absolutely had to. It was circling again, as it had before. I recall my image of it from before I knew what it looked like, when I had thought it of childlike size. A part of me had become convinced that it must have been the woodland child who walked around here, but if any proof were needed, the return of the footfall beyond her death be it. It was not circling perfectly, not as if it knew exactly where the hide was and was stalking me, perhaps seeking an entrance. I felt that I should have been frightened, but I was not, even slightly. If anything, I wanted to get out there and rip the head from its body with my bare hands. However, I would be clearly disadvantaged while sliding out of the exit on my back. I am vulnerable at that point, my movement and speed both limited. First, I would need to wait it out, wait for it to move away from the hide, and in the opposite direction to my secreted exit.

At least an hour passed, maybe longer, I did not want to move any more than necessary, including the pointless checking of my watch. This was an opportunity, not another event to catalogue and cross-reference. It had not, in all of this time, moved further than five metres away, to the best of my ability to make such estimates. I wanted to push the rods up and open my viewing portal, but such an action did not smack of wisdom at that precise moment. It is not that I feared the creature, I trust I have already made that plain, I reiterate the point because it is important you understand the situation accurately. I was positive that I would emerge victorious in one-to-one combat. Again, having no idea why, I seem to possess knowledge of physical combat, and of a rather vicious variety at that. None of this made any sense to me, I did not seem to be an angry or violent person by nature, but then who knows what I may have been in the past. Maybe my journey was long and complex even before I got here. I would love such knowledge again before I die. And die I will, but not this night. The exit though, that was the problem, if it caught me half out of the exit, I would not easily be able to defend myself. So, I had to wait until it was in a position where I may emerge completely and unnoticed. It was a game of patience. That, unfortunately, seems something I have little or no knowledge of at all. Why would it not move away? Go back towards the landing site, let me stalk you for a while.

I don't know how long it took before the powers that be began to regard my request with any serious attention, two hours, maybe three. My knees were causing me intense pain, damn them, I would need to walk that off before engaging the creature. Finally, it had begun to walk back in the direction of the landing site. I wondered if it was far enough away to risk lifting the window camouflage. Unless it has perfect night vision, that cannot be a significant problem. Then again, it does seem to walk around a lot at night. But it obviously does not possess intensely acute hearing. How did I know this? My knees, I simply had to move on one occasion, stupidly knocking a bottle of water over. I managed to catch it before it could hit anything else, but it was a sound, one I was sure would be quite audible from outside, this is only a hole on the ground, after all. But it did not hear. By this time, I could not even hear its footsteps. I inhaled a deep breath through my nose, exhaled slowly through my mouth, reached for the rods and pushed gently on them. Just the smallest slit at first, an uncomfortable position as there is no mechanism to lock the rods in place between open and closed, this not being a precision construction. My eyes scanned as much of the horizon as possible, though all I could truly see were the lights above the landing site, and something tree-shaped blocking a part of the master craft as it moved to the extreme left of my field of vision. That would be a tree. And something smaller in silhouette. Moving. I pushed the rods a little further. I could now see some of the hover lights higher than where the larger craft had been earlier, moving in a diagonal ellipse, perfectly synchronised. A beam of bright white light from the master craft lit up the area behind the tree that partially obscured it from my view. And lit up the smaller object too. The child. She was not dead? "Move!" I had shouted, "Run!"

Then felt my blood run cold as I realised they too may have heard me. Quite suddenly, the lights on each craft went out simultaneously, reducing the woodland to absolute blackness. And there was silence. And I did not move until the sun had brought a semblance of light back to the area.

In the morning, I went outside. As calm as I was, I could still hear my breathing at a near deafening level, such was the tranquillity. There was no sign of the child, none of the creature either. I looked carefully at the ground, checking for any signs of movement around the hide, and out to a distance of some five metres, gradually working the complete circle in which I had heard the walking. I found nothing. What kind of child does not eat, does not drink, does not sleep? And

what manner of creature does not leave footprints in soft ground? I grant you, the soil is no longer as damp as it was on my first visit, the red light seems to be drying it, warming the air. Nevertheless, there are places I would have expected to see the marks of footfall. But not so much as an obviously disturbed leaf. And my lust for vengeance; now I had seen her again, had it passed? I was not vet sure. Certainly, it had calmed, but I think I will need to sleep on it further. I have had four or five hours of rest today, I had little choice, I was exhausted after last night. But none until I was sure all threats had passed. At least as much as the sense of threat in this place ever passes. I fear to admit to myself that all of this is becoming much too real for my comfort. Tonight, I will secrete myself outside of the hide. I need a clear view of what is going on, all of it, not just that which I can observe through a narrow slit portal. I want to be able to see 360 degrees, as clear as whatever light there is will allow me to. And I want not to be confined in any way, not vulnerable, stifled. Should that creature come back this way tonight, I will be ready for it. Flame, hammers, spiked wood et al. And should the child come near, I must take the opportunity to rescue her from the mercy of these unwelcome abominations

Day 68 - Thursday 5th January 2017

Catharsis. There are times in one's life it becomes an essential process. How does one deal with rejection in an abstraction? I stood watch for a few hours of darkness to witness much the same mania as the previous night. I tried to make my periodical notes, but found my concentration wavering, my thoughts continually drifting towards the child. In my early days here, I used to dream of a child. I had forgotten that, but have been re-reading some of this journal today, possibly in an effort to reaffirm the sense of identity I seem to be losing of late. I think she and the woodland child are one and the same. Exactly how this would be possible is hard to imagine. At first, I believed the girl in the dreams would be someone from my before life, likely an offspring, child of a friend perhaps. I have meditated upon the subject intensely this day, I do not want to let myself be confused by what I would expect things to be. It occurs to me there is a strong chance that I would now remember them as one and the same because of my recent experiences. I am trying hard to remember if the dream girl really looked the same. It is not an easy situation, my never having seen the woodland child close up, and my eyesight not being sufficiently strong to take in the fine details of her face at a distance. So, in my mind, I see two children of similar age and size, possibly with similar hair colour, on two vastly different worlds, and I make them one. There are questions, things I need to know, but she seems not to want to know me since her return from the deceased.

I slept only a few hours, troubled sleep, many things weighing on my mind. Soon after midday, my brain was too hyperactive to sleep further, though still subject to the fog of over-tiredness, I found myself lost in thought. I had been convinced she was gone from my life for good, then when I saw her last night, it had caused such a rush of contrary emotions, leaving me experiencing a strange hybrid of sadness and joy. I knew now that I needed to make every effort to establish genuine contact with her, even a child in a world like this must have secrets I would wish to know. But should it turn out that we cannot speak with each other, at least we would not be alone, we could have company, share memories of the night of the full moon. When I left the hide soon after noon to relieve myself, she was out there, strolling through the woodland as if she had not a care in the world. I lifted my hand to make our accepted gesture of greeting and smiled, yet she did not return either, looking through me as if I were a phantom. My heart sank. What could I have done to deserve such disdain? Had I misunderstood? Were we not friends, as much as this extraordinary situation would allow? She is a child, not emotionally developed, they cannot process such quantitative information. Yet still. She simply continued walking, away from the landing site, away from me, without ever looking back. Suspecting she would pass this way later, I took the necklace from my pocket, the fuse-wire and coloured beads one I had made for her as a Christmas gift, the one my finding abandoned had convinced me of her demise. I looked for a prominent feature to leave it on for her, there to serve as an olive branch for whatever wrong she perceived I had committed.

I thought it would not help matters if I made any attempt to follow her, even though my every instinct shouted at me to do just that. I have learned to be suspicious of my instincts, they do not always serve me well. However, I needed to walk, away from the landing site and its continued daylight activities. All roads lead away from Rome, thus I set off to walk in a different direction. There was no skip in my step or lightness in my heart, the darkness had come over me again. If only I could desensitise myself to the whims of others, to the actions of those I do not understand, but I cannot, and they wound me, whether that be their intention

or otherwise. I would stop occasionally to closely observe the new growth, leaves starting to appear on trees again, ferns sprouting from the forest floor. But this was not to appreciate the beauty of nature or seek connection with it, no blessings shared with the earth, just the cold study of an interesting phenomenon. They were behind it, they, their constant hum and that damnable reddened light they bombard us with. It's subtle, a lesser mortal may not notice, but my senses are sharp today. Looking through the trees to my left, I could still make out where the track was, see the fields beyond it, all without any traces of life. Life was the landing site, life was myself, life was the woodland child. Move along, there is nothing to see here.

I did not circle, I did not wish to encroach on her space, I did not wish to take any further action which may seek to alienate her. I simply turned 180 degrees when I had walked my fill, stood for a few minutes, looking skyward, they were not visible today, then started back to the hide. I don't know how far I had gone, probably no more than a mile and half, just thirty-five minutes of casual stroll. Nothing held much interest for me and I came to realise how much my day had been ruined by one simple act of ignorance, if it is indeed fair to accuse a child of such a thing. I am not delusional, I hope I am not delusional, I recognise that the world does not turn on my axis, that the universe does not orbit my person, but do I not matter as much as any other living soul? I feel less than all of them today, I feel like a child myself, a scolded one, hurt and saddened, longing for a comforting hug, if just from a soft toy. I could sit cross-legged upon the ground and look to the sky for help, but it would not be forthcoming, they are not our gods, they offer no solace, they give no quarter. Am I such a monster? Am I one to be avoided where I am the only one that could be? She surely would have no time for them? Unless they feed her, give her shelter, provide her with all she needs, poison her against me. That must be it, they must be forcing her to stay away from me. But the gift, she can take that back, and they will never know, it will be our secret. Don't wear it, child, just keep it in your pocket, secrete it under your coat, let us keep them in the dark of our affiliation.

Enthused by my realisation that all was not lost, I picked up my pace and hurried back to the hide and the prominent point at which I had placed the necklace for her. I walked oblivious to all around me, all I could think about was the child, a smile on her face when she found the gift she thought had gone forever. Trees

may turn to green around me, ferns grow as I pass, but I will not see them, I just wish to be back there, to share our gesture, to not be alone. And I was there, and I sought out the prominent point. And the necklace had been knocked to the woodland floor. And left. I retreated into the hide to await nightfall, full of sorrow. I had not picked up the necklace, just left it where it lay, abandoned and unwanted, a symbol of friendship ended by death, not rekindled by resurrection. I wanted to sleep, but I know I need to take watch again soon, even if my thirst for blood and action has been quelled by the child's reappearance. I cannot muster the enthusiasm to do it for any other reason. I cut through the fuse-wire with a knife, irritatingly breaking a fingernail as I did so. No matter, what manner of being would travel without nail clippers? Certainly not I. I held the wire up, letting the beads fall off, not one at a time, rather in a stream of succession. Each one, I picked up and carefully pushed it into the earthen wall of my nightfall home. "You will each represent an emotion of mine." I whispered, "Then I can make account of how I truly feel." But I pushed each so deep into the dirt that I could no longer see it, I could not help but be moved by the hopeless symbolism of such an act. Using the sharp end of my knife, I carved the outline of an eye into the opposite earth wall. "So you may watch over the full range of my emotions," I said sullenly, "blessed be." The words seemed hollow, lacking any true substance. I got on to my knees, pushed the rods to open the portal, and I watched.

69. Friday 6th January 2016

If it does not load properly, winning is a much harder proposition. I had expected to enter nothing more than one of six colours, a single word. But when progress is hampered, the way is not as clear as it should be. This is a metaphor representing the wider situation; discuss and analyse.

Evening - 18:15

It's a chilly evening. I wish my heart were as cold, maybe then it would be immunised against the sense of loss I am currently experiencing. My emotions may seem synthetic, but they are as real to me as yours to you. Accepted, I have no way of knowing who you are or to which species you belong, but it does not seem an unreasonable assumption. I have tried everything; I have left food for her, sweet biscuits a child would adore, fruit juice, a sugar touch to the tongue,

she would like that. But she has not taken anything. She has walked to where I have left them, made eye contact with me, then emptied the food and drink to the floor as I watched. I showed no anger, much as there was temptation for me to do so. No, I will not be a slave to negative emotion. I let her witness my sadness, but she appeared chillingly untouched by this open show of emotion. I have called to her as she passes; she ignores me. I have made our gesture wave as she has looked in my direction; she does not return it. I have made the sign of oneness; she will not understand. Were she endangered, were that creature to reappear when she was nearby, I could prove my friendship and slay it for her, we could spill such sweet blood together. But alas, I fear my friendship is unwanted. No, worse, rejected, without reservation, without consideration. Do I expect so much of a child? There is a secret here. I know there is a secret, truth will out.

I believe, if it is your destiny, at some point in your life, the opportunity to fulfil it will befall you. The key is to recognise this moment, to comprehend it for what it is, to embrace it wholeheartedly. I feel the call of destiny on myself, much harder than I ever have before. And do not misunderstand, my friend, I have previously heard the calls of gods. What path would destiny have me tread, I wonder, how clearly will it map my footsteps? It is known, of course, 'written', as the terminology of those from the ages would have it. Every action and reaction is the result of physical laws which extend the length and breadth of creation, there is no escape from them. Thus, all things are dictated by these and each of us mere victims of illusion. With all my heart, I need to believe that I have the power to create my own destiny. And I do believe it, even though I know it to be a tragic falsehood. The dream that beguiles us from birthing pool to crematoria, the deceiver that shows us many paths, but whose hand on one's back ushers us to the only one we are allowed to walk. It leaves one to question the very reason for their existence, do you not think so? "Why?" You scream to the sky. But who can answer you? Who is actually there? This is the whole point; the game has rules, its outcome is predetermined, but you are invited to play with all the enthusiasm of one who genuinely has a chance of winning. Is it, therefore, worth your willing participation? Of course, how could it not be? Just breathe, is it not the most amazing feeling? That is life, my friend, and it is a precious gift, so much so that it hardly seems fair to quibble about its limitations. Embrace it, earn your destiny, delude yourself that your choices are your own. But make them good choices, make them wise, so you may earn the best possible destiny available. Does it still

feel such a bad thing to be at the hands of fate? No, at least not as long as it loads properly.

Evening - 19:00

Blue and grey, should I have expected any different? So, I believe the question I must ask myself is; should I have been given the free choice, would I have made one that differed? It is a courageous soul that would seek a path misaligned with his destiny. I am not so valiant, not really. Destiny is a complex beast, so much so that it may as well be free will. I cannot rage against reality, there would be no point. And I cannot believe there is no point to anything if we cannot truly choose, that would be to rage against reality. Normally, I would not ask, I would not dare. But what if my choice was green? Would you let me have green? Are these not exceptional circumstances? Have I not been snatched from the reality I was born to? Is it fair the laws of destiny apply so rigidly to me here? What if I were to challenge them in a court of logic? Would you think me arrogant? Or just plain stupid? I feel I have made my case; that this is not my world, that this is not my life, how could anything I do here be meant to be? And that is the extent of my challenge. I reject blue, I reject grey, I believe there is a third way, and it is that third path I wish to follow. All I need to do now is work out the significance of green. It seems rather abstract to make a colour symbolic of a particular path of action. I had thought it merely a tool, a way of adding intrigue to my tale, but now I come to wonder whose hand is at play here. Were it truly mine, would it not make more sense to me? What if this is destiny itself, telling me, in its own coded way, that the green path is open to me? I must meditate further, but not now, it is time to watch, the time for action will come soon enough.

First report - 19:50

Bedlam. Bedlam is grey, that was not my choice. The machines are industrious tonight. Drilling, I swear that is drilling. It makes me feel... sadness, I think? Sadness is blue, this was not my choice either. You deny me, I am not surprised. Simply because everything is so complicated it may as well not be, it does not mean that everything is not. Blue and grey, you told me as much, I should have listened. It is a skill to listen, to *truly* listen. Not to just open one's ears, but to actually *hear* what is being said to you. Blue and grey. If this is your will, then so

be it, I will make the best of the hand I am dealt. I stand alone, I cannot argue that a partner spoilt my play, it is my bid, it is for me to make, and for me to make alone. So when does the game begin? Surely, they work themselves to exhaustion? Even the craft look as if they need a rest. Water, I need a drink. They must have springs here too, the water in these odd bottles tastes wonderfully fresh and so clean. And I love the feel of the coldness as it touches the tip of my tongue, then spreads across it, ultimately making its way down my throat. I feel it's movement until somewhere circa the central joint of my rib cage, then it disappears into whatever internal plumbing lies beyond. I never had much interest in biology. Well, apart from the adolescent interest in it, of course, but that was all a very long time ago. I wish now I had paid attention, maybe I would have a little more incline as to where is best to strike that creature. It seems not to have any obvious nose, and more's the pity, that is always a sensible place for a well aimed first strike. But it has eyes, and I have thumbs, if you get my drift. Next watch.

Second report - 20:35
And if the end should come...

Third report - 21:17 I think I'd be surprised...

Fourth report - 22:01
And if the end should come...

Fifth report - 22:48

II I'd open up my eyes, I'd cry-y-y... II

Sixth report - 23:32 This is karma? Blue. This is karma? Grey. This is karma? Green. You're dead.

Day 70 - Saturday 7th January 2017

Time, time, time, why must you be my enemy? I feel the need to sleep a lifetime, this one has made me so tired. My muscles ache from living in this cold damp ditch, but so much have I learned. I am beginning to see the patterns and cycles in their activities, I think I now know the best time and place to start my fire. As their reddened light dries the ground, the fallen leaves become better kindling, I will strike them a blow courtesy of their own technology. And then what? Enough questions. Not all of this tiredness is fatigue, I recognise the weariness born too of depression, and the dark visitor makes her presence felt with gusto. It is the strange and cold behaviour of the woodland girl that brings such angst. It hurts, like a knife thrust and twisted, it is about the last emotion I seem to have left. Whatever I leave as temptation to interact with me once more, she simply knocks from its place and walks away from, barely a glance in my direction. I do not seem to cope well with unexpected adversity. I seem to be an ill prepared being all round at times. But if I merely sit around and feel sorry for myself, I get angry at my own ineptitude. Which makes me feel lower. I need a victory, however small, any reason to celebrate, any reason at all.

Tonight, my answer was an act of courage. Oh, do not polish your horns for a fanfare, I have not attacked the invading hordes with my multi function pocket knife, not picked at their alien flesh with my nail clippers, just got a little closer. I sat in the woodland, two or three trees from the track edge, at the nearest point to the landing site. I positioned myself there while the sun still backlit the grey cloud, ignoring their movement and activity, but taking care to avoid their direct line of sight for prolonged periods. As the darkness fell, and it does so quickly at this time of year, barely twenty minutes from light to black, I confess to becoming nervous. I was probably two thirds of a mile from the relative safety of the hide, and making a run for it in the poor moonlight would have been unlikely to save me, should such a thing have become necessary. I think the gods were with me tonight, the creature did not walk the woodlands, they seemed oblivious to my being so close. Or did not care. It is strange that the activity has shifted so much to the planet, it was all sky-bound at first. They sat up there in their vast numbers, noise gradually building over the weeks, while nothing happened down here. Then the blackout and the landing, now it all happens here on the surface, and I hardly ever catch a glimpse of the larger craft behind the cloud. They still produce the hum though, but after two months, I barely notice it any more.

From a close position, although I do not necessarily see more detail, I get more a sense of their being. There is an air of menace about them. I wonder if they are all as large a build as the one I tried to attack. Vanishing as an opponent leaps at you, that is no mean defence. Some manner of matter transporter, I do not doubt. And what would that do to the soul? Now that is an interesting question. Every atom in your body, broken to its constituent particles, then reassembled elsewhere? Or just a receiver that picks up the pattern signal and reproduces it? So that would be a duplicate of the original, rather than the being itself. Then where would the soul be? To all intents and purposes, the alien would be dead, it's body ripped apart by the technology, but its original pattern recorded for posterity at that precise moment. So when reconstituted, all of its memories up to that moment would be reproduced, along with its physical form. A perfect copy. But what of the original? A ghost? Imagine a new phantom alien produced every time they were to use such technology, and multiple phantoms of the same alien being, filling this world, all out of sight from those of us who still live. I wonder if the copy believes itself to be the original? Do you think it knows it is just one in a stream of copies and its immortal soul no longer resides within it? Now there is a mindfuck to tease the bastard with. Just before I set fire to it.

The night, I freely admit, was a long one, and not without moments of panic. I see patterns, I see them everywhere. If two hundred leaves fall from a tree, I will see a particular sequence and pattern in their landing and dispersal. And so it is with the behaviour of their machines. There were times I would make the smallest of movements, the night air making my legs or neck ache and relieving motion becoming necessary. And then, sometimes, at those precise moments, the large craft would rotate and cast its beam in my direction, as if it heard me, as if it hoped to see my face in its light. Often, as I walk through these woodland in daylight, I feel eyes upon me. It is as if we are equipped with many senses in excess of those we know. I wonder if it is the same for them, if they instinctively feel that I am out here, watching them? Am I afraid of what would happen if they caught me? I would be a liar if I claimed not. But I cannot imagine it happening, so I feel safe. If I cannot believe something can be real, how can it become so? No, I understand that would not make sense to a stranger, but imagine you've known me for aeons, now that makes a difference, doesn't it?

Closer, the craft are no longer just mobile lights, I can see they have form, are probably metallic and make low level noise as they move. They are extremely manoeuvrable, the pilots must be highly skilled, credit where credit is due. I

cannot see them with sufficient clarity to see if any arms or grappling gear extend from their number, so can make little more sense of their movement. I know I need to get to the tree line for that. I feel foolish for hiding away so much now, they can hardly be watching every square inch of the planet constantly, can they? They probably believe the place to be deserted anyway. Okay, they were searching for something a few weeks ago, but that need not have been myself or any other living being. It could have been... well, a thing. The indescribable object. It is. And that is all I can tell you about it, that and that it is probably what they sought. Not me. No, I do not think they know I am out here. They most likely think I ran for it after our prior confrontation, that I am cowering somewhere under a rock. So the flames will prove something of a surprise, I am sure. Or they will merely extinguish them with great simplicity and go on about their business. Why had I not considered that possibility? It seems an obvious one, now I come to think of it. But then, perhaps they have never seen fire, aside from in the hearts of stars. It may be a commonplace item to me, though I confess that is only since I found the lighter, but perhaps on their world it is not. Maybe that is why they came to us, a world where fire is commonplace, where there is fire and the indescribable object.

I think I can get a good photo from here, though I will need daylight to set the camera up somewhere steady. I do not want a picture that shows little more than a small light in a field of darkness, I want something I can study, something I can make sense of. All of the craft appear, to me, to be spherical. I cannot see legs, guiding appendages, windows, any features of that sort. The surfaces seem to bear some texture. Well, the surface on the larger craft, the hover lights still appear as pretty much just that, even from as close as I was tonight. Yes, that will be the plan for tomorrow; get the camera in a good and stable position to get some good quality photographs of our invaders. In a millennium or two, some passing stranger may find this record, recognise the perpetrators and see that history recognises the great injustice of it. Maybe that is the only weapon I truly have against them; how they will be remembered. But would they care? Would even the most tyrannical of species be able to see themselves in such poor light? When they woke each day from their slumbers, would they sit up in their beds and ponder how they should proliferate evil on that day? I think not. They will believe what they do is for the greater good, probably their own, but they will have ways of justifying their actions to themselves, as do we all. Maybe none of us are good judges of tyranny, not even history, it being written by the era's victors. Could we even trust the losers? Would their accounts not be filled with self pity and tales of the inhumanity of their conquerors? What if they seek to exterminate us because we pose a threat? Ah, you didn't think of that, did you? What if we are the tyrants and they came to end our tyranny? But I will do what I do, and I will feel it justified, and history be my judge, partial or otherwise.

Day 71 - Sunday 8th January 2017

The camera is set, roll on the hours of darkness. It is a surprisingly warm night for January, probably a comfortable 17°. Not quite apt for removing my coat, but enough to not miss having a jumper under it. According to my watch, I should have no more than an hour to wait until the sun drops from sight, sinking uncomfortably into the eastern sky. Though I suppose that makes me feel no more uncomfortable than my current proximity to the landing site. Oh fuck, what am I doing here? Fifteen, twenty minutes, I could be back to the cover of the hide. I feel so damned exposed today. They, well, they have been busy. I can see the beginning of a structure just starting to show above the tree line now. Unfortunately, I have to stand on some raised roots to make that happen, but I doubt they are finished with it yet. I can wait. The child has been around a lot today, apparently making absolutely certain I am aware she is ignoring me. Would she be angry that I was so powerless as to let her die? She is no ghost, she is more than capable of knocking my offerings to the woodland floor. So, one way or another, death has treated her kindly and allowed her to live. She seems oblivious to the alien presence; when the loudest noises come, unearthly and terrifying as the are, I cringe, jump out of my skin, she doesn't even break step. I pondered for a while the idea she may be deaf, but she ignores physical signs of activity there with the same consummate ease and comfort. Thus that horrendous thought that keeps pricking away at me; that she may be with them now, it still persists.

Something has just happened. I finished the last paragraph some ten minutes ago. I was beginning to drift as I was thinking how to phrase what I intended to write next, another slightly recalled memory I wanted to share, when what I would interpret as a siren of some description broke the silence. It was like no alarm call I had ever heard, not the two tone pitch I seemed to expect, or burst of white noise, rather a multi-tonal cacophony with a deeply abrasive timbre. The larger of

the landed crafts quite suddenly jumped up above the tree line. I had looked at the camera, wedged carefully on a tree, fixed into place with carefully positioned twigs and tied there. I knew that by the time I had made a grab for it, my quarry would be gone. And it was. It darted away in the opposite direction, a silver-grey blur as it headed over the ridge on which the pylon stood, several of the hover light craft following in its wake, apparently struggling to keep up. So what was the emergency? They've just come back into sight, tracking along the ridge from left to right, linear formation, large craft at the front. They are looking for something. I don't like this, I don't like it one bit.

Shit, that was close. The damn things just flew straight over me, I thought my bowels were going to go. I'm sat in the middle of a thicket. Is this the one I spent a night in once? Damn, I'm fucked if I know. Shit, my heart is still pumping hard, not breathing well, but I need to get all this down. One minute I was watching eight or nine of their craft drifting along the ridge, I look down to type something, than I feel a hot draft blow over me and realise the entire formation is halfway over my head, not more than 250 metres from the treetops. The sun was dropping fast, I wasn't sure I could get back to the hide for cover before it was dark, so I've just run into the woods until I saw this thicket, anywhere I couldn't be seen from above. I don't think they could have spotted me, they were moving really fast, and they haven't been circling round as if looking for anyone. I sat here quietly for at least half an hour before I opened this up. It was still switched on, I don't think you're supposed to close them when they're still on, I hope it hasn't done the screen any damage. I didn't really have much of a choice, it was on my lap in use when they went over, so I just had to shut it and run. I didn't want to open it any sooner in case the light drew them back here. Out in the open at night. Two nights on the trot. What the fuck was I thinking? Arsehole. Deep breath, Varg, come on, pull yourself together. Yeah, because 'alien fighter' is a job all normal people are used to doing, isn't it?

Fuck. I've just been sitting here, running through everything in my head, replaying it over and over, not wanting to forget any detail. Now, what did I see on the bottom of the craft? Joints, there were joints of some sort. In sci fi movies it's always fused perfect metal, yeah? This isn't the fucking movies. It looked kind of industrial, ridged joints, some kind of riveting, like a ship, but more precise. And they must have been quite big rivets if I could see them at that

height. Oh, shit, am I embellishing this with my imagination? I don't have any distance glasses with me, just had my patched up reading glasses, and they went straight to my inside jacket pocket as I got up to run. Come on, think about it, how much detail could you really have seen at over two hundred metres above the trees? Lines, vou saw lines, not riveted joints, that's just fancy on top. See any smiling green bastards looking out the windows too? Chintz curtains, backed with immaculate nets? Even an exceptional man would falter in such exceptional circumstances, and I seem not to be as exceptional as I had hoped. Don't be too hard on yourself, I think it would have shit the life out of most people. I was right about them being spherical though. Well, almost. They seemed to be flattened on the bottoms. What about size? Think, how big must they have been? I think the larger one was about fifteen metres diameter, possibly two and a half to three times the size of the hover lights. They must be single user transits. I still want to know what they were reacting to. That had to be an alarm of some sort, either that or they have the most horrific taste in melodies. Yeah, siren, positive, no way they were dashing home for tea and doughnuts. Fuck, why did I have to think of doughnuts? I can taste them now, warm, straight from the fryer, dusted in cinnamon. With a dollop of cream. Chocolate sprinkles. Enough. Concentrate. No windows, were there? No, definitely no windows. So, what's the possibility they are remotely piloted? What if the reason they are all staying up there in the sky is that they can't cope with the atmosphere down here? So, gradually, they are beginning to transform it with that reddened light, that's probably why I was gasping for breath after running. Meanwhile, they send down remotely controlled drone craft. Bit big for drones? Not necessarily, you don't know what they do. Maybe they need the mass for heavy lifting?

Bollocks. The camera. Oh, for fuck's sake. The fucking camera is back there, tied to a fucking tree. I can't go back there now, I dare not go back there now. I'm not even sure I could find my way back there now. Brilliant, stuck here till daylight, over twelve fucking hours, no food. Brilliant idea; putting it all down on the ground to keep the backpack light for moving around. Thank fuck I didn't take the water bottle out of the side pocket. What a complete clusterfuck. The hardest thing to deal with is my suspicion that they didn't even know I was there. All of this, the panic, the running, getting parted from my camera and my food; none of it had to be that way. Well, not as if there is anyone around to steal my camera or eat my food. If that alien creature took any, it would just be to piss me off, who

knows what kind of vile shit they eat on their homeworld. And the woodland child? There's the sweet biscuits she could open, I guess. I wouldn't begrudge her anything, however unpleasantly she's behaving. Poor kid probably doesn't know any better, I think they have trouble managing their emotions at that sort of age, anything doesn't go their way and it's the end of the world. Big scary alien comes along and kills you, that's a bad day. But then when you don't stay dead, that has to be a good one, no? You never saw her die, did you? Never saw her bloodied corpse. You just became aware that she had gone and that creature was there, near where she should have been. So you took two and two, added them together, and got the answer wrong. Easily done, don't beat yourself up. Fuck, I'm glad it's a warmer night, you notice the difference being out in the open. The thicket gives a little protection from the breeze, but nothing like as much as being in the hide. Who'd have known that dirt could be so warm?

Okay, so in the morning, I need to get back to the watch-site as soon as possible, pick my stuff up and return to the hide. I think I would be smart to get back inside that in the dark hours, at least for now, just until I can figure out what started tonight, why those craft suddenly stopped playing construction worker and went all special forces. Hungry. Well, let that be a lesson to you, don't be an arsehole again. You know, I think I used to like my own company, think I've probably always been that kind of person. But, to be honest, I'm starting to get sick of the sight of myself now. What do I do to get the kid to give me the time of day again? Nail myself to a piece of wood and hang there sullenly? I wish I knew what I was supposed to have done in the first place. Was it something I said? Come on, the girl can't understand a word you say. Even the gestures are limited to... well, no more than one. She can't think I'm in league with them, what would have happened that made her think that? Did they capture her? Indoctrinate her in some way? Paint me as the bad guy? I'm not a bad guy, kid, I'm just someone a little out of his depth, trying to save a world. Forgive me father, for I have sinned.

Day 72 - Monday 9th January 2017

11:15 - Sleep did not come easy last night, the thicket is not so far from the landing site that I do not have to hear its machinations. Several times, I saw the aerial flotilla flying overhead, a streak of lights flickering through each small hole in my temporary hide. No, I am not being paranoid, I saw nothing in their pattern

of movements indicating they were looking for me. Judging by the time intervals between their passing. I would guess they were covering a much larger area than the woodland borders. I don't know what time I did finally fall asleep, but I was awake again before it was fully light, a little cold and dampened by the dew. I drank some water, allowed myself some time to come round. The mechanised sounds of the landing site could still be heard, I knew I would need to take care, but I needed that camera. Some food would be nice too. Following my compass, I began the walk back towards the hide, from where I could easily find my way along the woodland edge to the tree my camera was tied to. I don 't know if I walked slower than normal, had taken a shorter route previously, but it seemed to take an age to get back here. The child shadowed me all the way, as per usual. I can honestly never understand how she always seems to know where I am. I didn't even know at first where I was going when I took off last night, yet there she was as I clambered out from the thicket this morning, sitting calmly on the woodland floor opposite my point of exit, deliberately looking away from me. And now I'm back outside the hide, sat comfortably with my back to a tree, and there she is, slightly short of three o'clock, just at the edge of my peripheral vision, her eyes quickly switching away from me any time I turn my head that way. Yes, camera, I haven't forgotten, believe me. I'm hungry too, I haven't eaten in eighteen hours. It's just the level of noise coming from down that way, it's a bit unnerving. If there's that much going on, in daylight, the bastards, there's likely to be a lot of them around, thus more chance of my being spotted. So I'm just enjoying a little spiritual Dutch courage before I go, taking a few deep breaths. I can only pray the camera is still in one piece, if I ever get out of this place, the information on it could prove crucial. And that the food is still there, of course, it's quite a hike back to The Base from here. Okay, let's do it, say one for me.

19:20 - I never thought I'd be so pleased to be back in a hole in the ground. Tiptoeing around, no more than a kilometre from the first alien settlement on the planet, can best be described as nerve-racking. Probably, the whole thing was made even less easy by my being conscious of having been followed to the heart of the alien nation by the woodland girl. Why the hell does she want to follow me around if she's having nothing to do with me? For fuck's sake, this is like the mad dreams you have when you're really anxious about something. Like there's anything for me to be anxious about in this place! She's no dream though. If I were going to dream someone up, it wouldn't have been someone who's not

talking to me. Sort of thing you could tell your therapist; "Hey, Doc, when I was a kid, I had an invisible friend. Unfortunately, he hated me." I think your imaginary friends should be on your side, that's important. "Don't fuck with me, I got invisible friends!" That's how it should go. As irritating as I find her weird behaviour at the moment, I felt like turning round and shouting "Fuck off!" Just to try to save her from herself. I don't like how blasé she is about the green bastards. they may not even get that there's a difference between human adults and human children, they could see her as any other member of the species they're exterminating. I wonder if they'd share our notion of compassion if they could differentiate? It's a whole different ball game when thinking about a species who have evolved through a completely unconnected history. There are probably ways to live that we can barely imagine, many beyond any of the various cultural adaptations on our own familiar world. I say 'familiar', even though mine remains a series of vague impersonal flashbacks. I know we are not all a single nation though. I wonder if they are. Logically, you would imagine a planet would have to sort out its internal divisions before it could work on and produce the means for interstellar travel. It seems unlikely that one nation could manage a feat like that while still involved in conflict with or espionage against any of the others on its homeworld. Perhaps there is a lesson there for my people too. If I can ever figure out who they are, where they live and how I can get back there.

That's how I kept my mind off 'the fear thing', walking from the hide back to the daytime watch site, running all sorts of alien sociological probabilities through in my head. You come up with an interesting world ultimately, but one quite out of step with the sort of character you would imagine required to be invaders of other worlds and exterminators of other cultures. Green bastards do not embrace other cultures, they conquer them. I suppose all developing species would go through a warlike phase, almost unavoidable. So, your beginnings; early days are going to be about survival, you're going to be living in small groups, not alone, safety would dictate that, primitive worlds are dangerous places. Maybe extended family groups, tribes even. Natural leaders will emerge, of course. Would they automatically respect the wisdom of elders? I think not immediately, not until they had learned of the advantages. At first, it's likely power would be seized by the strong, but if seized by the strong and stupid, they would not last long. Once you have your more balanced tribal system together, your developing brains will question your world, beyond its ability to provide you with food. You will wonder

about the great ball of light that illuminates your days, the various lesser balls of light that you stare at in the night. And all those minute pin pricks of light that adorn your sky and the milky halo they produce. You will invent stories of beings of untold power and glory and they will take responsibility for your world. The more twisted amongst you may use these as weapons of control, to exert power over their perceived enemies, by way of sacrifice or whatever other ingratiation they may decide on. The less stable among you may hear voices and think themselves in contact with these gods and masters, there will be a long period of uneasy coexistence between power and mysticism, but science will finally bring this to an end and wiser political systems will evolve. Ultimately, the various cultures and factions that spring up around worlds will need to treat each other with fairness and respect. They will undoubtedly have arguments about territories. mostly to do with strategic positioning or resources. But, as I said, ultimately, they will need to get beyond that, lest half of their world starve while the other half indulges an orgy of greed and gluttony. They will need to be fair with each other so their societies may progress. Nature is a clever beast, a world will provide for the needs of its children, if it too is treated with fairness and respect. Once peoples are cooperating, working together, their period of great achievement will begin. When the finest minds of a world work in common interest, forgetting petty differences, issues of profit and gain, what wonders could they reach for? When time and manpower no longer need be put into conflict resolution, when the answer to who will benefit from each new discovery is always everybody, then indeed a world would be able to reach the stars. But how does that equate with our unwelcome guests? Fair and reasonable? I think not. I cannot, therefore, explain how they came to be here. How would a warlike species overcome internal differences to achieve such technological brilliance? Unless they are a civilisation as old as time itself. And still seeking worlds to conquer. What a dismal thought. If we do not move forward, if our evolution ceases, one can only describe that as stagnation. I refuse to believe that is the ultimate goal of this incredible universe we occupy, the most apt use you will ever hear of the phrase "a waste of space".

I think we, my young friend and I, arrived at the daytime watch sight around two in the afternoon. I could just make out the camera from fifty metres or so away, a great sense of relief came over me as I realised I had not lost one of the two most important devices in my possession. I also thanked the weather gods for keeping

it dry overnight and hoped the dew would not affect it adversely. As good fortune would have it, a couple of pointless pictures of trees later, it seems to be working fine. Small mercies, as they say. By this time, the hunger had grown in me substantially. Luckily not all, but some of my food had gone. It was not hidden, I grant you, but I had not really thought there a need for that. I could not imagine aliens travelling with tin-openers and my young woodland friend seems to have little interest in food anyway. But at least there was enough for me to eat. I must sign off now, time to watch again, though frankly, I would rather sleep.

Day 73 - Tuesday 10th January 2017

Finally, the truth of what has been going on at the landing site is unveiled! They were testing some kind of weapon last night, the beams emanating from something that raised just above the tree line in the dark hours. It is an energy weapon of some description, but looked like nothing I am familiar with. I have seen industrial lasers, as well as those used in entertainment, red or green, I believe, this was neither. At the point of its generation, it appears almost black, a dark spot with a dark red halo. Emanating from that is a cobalt blue beam with a bright green halo. They seemed to be attempting its use at varying intensities, from a thin beam that looked as though it would burn a bullet sized hole through a man, all the way up to a thick beam that looked like it could destroy a building. There was still a part of me that wanted to believe there were rational explanations for all the things I have witnessed here, that all the blanks my imagination had filled in had been wildly wrong. But there is no other explanation for that weapon and it is something I must clearly stay out of the way of. I have no idea why they do not seek me, they know I am out here and I should not delude myself otherwise. When I saw that humanoid creature with reptilian eyes, I made no attempt to hide from it, I attacked it. While I accept it avoided me with ease, I cannot believe they would regard me as not posing a threat after such a clearly hostile action. For all I know, however, they have been monitoring me from day one, and any further hostile action I may intend is delusional on my part and of no concern on theirs.

I need to investigate the power of this weapon, ascertain how much of a threat it may be to me. They've paid me no direct heed as yet. Even the creature I tried to attack did nothing in the way of retaliation. But that weapon, should I succeed in becoming the annoyance I intend to, could be used to despatch me with little

effort. They were firing it over to the right, in a north-easterly direction, though I could not see what they were aiming at from the hide and was a little concerned about leaving it for a closer look. Clearly, I need to have a look over that way for any obvious targets, to observe first hand and document whatever level of destruction it may have caused. I argued with myself long and hard last night about the wisdom of trying to get a picture of the energy beam, but I was unconvinced of the safety of doing so. I am aware that when using the camera at night, it utilises a red light, presumably to help it focus. I confess I am no expert when it comes to photography. But for whatever reason it exists, it would probably be adequate to give away my position. That strikes me as a particularly foolish course of action under the circumstances. So it is important to at least get photographic evidence of the damage the weapon is responsible for. However, I cannot do this immediately. As a result of the disappearance of some of the food I had left at the daylight watch location, I need to return to The Base before I can do anything else. As it is pushing one o'clock now, that needs to be done without further delay, lest I wish to be on sparse rations for another twenty-four hours.

Evening - 19:06

God, I could have done without this. I had to stop and rest for a while about two thirds of the way back, I began to feel a little dizzy and nauseous. Where the hell can I have picked up a bug on an empty planet? Please don't tell me viruses and bacteria are alive and well, while all other life has been extinguished. And if not a bug of some sort, it may be something worse, a part of my own system failing. And not a functioning hospital in lightyears. Could it have been something I ate? Unlikely, death is death, and this world is overrun with it. I have seen two living things since I have been here; the woodland child and the alien creature. Beyond that, not even an ant. If food is bad, it is the living organisms it contains that cause you harm. Fatigue would be my best guess, I have not been sleeping well on a regular basis. The odd good night, but mostly my slumbering hours have been interrupted by strange and unwelcome dreams. My head does not hurt as such, it is just uncomfortable and does not quite feel like it belongs to me. Maybe I should take a breather back here at The Base tomorrow, let the intergalactic war wait another day, head back on Thursday. It will, in any event, be a good opportunity to take stock, both mentally and physically. Obviously, I need to return to the hide with more food. Some more paper for kindling, so long as I have the space.

Sharpen some more sticks to take on their death ray. There are times I feel an idiot for even thinking anything I could do might have an effect. But, as I have probably said on several occasions already, these are not acts of bravery, they are merely acts of frustration and desperation. Ten damned weeks. And I know little more now than when I first became aware here

The basement; I haven't opened absolutely everything down there, probably haven't checked the contents of every box within boxes upstairs either. I haven't found anything medicinal as yet, they surely cannot be a species without ailments? A couple of paracetamol would go down quite well at the moment, that and a long and sound night's sleep. Mind you, how would I know what the medicines were for? Unless maybe they had an appropriate illustration on the box? Unlikely, I haven't seen anything like that as yet. No boxes or packets of cereal or sweet biscuits with loveable cartoon characters printed on them, no grooming products with pictures of attractive couples on them, no... thinking about it, nothing with an image of any kind of living creature, real or imaginary. So much about this place doesn't bear close scrutiny, but I don't think that is a place my head wants to go just now. It wants to go somewhere beautiful, somewhere peaceful, sat on a rock in a scenic cape, enjoying warm sunshine, holding hands with someone I love. Each wave would come into the cape, swirl gently, make spiral patterns on flat stones that would draw our eyes. We would look hard into the swirl and it would draw us down beyond the elements, down beyond the atoms, down to the very fabric of reality. We would marvel as the very particles of creation danced back and forth between dimensions, then we would pick up the key and smile knowingly at each other. With the key, we would together unlock the secrets of existence and dissolve into its infinite reality, forever circling the Great All, until came our time to return. And there is peace, blessed be.

I sit here in the upstairs of The Base now, looking at stars. I feel I could pinch myself, it is the first time I have been able to see them through the gradually clearing skies. They are not everywhere, they are not at their brightest, but where the clouds are thinnest, they are there. Not even enough to get any clear sense of constellations as yet, but it doesn't matter. There have been times I have feared the vulnerability of this building being, it being not completely sealed from the elements, but now I can sit and enjoy the view through the opening, those fears

have passed. I shall feast tonight, I need to rebuild my strength for the ordeal that is to come. Good food, good sleep, good meditation for clarity of mind. Why do my eyes leak? I do not believe I feel sad. Are these tears of joy? For what reason? I am not myself at the moment, perhaps it would be unwise to read too much into anything I think or feel. Something has got to me, be it something natural or something they have inflicted upon me. Perhaps they wish to explore a number of ways of killing me off. Hah! Oh, that I truly were such a burden to them as to constantly play on their minds. And what manner of minds might they be? No, not now, relax and think peaceful thoughts. Of a beach, of soft white sand washing through your toes with the motion of the sea, watching the small fish that swim near the shore. Come lay down your head, Sati, your day is over, peace be with you this night. Peace be with us all. Even them.

Day 74 - Wednesday 11th January 2017

Still feeling quite under the weather today.

WORLD DEFEATED!
ALIENS FILL THE SKY!
THE END OF TIMES IS HERE!
SATI VARG HAS A BIT OF A COLD!

For fuck's sake, you could almost laugh at the pitiful humour of the situation. Either I laugh or I become convinced of a cosmic conspiracy to beat me down, force me to admit defeat, leave me sitting naked in a flower bed, muddied by my own urine, waving a sign saying "I surrender". I don't even know what's wrong, I just feel slightly nauseous and light-headed. If it is the effect of something they've done, I think they must be even more pathetic than I feel at the moment. I've been sleeping intermittently most the day, generally washed out and run down. Sure, there were quite a pile of things I'd liked to have got done today, but not so far. Okay, it's early, not five yet, still just the slightest hint of light out there. The basement is a pretty dark place in the middle of the day, it's not as if it'll be any worse now. If I have to spend one more day here until I feel more recovered, so be it. Having said that, I don't feel as if this has peaked yet. More an irritant than something genuinely debilitating. The thing that still bugs me most, no pun intended, is how can you be infected by anything on a dead, therefore sterile,

planet? Whatever, does it matter? No, I suppose not, but what else do I have to talk about? The Big Plan... da dah DAH! It still hasn't got beyond a bit of fire damage, jabbing the scampering aliens with sharp sticks and smacking them in the face with a hammer. I'll bet they're quaking in their... well, whatever it is they live in, hives or something. "Leave it, Xorg, he could light a barbecue with that!" Yeah, leave it, we've all had a drink. Chance would be a fine thing. I still plan to do it, hypersonic laser guns don't scare me. Well, yes, they do, a bit. But, if I'm unfortunate enough to get hit by one, I doubt I'll know much about it. And faced with the choice of being the only human on a planet and hiding from ET till I die of thirst/hunger/boredom (*delete as applicable), it's not that frightening. Whoever took my memory has probably done me the most enormous favour; this way, I have nothing to miss. Now, if, on the other hand, I knew I lived in a beautiful house by the sea, or maybe overlooking a lake, beautiful wife, 2.4 beautiful children, cat named Furball XL5; well, wouldn't it just mess up my resolve to cause some damage to our guests, give me a greater reason to think getting home is the more important? Or is that the game all along? Am I being played? I'm back on the 'rat in a maze' theory again, aren't I? It feels like this at times, like there is something utterly surreal about the entire experience, like I'm on a game show. I get stranded on some strange planet, specially terraformed for Pan Galactic Television Channel 30, and I have to figure something out, deduce the actual status of reality from the clues they provide me with. What do I win? It'd better not be a fucking caravan.

This won't do, it really won't, I can't just sit here all evening, prattling on about something that is going to make little sense to its eventual reader. Okay, maybe it'll tell them something about my state of mind. Profundity: If a man is the last of his species on a planet for ten weeks, he starts to lose his marbles. Oh, there's one, rolled under the kitchen unit. So, should I believe I have something worth going back to and apply myself to working out how to do that? Or, do I take the soft option, a bit of fire damage and casual violence, then take early retirement, happily oblivious to what I could have won? Somebody? Anybody? I just want to hear a voice shouting "take the money" or "open the box", I think I'm past caring which.

[&]quot;Did you say 'open the box', sir!?"

[&]quot;Okay," I respond, "you have my attention, why do you say that?"

[&]quot;It's like this, Sati," you continue, "may I call you Sati?"

- "Of course," I confirm, "there's no standing on ceremony on this show."
- And I do not lie, there truly isn't.
- "Thank you, Sati. We think your quandary is that you have no definitive evidence by which to make your decision."
- "Bingo!" Say I, "That's deep, man."
- "Therefore, the continued extensive search for same should be your priority for the time being."
- "And you won't make me take the caravan?"
- "Wipe the sweat from your brow, Sati," you reassure me, "nobody is going to make you take the caravan."
- "Phew!"
- "No, Sati, you can go on to win tonight's STAR PRIZE!"
- "Oh, be a pony, be a pony!"
- "Tonight's STAR PRIZE is..." And you pause, as if you don't already know the answer, but you do, you are just seeking to create a false sense of heightened anticipation.
- "Hmmmn," I mutter, "what books do you have for me to read while I wait?"
- "..." You continue.

And night becomes day, and night again, and days become weeks, and weeks become months, and months become years, and years become lifetimes, and lifetimes become epochs etc etc. And you punch the air and I look up, ready for the revelation;

"CERTAINTY!" You exclaim.

I gasp.

- "Certainty?" I whisper the hallowed word, "I can have certainty? I... I..."
- "Yes?" You beckon, "What is it, Sati? Tell us?"
- "I think I'm going to cry!"
- "We're ALL going to cry, Sati," you pat me on the head, like a favoured pet dog, "ladies and gentlemen, we'll be back tomorrow afternoon at the same time, when it could be YOUR chance to play 'REDEMPTION OR DEATH'! Be there or be square!"

Redemption or death? Is that really what you think this is? I guess it's back down the cellar then.

"Next on Pan Galactic Television Channel 30, it's 'THE FAIRY LIGHTFOOT SHOW', brought to you by *Pretty Paulie's Powder Puff Pocket Purses*. Don't go away, we'll be right back after a word from our sponsor!"

It was only really boxes within boxes, the outer shells had all been unpacked, but one of my prime wishes was most certainly granted. Perhaps not the most useful, but desired beyond all else. Well, maybe except nail scissors, a pair of which would be most welcome to trim the coarse mess on my top lip that insists on fraternising with my food every time I eat. The big thick hairs growing out of my ears I can live with, no monkey see, no monkey care. But the unkempt moustache, I look like some lone frontiersman. But then I guess that's just what I've become. Yeah, the find; it wasn't in a box, it was under one. I don't even know what made me pull the crate out, I'd emptied it a while ago, just left it where it stood. Today, it simply had to move. And as I lifted it out, there it was, a magazine. I've not really been able to look through in any detail as yet, it's a bit difficult with a torch, but I shall look forward to a read at the breakfast table in the morning, maybe accompanied by scrambled eggs and smoked salmon. I can't read a word of it, but no matter, it's full of photographs and other illustrations, and what do you know, the indigenous look just like me. Albeit cleaner, and they obviously own a hairbrush, which is probably one of many advantages they have over me. Had. They're not here any more. Sobering thought. Looking at the man on the front of the magazine, I can't see any obvious differences. I grant you I haven't seen my own face in any great detail for two and a half months, but I seem to know what it looks like anyway. So, the natives are just like me, but I don't belong here. If I did, their alphabet would make sense to me, but it doesn't, the one on this keyboard does instead. What does that tell me? Parallel development? Is it possible the idea of an infinite universe could actually be true? That's the only way near copies of our own world would be possible. Not now though, I still feel tired and quite awful, I'll give it a good look in the morning. It's just that it's so hard resisting taking a peek through now. Imagine, a genuine alien publication. If I ever get out of this place, you're coming with me, no argument. I think I may well have another day of rest here now, this has to be worth thorough examination. Maybe something in its pages may give me some clues as to what has actually happened here. I confess, I've made numerous assumptions since I've been here, but they truly do make sense to me. What I've seen, everything I've heard, I don't really see what other kind of explanation could be possible. It's a thick magazine, it'll probably take me the best part of the day to read it. Some of the symbols do actually look like our letters, only a handful, but I suppose there's only so many simple marks you can choose from when developing a writing system. There are several dozen different ones here at least, far more than appear on this keyboard. I wonder what their language sounds like? I gather they would have more than one, I seem to know words and phrases from several tongues myself, I don't know how normal that is. This is getting too academic, I promised myself I'd take it easy this evening, get my strength back to claim my prize of *certainty* and all that.

Boxes, yeah, I meant to say there was nothing much else of interest in all the smaller boxes. I did find a packet of pills, manufactured packaging, but no illustration on said packaging which may indicate what they are used for. They look like straightforward pain-killers, round and white, paracetamol sized. However, it's a bit of a risk, regardless of how rotten I feel at the moment. So much depends on my various theories about how all these supplies came to be here. Some, without doubt, were put here for my benefit. Others, possibly, but less certain because of the amount of dust on some of the boxes and crates. If that stuff was intended for me also, somebody must have been planning my abduction several months before I woke up here. But then that idea doesn't fit, does it? If someone or something was planning to abduct me, why would it also provide for me. The 'benefactor' theory seems the most likely; that I was put here for my own safety because of the cataclysm that has happened on this world. But it rather begs the question as to why I was brought here in the first place. That would imply that everything left here was safe. But. The pills came from a box in one of the crates in the basement, one which had originally been covered in dust, now beautifully restored by my remarkable houseworking skills, but originally dusty nonetheless. That means they may not be intended for me and are not, therefore, safe for my consumption. It's a thing I seem to remember about metabolism, it differs greatly from one creature to another. The fact the indigenous look like me does not mean they're like me all the way through. The integral biology could be very different, so they're medicines could be potentially toxic. So, great day's work; a magazine that I can't read and a packet of pills I may or may not be able to ingest safely. Enough waffling, I need to eat, relax and sleep, tomorrow is another day. Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

Day 75 - Thursday 12th January 2017

I think that last comment was added around two in the morning. Suffice it to say the white pills in the box of manufactured appearance were not what I had at first believed. My sleep had been constantly interrupted, I kept waking up feeling as if I was going to be sick, then not being, but still feeling odd. In spite of it being an unnaturally warm night for January, I kept getting cold, then would put my coat back on and wake up sweating buckets half an hour later. Finally, it got to about one o'clock and I just thought "to hell with it" and "what's the worst that can happen?" Two tablets seemed a reasonable dose, they looked about the same size as paracetamol tablets, so that's what I took. Within fifteen minutes, I was feeling surprisingly better. My stomach had settled, the giddiness had gone, only to be replaced by a sense of otherworldliness. Half an hour in and whatever symptoms I was still aware of no longer seemed to matter. I sat bolt upright as a shooting star flew across the open sky in the corner of The Base. Very briefly, I considered it might be an alien attack, decided against it, and lay back down to enjoy the show. The show? There wasn't just one shooting star, there were quite a number of them, in the most wondrous variety of colours. In fact, I soon began to notice that virtually anything I set my eyes on would quite suddenly lift from its moorings and do a brief lap of honour around the walls or night sky. Feeling that my mouth was a little dry. I flicked on the torch and reached for the water by my sleeping place. As I did so, a number of droplets of what looked like various coloured oils followed my hand, landing on the back of it when it stopped moving. When I examined the back of my hand, they were nowhere to be seen, though my skin was covered in patterns. Patterns that, on closer examination, turned out to be letters. I realised I could read words in them; 'Lomby', 'Rose', the names of my imaginary Dream Pixies?

"Acid pixies, Zumble, man."

I laughed, watching Lomby desperately trying to join three cigarette rolling papers together. So that's what the tablets do, they take you back to your teenage years. Yes, it all seemed strangely familiar. I looked at my watch, it was half past 1973. But 'Zumble'? What the hell was that all about?

"Zumble," responded Lomby, as if reading my mind, "is you, you're Zumble Tripweed, the cosmic cowboy, man, don't you remember?"

"Aaahhhh..." I had gasped.

At the time, it had seemed like somebody had just unlocked one of the greatest

secrets of the universe for me. It all made such perfect sense, of COURSE that's who I really was, who else could I be?

"Hold it right there, man!" I yelled, grabbing at the netbook, "I have to get this down quickly, just in case I can't remember it in the morning."

"What on earth makes you think that might happen?"

"Minute!" I cautioned, hastily typing;

"I'M ZUMBLE TRIPWEED, THE COSMIC COWBOY, YEE-HAH!"

I was one hundred percent positive that would tell me everything I could possibly want to know come the morning.

"Rose is out riding your cosmic horse at the moment, man," Lomby mumbled, dropping the mess of rolling papers on the floor, pulling out more to try again, "hope that's cool?"

"Far out, yeah," I had said, "what Rose Petals wants, Rose Petals gets."

For some unknown reason, that was quite the funniest thing I had said in my whole life. I started to snort, stifling the laugh that I could feel coming with relentless force. Lomby began to snigger.

"Rose Petals!" He screeched, like a demented banshee I thought, which just made me laugh all the more.

And that was it, we had 'the giggles'. Big time. From that point forth, whenever there should be a brief interlude in the laughter, one of us would only need say a word, any word, and it would all start over again. So there I was, for some hours, rolling around the floor in histrionics with an imaginary pixie, quite unable to string two words together. If I'm honest, I can't imagine I've had that good a night in a very long time.

I really don't know what time I eventually fell asleep. It's about twenty after four in the afternoon now, the sky is just starting to dim, full of oranges and reds. I've been awake about an hour and a half and feel extremely well rested. Whatever was plaguing me these last couple of days seems to have gone, which I suppose proves the point it was nothing I had caught. Most likely just the result of fatigue or stress. I hadn't realised things had built up in me so much. I think I was putting so much effort into putting a brave face on everything, I had completely forgotten about being human. I'm ready to get packed up and off in the morning now, what better day than Friday the thirteenth to march off for your last stand, huh? Yeah, that worked out well. Seriously though, I cannot tell you how much better that insane interlude to reality has made me feel! God alone knows what that stuff

was, but it has a guaranteed place in my backpack from hereon in.

"An off his face warrior is a brave warrior!"

I recall reading that in a great philosophical work somewhen. No, just kidding, that's not the plan at all. Zumble Tripweed? That still makes me smile. Ah, the amusement of subtle drug reference in story telling. Seriously again, I was just thinking a couple of those pills may make the end a tad more palatable should it end that way. That's not fanciful, is it? I can't imagine anybody would set off for something like this without a Plan B, no? Well, it may not be a brilliant Plan B, but it's all I got. When the minor victories run out, when I cease to be a thorn in the invader's side, Plan B is serious chemical escapism. What's wrong with facing reality? Well, that's an interesting question, because it all felt very real to me last night. What happened to me actually happened, the things I 'saw' were processed in my head just the way real images would be, that's how they end up that way. It's just a question of real reality vs chemically enhanced reality. My instinct is to go for the one that hurts less. Sue me.

Day 76 - Friday 13th January 2017

I'm not superstitious. That is to say, I do not think I am superstitious. I would imagine those taken to such irrationality have particular instincts that scream at them in certain situations; not to put new shoes on the table, for example, the rationale for which completely eludes me. Not to walk under a ladder? I suppose that would depend if anyone were on said ladder at the time and what they might be carrying. Though why one would believe they merely perched there waiting for some poor unsuspecting sap to pour their load upon, it again eludes me. However, that said and done, I confess to being slightly less than comfortable with setting off on a Friday the thirteenth. It's a stupid thing, isn't it? These ridiculous notions play on the minds of the otherwise mentally healthy, ultimately becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. The only thing a Friday the thirteenth indicates with any certainty is that the month started on a Sunday. Why would evolution give our species this tendency to believe in things without evidential support? I fail to see any evolutionary advantage in that.

"Hah, bird!" Cries the snail, "You cannot eat me, evolution has provided me with a hard shell to protect my soft body."

"Oh yeah?" Sneers the bird, "But I knocked on wood, so I get to smash you all to fuck on a rock."

"Oh."

"Exactly, not feeling so smug now, are you? Fingers crossed..."

Of course, there are no snails or birds here upon which I can test this theory, but I'm reasonably satisfied it has a sound basis.

So, pep talk out the way, we've just passed noon, time to hit the road. I have the strongest sense, feel free to call it superstitious intuition and let's simply overlook the irony of that, the strongest sense that I will never see this place again. I have called The Base home for the best part of eleven weeks now, save for my stays at the lower star-rated Hide Hotel. It's the room service that lets it down, that and the strangers walking around outside your window. And the noise, don't get me started on the noise. Strangely, I think I'll miss this place, the ultimate in open plan, part of the wall and ceiling missing. I've formed a fondness of looking at the stars over these last few nights that they have actually started to show under the clearing skies. You can see nothing in the hide, save for dirt viewed from the light of this machine, or the lights from a distant world that pirouette above the landing site. To be honest, I've had enough. This seems to continue without purpose, without hope of my ever fathoming out what is going on and thus being able to effect some kind of resolution. The clues are either weak or absent, this razor sharp mind is certainly unable to put the pieces together based upon them. Continually, I feel like there is something I need to do, but forces, unknown forces, seek to stop me. As if life will present me with some excuse or another for not taking action at this time. Tomorrow will, undoubtedly, present you with a better opportunity. Actually, next week, one must never procrastinate before the time comes. Before long, I see myself looking back over long years of inaction here, wondering what the hell I was thinking. Whichever way this plays out, whatever the truth turns out to be, I think it a reasonable bet that doing nothing is not the best option. Don't get me wrong, I am no fool, I understand that in life, at least sometimes, doing nothing is the sensible course of action. I just do not believe this is one of those situations. But doing the right thing, that is another matter entirely. For example; I could be the intergalactic hero, single-handedly quell the invasion, send them chasing their tails back to their own planet. But then what? Spend the rest of my days alone on a dead world? Sounds terrific, can I have mayo on that? Whether this is real; as in it being more or less what I actually interpret it to be; or a cloak upon reality; as in it being some kind of augmented state in which I am the lab rat; in either event, I have a role to play. Sometimes,

we seem to go to great lengths to avoid playing our role in events, whether by accident or design, by omission or evasion, it happens. Or it doesn't. Do I put my hands up and admit I do not know the game, do not understand the rules and have no idea how I am supposed to play it? I would look foolish, would I not? And I would also look honest. Which of those would I embrace, which would I fear, which would likely have more impact on the human psyche? I rest my case.

I need to move now, three and half hours to the hide at reasonable pace, about four hours of daylight remaining. I have not squandered my morning, I am fully packed, I have more food and whatever else I considered may yet prove useful. And the pills, of course, just in case. I wish I could write as I marched, it is a rather lonely experience, save for fleeting glimpses of the child ducking behind trees in the near distance. I confess; I do talk to myself on the journeys I make. Well, not to myself exactly. I do it as if I am talking to somebody else, but obviously not someone I believe in, more an extension of myself, lest I would not continually break off and go back if I say something that I haven't phrased well. To do so in normal conversation with another would make one seem quite mad. But I enjoy the company and don't much care what the child thinks. No, I am not angry with her, that would not be right. Just frustrated. Children are children, they occupy a different level of reality to the rest of us. And I am yet to be fully convinced she is actually real. I could use a recording device, something I could hang around my neck, make my journal entries by audio file as I walk. There have been times I would have liked to be able to record something instantaneously, to capture every detail while still absolutely fresh in my memory, but c'est la vie. Twenty-five minutes to one, time to go. I will check in with you again when I arrive in the hide. In the meantime, do feel free to enjoy a light lunch and a glass of fruit juice, won't you?

Evening - 19:24

The magic pill was obviously only the provider of temporary respite, I still can't say I feel that brilliant, but then I gather it probably won't be natural causes that finish me off. The thought has also occurred to me that this may be something to do with their terraforming process, that redness in the light; I would reason that if they are affecting the concentration of oxygen in the atmosphere, it would clearly have a detrimental effect on me. There must, in any event, be more oxygen in the

air as there are no other living creatures to share it, just the trees to make more. I would have thought being oxygen enriched would be a good thing, but frankly, I'm rather clueless when it comes to medical stuff. It may make me feel odd, like I do, is that not a reasonable assumption? Remind me to look it up if I get back. When I get back, let's keep things positive. The hide appears undisturbed, it must only have been the child who found it previously. I had been so sure she was in league with them, although that was never likely. But I do have to accept that she is most certainly real then. Imagination cannot move leaves. Talking of which, this reddened light is most certainly having an effect. I noticed it on the way here. each new mile showing the effects more strongly, e.g. the closer I came to the landing site. There is a bizarre mix of Autumn and Spring happening in this area. some old and dying leaves on the trees, right next to fresh ferns popping up from the soil. Were you coming into this world cold, you would be hard pressed to work out exactly which season it was supposed to be. Obviously, I do have some concerns with regard to how much longer I will be able to breathe here, how much warmer it is going to get et al. But somehow, I think circumstance may dictate those will not be the deciding factors when the final outcome is weighed. Were I a betting man, I would not waste my money on any eventuality, all seem as unlikely as any other.

It has been very quiet out there thus far, even the child has made herself absent for most of the evening, though I can hear footsteps a little way away at the moment. They are light, most certainly hers, if that brute be anything to judge their general scale by. Call me whimsical, but I had always hoped they would prove to be little green men. It was hard to be precise about the flesh colour beneath that creature's mask, the moment was gone before I had really had time to process all the information. I had just felt anger, the need for retribution, even though the wisdom of age tells me that is not necessarily a good thing to seek. But there she is, for all my fears, skipping about out there. I wonder if she is in sight of the screen? Excuse me one moment, I just need to push the rods up. Yes, I see her, just at the edge of the woodland, a metre or so my side of the track, skipping one way then the other, quite oblivious to the silent alien menace just the other side of yonder tree line. The sweet innocence of youth. I doubt she suffers from any of the angst that I do when it comes to regarding our respective fates. She must have seen that creature too, surely? She had been too close not to have. And the light show they put on at night, well, one could hardly overlook it, any more than you could not hear the noise. Unless, of course, she really is deaf? You will find no answers here, Mr. Varg, this is a land of questions. Ah, it looks like we have some action, I see a light rising above the tree line by the landing site.

22:08

The weapon again. Presuming it is a weapon? I fail to see what else an energy beam like that could be. They are still shooting off in to the distance, so it is impossible to see what, if anything specific, they are actually aiming at. I suppose it could be a power transfer device, were I feeling generous of mind, but I am stuck in a hole in the ground taking notes on their activities, so I am not. I would like to find something it has connected with, that is the only way I can be certain of its purpose. That stupid child has been much too close to the woodland border on several occasions. I don't know why, but I worry for her, even though worry does not seem intrinsic to my nature. An empathy between most clearly related human species? I must learn more of her race, it's important I gain more of an understanding about this world. I brought the magazine along, stuffed into the large inside pocket of my backpack. I needn't worry about creasing it, life under a crate had hardly been kind to it so far. Just the glances I've had inside have been intriguing, but even with my taped up reading glasses, I could really use the benefit of daylight to read it properly. There was an aerial photograph of what looked like a city I knew, I recognised the shape of the large river that ran through it, but not the city itself. My fragmented memory tells me there should be tall buildings reaching up beyond the clouds, but this city was all low built structures. Strange. But I am sure I will learn much more when I get the chance to read it properly. Hark at me, you'd think my desk diary was packed with appointments. No, it's not so much 'busy' as preoccupied. As well as still feeling a little achy and wishing my head was on somebody else's body. I wish there was a better beam on this torch as well, it is far from adequate enough to read by. I wonder if they plan to do anything other than fire that fucking thing off into the distance tonight? I thought the beam aesthetically pleasing the first couple of dozen times, but you know what it's like, you've seen one alien death ray, you've seen them all. I suppose I should return to the watch now, still trying to work out where best my lighter and kindling can be utilised. I can see me going out to that stupid child at some point tonight as well, can she not see what is going on over there? It looks like she's chasing a butterfly, only I know that can't be it. My only worry about going after her is that she'll run in the opposite direction to my approach, and that will put her straight on their doorstep. Doesn't she sleep? Be calm, Mr. Varg, there are things beyond your control that you must not stress yourself about. Concentrate instead on what you *are* able to influence. That shouldn't take long...

Day 77 - Saturday 14th January 2017

I knew this was going to happen. My own prophetic words last night. If I were a superstitious man, I may believe I had brought the ill fortune upon her. I would have been sat in the daylight now, enjoying a sweet fruit drink, flicking through the pages of that otherworldly magazine. Instead, I am cooped up in my hole in the ground, playing cautious. I had thought the woodland child was playing with fire, dancing obliviously at the woodland's edge, whilst they continued their weapons testing. Occasionally, she would even look up at the beam, flitting at 180° across the sky from her and I. While I cannot be sure, because of the distance, I would like to think she was smiling at it. But, hand upon heart, I never believed they would really turn the weapon in her direction, not a child. Why? What possible harm could she do them? She couldn't have lived for much longer, a small child with nobody to care for her. It still amazes me that she survived for so long, but good for her, plucky little spirit that she was.

It was early hours, I am not sure exactly when. Afterwards, I fell into a ball of despair, not stopping to check my watch or make a report. Next thing I knew, I had missed the first three hours of the day. The beams had been firing off to the north-east for a good few hours, I had developed a distinct ennui to their existence, though I was still keenly observing the weapon itself. There were a brief few seconds before it fired that you could see the build up start, just before the black light appeared. I realise that sounds contrary to the laws of physics, but the centre of the beam at the point of firing is dark. It looks black to me in the poor light of the night, maybe an ultraviolet weapon of some sort. I know nothing of weapons, which at the moment seems both morally elevating and a practical disappointment. The one thing I had been sure of is that there had been little or no rotation on it; that the test direction, that is to say I assume they are testing it, had not changed so much as once. Then the firing broke off and it began to turn in our direction. The child still skipped back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. What I would take to be a targeting beam shot over her head, settling on a tree

behind her. I watched the back of the tree intently, waiting for the green/blue burst of energy to explode through it. That did not happen. Instead, the targeting beam dropped to the woodland floor, dissecting the child's body as it did so. Still, she took not notice, I saw nothing more than her head drop with it, as if to look down in curiosity. It began to pan in the direction of the hide, so I quickly dropped the rods, aware that its reflection on the small length of glass would most certainly give away my position. So bright was the beam, I could still see it pass across the camouflaged net covering. My memory now tells me I held my breath for five minutes or more, but it is most likely I have simply forgotten that I was breathing. I remember doing that frequently as a child, always when lost in the depths of make believe games. When I was sure, although I accept that to be a foolish term in hindsight, that the beam was no longer a threat, I pushed the rods back up again. Though I could not see the child's face, I could see she was facing me. She lifted her hand, presumably to wiggle her fingers, as we had done, when we were friends

"Please, God," I had whispered, "don't show them where I am." At once, I realised the horrible selfishness of my words and could only watch in horror as the beam reappeared above her head. Slowly, it dropped downwards, moving towards the hood of her coat. I told myself there was nothing I could do, I couldn't even get out of the hide in a hurry, I would never be able to get to her in time to help her. And I repeated all of this in my head a thousand times in the fractions of a second they allowed me to do so. And I saw the black arc beginning to form, the final sparkle of green that came half a second before the deadly beam would be emitted.

I couldn't watch. Maybe I had a child myself somewhere. Maybe I was human. But I couldn't bring myself to keep my eyes opened. I would have dropped to my knees, were I not already on them, both in actuality and metaphor. Instead, I bowed my head. I could not bear to see her drop to the ground, lifeless. I listened, I was not so far that I would not hear her small and frail body fall, but the sound did not come. "My God," I had thought, "they must have vaporised her completely, the poor child." But in my head, I saw a quick and painless death, one she would not have seen coming, one she would have had no time to fear. Where might that young life have gone? She could have been the one destined to change the world for the better, the good revolution, and they have denied her that. They have denied us all that. Still, only a handful of seconds had elapsed. I opened my

eyes to see the last wisps of smoke illuminated in the targeting beam, now focused on the tree that had been behind her. The beam must have gone straight through her, if it had left anything of her to go through. There will be a mark on that tree at the woodland's edge, obviously. When things quieten down over there, I will go to find it and I will make some kind of memorial to her. Perhaps a cairn at the base of the tree, with whatever stones I can find, I cannot just let her be forgotten. And I don't even know her name. So the most I can do is scratch 'Woodland Child' on a stone with my knife. And any future visitor may wonder why somebody had made a pile of small stones. And why one had strange symbols scratched on to it, symbols that made no sense in their own tongue, or in the one they knew had once been of this world. Although they will not know who she was, what she looked like or why she died, they will still be thinking of an unknown 'something', and I will know that is her, and I will be happy it is so.

Evening - 19:10

All is peace tonight. The lights of the landing site are dark, the machines are silent, as if they are mourning her loss with me. Empathy for the vanquished. Nothing moves, even the night breeze has stilled itself. So much so that I sat outside for twenty minutes or so, cross-legged, or as close an approximation as my age and inflexibility will allow, in an act of remembrance. There were three stars visible through a gap in the cloud this evening, plus one brighter light, which I think is probably a planet. If this were my world and I was as I was, I would likely be able to name it for you. I made a wish on the planet in the sky, a wish that the woodland child will find eternal peace in death. I don't know what their life end customs may be here, but I felt I should do something. On my world, I seem to recall we often mark the place of death, and that is where I shall build the cairn, at least as soon as I think it safe to do so. In the meantime, my words with the planet and a period of outdoor meditation will have to suffice. Although it looks like there will be nothing to watch tonight, I had the screen raised. If this entry cuts off suddenly, it will just be a case of my having heard something outside and shutting the cover immediately, nothing more sinister than that. But I would be surprised to hear a sound tonight, any sound. It is like time has been frozen. If not for the stars slowly changing position, I would suspect that were the truth. And here, I think that would be believable. Tonight, it feels like the world belongs to us again, however short a respite that may turn out to be.

What to make of these men or creatures that govern our destinies. Who was so foolish as to allow them these powers? I recall wars where I am from. I could not say between whom, but I remember them happening. To be honest, I cannot recall long periods of my life where one was not. What does that say of the people who run my world or the creatures that will soon run this? Have they deceived their fellow beings as ours have so often been? Have we been painted a sinister threat that needed to be exterminated? And what were they after really? Resources? My world has water in abundance, I remember that, watching the falls at World's End, I wonder if their world does not. I wonder if our human species has been wickedly caricatured on their billboards, made to look like a menace, a smouldering flame that needed to be extinguished. We are the fools though, we have to admit as much. It is us who willingly give power to those that seek it. It is us that support their power base through thick and thin. We finance their aims, we fight their wars, we believe their propaganda. Would they be any different? If we stopped to think, would we not realise that it is not governance we need? I would banish the word government from our mother tongue. It is governments that cause the very conflicts we end up suffering for, while their own powers and riches save them from the effects. If we had an administration that represented its peoples instead of ruling them, how many of us would then bay for the blood of another nation and have the wrath of its people thrust back upon ourselves? What I remember of my world, it was a pitiful excuse for a democracy, an exercise in cleverly selling a barely post-feudal system to a population that were too heavily indoctrinated to realise something wasn't quite right. You may think my anger misdirected, you may think it is not the actions of the governors of my world that has brought this alien invasion upon this one, but it will be the fruits of the thoughts of ones who bear similar ideals, I am sure. They will have clever methods of selling conquest to their masses, it will be "the will of the gods" or some other such nonsense. Are you now or have you ever been... a coward, sir!? Of course not, be a patriot, kill for your country, die for your country! Or we will publicly shame you, have them send you feathers in the mail, SSSSHHHHH! Seek adventure, young man, serve your nation, serve your world! Aren't you proud to be a member of your species? And you know we are better than THEM, don't you? Are you going to sit back and let them infiltrate our way of life? Of course not! They don't want what we want. Their values are not our values. They don't dress like we do. They have different deity concepts! And have you seen the way they look at our women? By our side we will have you, and we can join hands and hate them together. Is there any stronger love than the mutual hatred of an identified common enemy? They won't even spend and save when we tell them to, the bastards! Stand up, sir! Hold your head up high! And pull the fucking trigger...

And we end up here.

Again.

Day 78 - Sunday 15th January 2017

Eleven weeks. Just me and them. Deep joy. Since they have completed and tested their weapon, they have been quiet and all but invisible, so my attention has turned back to those in the sky. The cloud has now thinned to the point where glimpses of the circular reflective craft are becoming more frequent, I expect to be able to get a good photograph within days. The redness in the light is plain to see now. I'm not talking 'visions of hell' or anything, just a noticeable red tint in the sky, as if the sun will soon rise or set, but for most of the day. The hum has returned to its original state, whatever the change in it signified or contributed to has surely come to an end. Which brings me to wondering what will happen next. Clearly, they will have a plan, this seems the probable time for them to enact it. I don't wish to be the fool sat in a car park waiting for doomsday, I am aware we have been here before, but I can no longer theorise anything they may yet be waiting for. Possibly, they need the planet to be a lot warmer before they can leave their ships in numbers, but the creature I took a dive at didn't seem to be wearing protective clothing. Having said that, how would I know what protection they would need? It could be nothing more than something to keep them warm, the dark material it was covered in could have been some special alien thermal weave. In any event, no breathing apparatus of any discernible sort. So, either they are already comfortable breathing our atmosphere, or the creature was not one of them, perhaps a member of a slave race, something genetically bred for servitude? It is just a waiting game now, there is nothing more to observe. But tomorrow, as all has been silent, I have some personal business to take care of. I have a tree to find, a cairn to build, a life to honour. For tonight, I have no more words.

Day 79 - Monday 16th January 2017

Monday morning, the weekend over, back to the rat race. They've summoned me. Oh joy. I have to go all the way to the city because they want me in the office for a meeting. Brain duly switched to auto-pilot.

"We need to discuss how the project is going, Mr. Varg, nine o'clock sharp, if you please."

Phoning on a Sunday, honestly, you'd think the world was about to end! I still have nearly a week before the deadline and I'm just taking the story into the final arc, have I ever let them down before? I think not, so I don't bloodywell appreciate sitting here with a bowl of cereal and piece of cold toast at six o'clock on a damned Monday morning.

"Would you like me to give you a lift to the station, dear?" My wife's voice came down the stairs.

"What was that?" I heard every word, but you ask them to repeat anyway, don't you? It's a man thing.

"I said, would..."

"That's okay," I interrupted, "I'll drive, and you might get caught in the traffic, then you'll struggle to be back to get the kids to school."

"Good point."

"Eh?"

"I said..."

"Yeah, I heard you."

"Well don't make me repeat myself then!"

Lucky the kids can sleep through anything, isn't it? That's the teenage experience for you. Remember it well; never wanted to go to bed, never wanted to get out of it. I believe that's what they call a paradox. I can't believe I'm entertaining this crap when I have to be out the house in five. The last spoonful of cereal decides to splash a couple of drops on my clean shirt. It'll be masked by my jacket, to hell with it. I stand up, gulp the remainder of my coffee. That was hotter than I expected. Keys? Damn it, where did I put the car keys?

"Darling?" I shouted up the stairs, now approaching a state of panic.

"They're in your raincoat pocket, remember?"

Women read minds, thank God that women read minds. And remember things. I rifled in my raincoat pocket, there they were. Of course, now she mentions it, I remember, it was pouring down on the way back from her mother's on Saturday

night, then I didn't leave the house yesterday. Why would you, it's Sunday. Read the paper over breakfast, do a bit of work in the den, the Sunday roast, fall asleep in front of the television. As I said, Sunday.

"I don't know what time I'll be back, darling," I shout on the way out of the door, "you know what the trains are like."

I think there was a response from her, I couldn't quite hear it, the sort of gargled response you expect when you catch them using the mouthwash. There's a frost, damn it, I hadn't realised there was a frost. It's January and I hadn't expected a frost. Twat. Modern cars, better, one push of the button and the locks flick open. I used to have a car in my twenties that the lock froze on. Any time there was a zero degree day, the lock would freeze solid. I'd come out of work, go to put the kev in the door lock, and I couldn't get it in. I had to get in the habit of carrying a flask of hot water around with me in the Winter. None of that with modern cars. Open the door, on with the engine, hit the 'defrost' button, that's all she wrote. On go the blowers, full heat and air con, maximum power to the windscreen, front and back in-screen heating goes on, she'll be ready to go in two minutes. I climb into the driving seat, shut the door quickly, hastening so I don't have to speak to that miserable sod next door. What the hell's he doing up this early? Last thing I want to do is listen to that old git going on about how loud my kids play that horrible noise they call music and it wasn't like that when he was a boy. Of course it wasn't, electricity hadn't been invented back then. And anyway, I know how loud they play it, I live with them. He's trying to get my attention, keep looking at the dashboard as if you're doing something. Good enough, let's back out, then I can ignore him completely. That's one potential Monday morning problem tackled. Next...

My mind starts skipping ahead, I'm wondering what they want to see me for. More than wondering, it's absolutely plaguing me. Come on, Sati, focus on your driving, the roads are still a bit slippery on the estate. Do they not like the characterisation? The main character is rather obviously me, I think I might take it personally if that's what it's about. Of course, they don't know me that well in the office, I'm just the jobbing writer that has to pop in a few times a year, maybe suffer the occasional Christmas party. Thank God they don't let you bring spouses, that would be an embarrassment. Mr. Jenkins always has to give one of his "state of the company" addresses. It's just a second rate fiction house, nobody cares, especially not my wife. "Just keep calm, cash the cheques and carry on."

That's what she says. At least she proof-reads for me, small mercies. Mind you, that's probably just to save a few bob so she's on for another new dress for the do at the golf club. Why we have to go, I do not know. Those people are insufferable bores. The bloody wives are like a witches coven though, thick as thieves, so I have to go along and pretend to enjoy knocking a stupid little ball into a sandpit. If I wanted to play in a sandpit, I'd put shorts on and blag my way back into primary school. Why is the damned main road queuing already? Surely most normal people are still asleep. Who are these people and what have they done with the general population? Have they just vanished them all of the planet? That's... my mind has just gone blank, where was I? Yes, the estate, it's always a nightmare getting off the estate on a Monday morning. Then, when some courteous and good soul finally condescends to let us out on to the main road, we all have to do our ritual morning routine. Move a car length, sit and stare at the dashboard, see if there's anything reasonable on the radio, move a car length, listen to some arse hoot his horn, they can't get out of your way, there's nowhere for them to go, move a car length. How can people live like this? Why do people live like this? There are times I think aliens should come along and vaporise the whole damned place. That's what... my mind has gone blank again, is this the beginning of premature senility? If I don't get to the railway station soon, you're going to see a grown man cry in his car. Now we have the roundabout to contend with. Yes, here we go, the usual pig ignorance, people flying past you, as if they intend to turn right at it, then going all the way round and bloodywell pushing in. How do they sleep nights? God, am I like this every Monday morning?

So what do I report to them? Do I tell them I'm quite happy with the way the story is going? No, that might sound a little arrogant. It's not meant to be, but people interpret things that way, don't they? "What would I have meant if I'd said that?" I'm so sorry I don't think like you, maybe that's why I'm a creative writer and you're a... incredibly wealthy publishing house owner. Bastard. They're not going to get the ending out of me, my lips are sealed. There'll be an office full of hacks, I'm not having any one of them pinching my ideas. Come on, come on, just edge forward a bit, can't you see my indicator? Yes, that's right, I want to go into the station car park and you have two thirds of a car length vacant in front of you. You may not be able to go any further than that at the moment, but if you go at least as far as you can, I can get into the car park, get robbed by a ticket machine and be on my way to the platform. And what will it have cost you? A

little wear and tear on the rarely used switch that engages your brain. No, tell you what, don't bother, I'll just wait until the whole queue moves, even though I don't need to be in it, I just happen to be stuck behind a selfish wanker. Oh, thank you, traffic gods, you treat me kindly, it wakes. Now all I have to do is several circuits of the car park, seeking the one space that will be left, even though it's still an hour before the rush hour really gets going. Of course, there will be other spaces, but some dickhead will have parked over a white line and ended up using most of the one you could have got in otherwise. And those pricks that have to have a car the same size as their house. The ones that really annoy me are the ones that have the executive spaces right by the station's main entrance. Cost an arm and a leg, they do. Is it worth it? You see the smug looks on their pudgy little faces as they climb out of their home-from-home's, you'd think so. Great if you have money to burn. The wife says we don't. If we did, the kids would be happy to burn it for us, I'm sure.

At least the train is clean this morning. That's odd, I don't remember actually getting on it, how strange. Maybe she's right, maybe the years are catching up with me. I must have, obviously, I'm here. Last thing I remember was glaring at some middle aged chubby in a very expensive looking overcoat, but I must have walked through the concourse, flashed my ticket at whatever was standing by the barrier this morning and hopped on board. Yes, that would be it, the train is always here waiting. I don't do this often though, do I? I'm... oh, she's rather attractive, would that I were twenty years younger. And then some, I've not seen her before, but then they only call me in three or four times a year, why would I have? Why do men torment themselves like this? Why do we think "she obviously fancies me" just because she offers up a pleasant smile? She's just being civil, we could learn lessons from women. If we listened to them. Oh, very nice, a personalised leather briefcase, she must be doing well for herself. Is that "Desire" written on it? Hah! Wishful thinking, it's Desiree, must be her name. She's certainly very good at the 'making space to read my broadsheet at your expense' game. I'm glad I'm sat opposite, rather than next to her. No wedding ring. Oh, grow the fuck up. Read your book. Science fiction, that will impress her. "Oh, look at the sexy man-boy opposite, what classic literary taste he has." Don't let Jenkins do that to you again. That's what all of this is about, isn't it? That obnoxious little tosspot gets to you, doesn't he? He grinds you down and makes you angry with the world, undermines you, tries to make you feel stupid and undervalued. It bloodywell works too. Just be confident with him. "No, Mr. Jenkins, sir, I don't think the plot is unbelievable, I think it is progressing very naturally." I wonder what curve ball he'll throw at me then? Did she just wink at me? She did, she just winked at me. She's gathering her things together, obviously getting off at the next stop, not going all the way into the city.

"Would you like my paper?" She asks in a delightfully clipped Home Counties accent.

"Thank you, most kind." I say, taking it from her gratefully.

I don't read broadsheets, I feel foolish. If she'd been a man, I'd have politely declined. An attractive woman throws you a biscuit and you're on all fours snuffling for it. The joys of middle age. Middle? Like I'm going to live to 116.

"Enjoy." She smiles, "Good article on the economy, page twelve."

Mine are not the only eyes watching her leave the carriage. But I got the paper though, didn't I, losers? The usual 'money, money, money' headline, of course, what else matters? So what's this great article on the economy then? Will I finally be rescued from my futile resistance to capitalism? Will I finally see the error of my ways and embrace the concept of greed at the expense of others? Is that her phone number? Why has she written "Call me, I can help" and her phone number on her paper and given it to me? That has to be deliberate, surely? Knowing my luck, it'll be intended for a client she's seeing later, probably forgotten she'd put it there before giving it to me. Now she'll be dreading the awkward call. Nonsense, you're in a nice suit, not top of the range, but smart, stylish, obviously not cheap. Quality leather shoes to boot. She can tell you're not doing too badly for yourself. Some women prefer a man they can talk to as well as, you know, the other thing. No, of course I'm not going to call her, I'm a happily married man. Anyway, I have two teenage children, she wouldn't like them, they're teenagers, nobody likes them. But I feel good about myself again, I feel I'm ready to go toe-to-toe with Jenkins now.

"You're last story, Sati," he'd exhale slowly, scratch his greasy ear, wipe it on his jacket, "the ending was a little disappointing, don't you think?"

Then he'll just look at me while I shrug, what do you want me to say back to you? "Fuck you, knobhead, what have you ever written?"

No, I can't say that, he'll just respond with something clever, something that reaffirms his superior position.

"Apart from your pay cheques, you mean?" Game, set and match.

"Coffee?"

"Sorry?"

"Did you want a coffee before the meeting?" She asked again.

I look around me, I'm in the office, sat in the waiting room. I was on the train a minute ago, what the hell is wrong with me this morning? Even my thoughts seem strange, I'm angry, irrational, menopausal, that isn't me, surely?

"We have some biscuits too, very nice, custard creams, yummy yummy."

"Thanks, pet."

Pet? Since when do I call anyone 'Pet'?

"You're very welcome, Mr. Varg, I loved your last story."

"You read science fiction?"

"Oh no, it's my husband, keeps him off my back so I get a good night's sleep." She winked

"I'm so pleased my writing has positive applications."

I dunk a custard cream into the hot coffee, too much of an irresistible combination not to do so. It delicately softens the biscuit, it melts on your tongue, the bitter tang of the coffee mixing with the sweetness of the cream centre.

"Nice?" She asks, barely looking up from her typing. How do women do that? Multi-tasking, they call it, I wish we could do that.

"Custard cream of the crop!" I joked.

Since when do I make such naff jokes? Who am I and what have I done with myself? I've turned into one of the people I used to laugh at on the train to school. Kill me now.

"Oh, Mr. Varg, you're such a card." She giggled.

Close, same amount of letters and starts with the right one.

"Oh," she continued, still typing away at veritable breakneck speed, "Mr. Jenkins is in a funny mood this morning, the red mist."

"Like the terraforming?" I asked.

"The what?"

Why did I say that?

"Oh, some... something in my story."

"That's nice."

Go back to dunking your custard creams, Sati, dunk your custard creams and shut the fuck up, you are talking like a total twat. Oh, bollocks, come on, don't do this to me. Custard creams never break after dunking, they are the fortresses of the biscuit world, nothing breaks them down. Yet there it is, a one centimetre piece of

coffee-sodden custard cream on my beautifully ironed grey slacks.

"I'm ready for you now, Sati." Mr. Jenkins, with his normal impeccable timing, "Do come in, and try to avoid my slime trail."

"Sorry?" He never really said that, surely?

"I said 'do come in'."

"After that."

"I didn't say anything after that."

I stood up, gulped the rest of my coffee, complete with sugary biscuit grains at the bottom, nodded to... you know, I don't even know her name... and followed him into his office. I know this place, I've been here loads of times, yet it all looks strangely unfamiliar. As if I'm supposed to know it, and think that I do, but I don't really.

"Shall we begin?"

I nod.

"Please," I pull my cigarette case from my inbreast pocket, "may I?"

"Of course." He replied, sliding the grubby ashtray in my direction.

I smoke? When did that happen? No, I don't, definitely not. I put the cigarette case back in my pocket.

"Is everything okay, Sati?" He asked suspiciously, as if I had just committed some unwritten cardinal sin, "Are you comfortable to continue?"

"Bring it on, motherfucker."

It's okay, he's not a telepath.

I became aware of an adjoining door on the wall to my right when there was a heavy knock on it. He seemed not to hear the knock himself, continuing to look quizzically in my direction.

"Is the seat to your liking, Sati?" He asked, oblivious to the interruption, "You don't mind us being on first name terms, do you?"

"No," I said, "Sati is good. And I should call you?"

"Mr. Jenkins, yes, and the seat?"

It was one of those fairly standard office chairs; a black leatherette style bucket seat on a rotating base. I sit-walked it slightly back from the visitors side of his walnut desk, put out my leg onto the leg of same and pushed, causing the seat to spin, which it did with gusto, if such a thing could truly be attributed to an inanimate object.

"Whoo!" I exclaimed, "Sure, great seat."

The knock at the door repeated, this time on an adjoining door on the opposite side of the office. He seemed oblivious to that one too.

"Good." He nodded, fidgeting uncomfortably on his own rotating seat. I could see he desperately wanted to give it a twirl himself, but clearly thought such behaviour beneath him, suitable only for the hired help. E.g. me.

The knock repeated simultaneously on both doors, perfectly synchronised. He looked at each in turn, shook his head, as if in despair, then back at me. He said nothing.

"I..."

"Yes?" He snapped, not giving me time to complete my question.

"I wondered why you had called me in today?" I enquired, "It's such a pain getting into the city on a Monday morning this early."

"My heart bleeds."

I suspected it didn't really, he was known for his sarcasm and not about to fool me with false concern

"You've read the draft up to date, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Day 78, yes."

There was a knock on the door to my left, a pause of several seconds, then a knock on the one to my right.

"And," I began, looking at both doors, then at Mr. Jenkins, then at the doors again, "it has held your interest, yes?"

Alternate knocks; left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right. Mr. Jenkins looked annoyed that the sequence had been broken, but still ignored them.

"I'm not sure about the protagonist," he shook his head, "no, no, no."

"Protagonist?"

"I have a parrot that does that."

"What?"

"Repeats things."

"Sorry, you caught me by surprise, there is no protagonist, the man is alone."

"The 'creature', lizard man in a mask," he coughed out, not bothering to hide his annoyance, "what would you call him, or it, if not a protagonist? Who is it supposed to be based on?"

"Nobody," I lied, "he's just an invention."

"An invented protagonist." He lifted his finger to his lips, looked at both doors and winked at me. I looked back, just a little confused, there had not been any further knocking. "Come in!"

"He's not a protagonist," I protested, and I confess to stuttering slightly as both doors opened and a figure appeared in each, "just one of 'them', the only one he has thus far seen."

"So his being the spitting image of Mr. Mills is merely coincidence then?"

"What? He's a bloody lizard faced alien, he looks nothing like... who is Mr. Mills?"

Mr. Jenkins pointed to the door to my right, where stood a six foot humanoid in a black mask, reptilian features visible beneath the white eye and mouthpieces.

"Mr. Mills, as you well know." Mr. Jenkins stated matter-of-factly. "I trust you see my point?"

The masked lizard man sat to Mr. Jenkins' left.

"I trust you don't mind me sitting in?" He asked, "My being a partner in the publishing house?"

"Of course not, Mr. Mills," I felt a little strange saying it, "I'd completely forgotten you worked with Mr. Jenkins and resembled my 'creature' character. I really can't think how that escaped me. I can... look, I've probably been overdoing it a lot lately, deadline looming and all that. I don't want to worry you both... three... no, she's too young to be bothered... I..."

"I like books too." Said the child.

As Mr. Mills had come in the one door, she must have come in the other, and was now sat to Mr. Jenkins' right. She can't have been more than five years old, I really don't think she could be a partner in the business. Granddaughter maybe?

"Don't mind my daughter," said Mr. Jenkins, "she doesn't talk."

"But she..."

"You were telling us about how overworked you are."

"J Big books, little books...J" sang the child, though neither Mr. Jenkins or Mr. Mills appeared to hear her.

"But I will deliver, I assure you, I think the story is progressing really nicely, I'm very happy with it."

"Are you?" Mr. Jenkins raised his eyes, looked to Mr. Mills, then back at me, "The 'woodland child' in your story, would that be based on my daughter, as lizard man is based on Mr. Mills?"

"No, I didn't know you had a daughter."

"I beg your pardon?" He sounded incredulous, possibly angry, I didn't seem to be very good at understanding emotional responses. "That will be the Asperger's."

"Sorry?" I stuttered again, that comment seemed apropos of nothing, is he doing a

mentalist act now?

"You looked confused as to whether or not I was angered by what you had said," he explained, "I was merely stating that it would be the Asperger's that you are afflicted with."

"Oh." I nodded, "Of course."

"Exactly," he continued, "it wasn't apropos of nothing at all."

"No?"

"That's why we dim the lights when you come in," he smiled reassuringly, in the way a cobra might reassure its prey before a lethal strike, "you *Aspies* tend to have highly photosensitive eyes, don't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Jenkins, thank you."

The office wasn't just dimmed, it was really quite dark, now I came to think about it. There was something very surreal about this, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I'm sure lots of writers are called into the office to discuss plot development on their latest projects, and Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Mills are partners in the publishing house, what's wrong with this picture? Stop it, Sati, you're just a little tense at the moment, you're being paranoid.

"Just because you're paranoid," Mr. Mills growled deeply, as if doing the voiceover for a sinister movie trailer, "it doesn't mean they're NOT out to get you."

He and Mr. Jenkins laughed heartily for several minutes, I took the opportunity to pop out to reception to get another coffee from the nice lady whose name I don't seem to be able to recall.

The reception was empty as I stepped out, all that could be heard was the slight hiss of the coffee and the soft clicking of calls being missed on the switchboard.

"Sorry," she wheezed, dashing from the bathroom, still waving her hands up and down to finish drying them, "can I help you with anything?"

"No problem," I smiled, "another coffee, pause for dramatic effect, if you can?" "Yes, of course."

The laughter from Mr. Jenkins office had now gone on to a loop repeat, as one would expect.

"They sound happy in there," she whispered nervously, first touching the coffee jug with the back of her hand to check it was warm enough, then began to pour me a cup, "did they... er... did they notice you'd gone?"

"I don't think so," I mirrored her in whispering, "they've gone on to loop repeat,

as one would expect."

"Yes, naturally." She paused, passed me the cup, smiled sweetly as I nodded my gratitude, "Is... is everything okay?"

She seemed a little awkward, I knew this particular expression, sort of the 'nervous about broaching a subject, but it needs to be done, well, not so much needs, but I personally think it would be of mutual benefit' type of expression. I recognise it from school. It was the woman who teaches my son, whose name I don't seem to be able to recall at the moment, she'd caught him masturbating in the cloakroom when he was supposed to be in lessons. He should have been doing 'statistics and numeric relationships shown in various chart forms'. So, as I have said, I recognise the expression. But she hadn't caught me masturbating, at least not to the best of my knowledge? No, thinking about it, I am sure I would have remembered, so I wondered exactly what she meant.

"What exactly do you mean?" The direct approach seemed the most practical.

She looked at the office door, it remained closed. She looked at the door handle, it remained motionless. She listened to the laughter, it was still repeating in a loop of approximately 22.8 seconds.

"Do you not notice anything strange in there?" She spoke to me, but looked at the floor. Not counting the carpet tiles as I would have been, rather a reluctance to make eye contact.

"Strange?" I laughed, just a little, "Why no, Miss...?" I took a breath to allow her to furnish the information.

"Ced, Muro Ced," she said, "I wanted something with decorum."

"Muro, what a lovely name, may I call you Muro?"

"Please"

"Well, Muro," I began to mentally examine the situation, putting it into spoken words so she would feel included in the process, "I'm a staff writer, every so often they call me in to check on the progress of a project, if I'll meet the deadline et al. Nothing strange about that, is there?"

She looked at me curiously. There was something strangely familiar about her. She wasn't the woman on the train, was she? No, she looks nothing like her. She raised a finger, went to her handbag and took out a powder compact, opening it to reveal a rectangular mirror. She then took out a cherry red lipstick, unused, and proceeded to write "I'm like you" on it.

"You can tell me," she said, putting the compact and lipstick back into her handbag, "we're on the same page, you understand?"

"I think they were just... well," strange pictures were flashing through my mind, a sky full of silver discs, a dark cellar, been watching too many psychotronic movies, or, "they were concerned about the character developments."

"Sati, may I call you Sati?"

"Please do "

"May I be frank?"

"I think, yes," I nodded my agreement, "that may well expedite matters."

"There is a man in there who looks like a human sized lizard in a black mask, yes?" She stared into my eyes intently, questioningly, watching my pupils with a savage intensity.

"Mr. Mills, yes." I confirmed.

"Does anything strike you as odd about that?" She looked at me in a way that made me think she was not too sure what her own answer might be.

"Um, no," I shook my head, "I'm sure Mr. Mills has been a partner here as long as I've been writing for them."

"Them." She said. Nothing more, just that one word.

"They have been publishing my work for sometime now." I added.

"They." She said. Nothing more, just that one word.

"I'm sure Mr. Mills has always been here." I repeated.

"But I'm like you." She whispered, looking uneasily at the office door, the other side of which was still the laughter loop.

I could sense she wanted to say something more, but was not sure what it was she was trying to tell me.

"You, Muro," I waited for her to look at me, her eyes having been fixed to the office door for several seconds, "do *you* think there's anything strange about having a masked humanoid lizard as a business partner then?"

"I... well, yes, no," she stammered, "I think so, I'm not one hundred percent certain, but yes, I think so. It just seems a little odd to me. I thought you and I... that you were like me... you know, we who do not belong salute you. Sshhh."

She placed a finger on the centre of her lips.

"I understand," I whispered, "thank you very much for the coffee. I will be careful in there, I promise."

The laughter stopped.

"You'd better go." She advised.

"Indeed."

"Just because you're paranoid," Mr. Jenkins was repeating as I walked back into the office, a broad grin upon his rotund face, "ah, Sati, there you are, we wondered where you'd gone. There we were, laughing away, that Mr. Mills is a card, isn't he?"

"Very nearly, Mr. Jenkins." I agreed.

"And there you were gone."

"I was desperate for another cup of Ms. Ced's delightful coffee." I explained.

"Oh, bravo, what a polite gentleman you've become, Sati," he looked both pleased and surprised, "isn't he a polite gentleman nowadays, Mr. Mills?"

The lizard man in the mask nodded.

"Thank you." I responded uncomfortably, I am never sure what to do with regard flattery.

"He used to be so rude back in the day," continued Mr. Jenkins, "don't you agree, Mr. Mills?"

"And arrogant." Mr. Mills added ominously.

"But I'm a better person these days," I hastened to add, "I think I've come a long way."

"And it matters to you to have that acknowledged, doesn't it?" Mr. Jenkins spoke in consolatory tones. I liked that, it made me feel comfortable.

"It does, Mr. Jenkins," I confirmed, "it wounds me deeply otherwise."

"Stop it," he replied, clearly sharing my pain, "you'll start me off, then Mr. Mills will cry, Ms. Ced will cry, my daughter will cry, we'll all have to swim out of here."

My suspicions turned towards sarcasm, perhaps I had been naive to believe he had really forgiven me. Having said that, I could not remember what I had done to upset him in the first place.

"The court case?" He muttered under his breath.

Yes, that was it, the court case. But that was a long time ago, we were all friends now. And... you know, now I come to think about it, is it actually normal to have a masked lizard man as a business partner? I think that might...

"Sati!" Mr. Jenkins shouted, halting my train of thought in its metaphorical tracks. "The story?" I asked.

"Yes," Mr. Jenkins nodded, as did his daughter and Mr. Mills, in what seemed like a poorly rehearsed attempt to do it in perfect synchronisation, "the story. We have questions, you understand."

As I finished my coffee, I noticed a note had been scrawled in the bottom of the

cup; "They don't understand our culture!!!" That's obviously not written with lipstick, I wonder what she wrote it with?

"The cup was manufactured that way." Said Mr. Mills, drawing two scalding looks from his right.

"Now then," Mr. Jenkins said hastily, turning his head back to face me much more slowly, thus making me wait for the remainder of the sentence to come, "this Zumble Tripweed character, is he belligerent?"

"Zumble?" I laughed incredulously, but not for too long, I was careful not to put it on repeat, "No, no, that's not his name, that was just the result of a fantasy episode involving a psychoactive drug."

"So what IS his name then?"

"It's... well," I paused, inhaled deeply, then came to a moment of realisation, before racing ahead, "I really can't remember right now, how strange. But anyway, his name is not important. Who is he? Oh, he is an idealist, a man who believes civilisation is on the cusp of a crucial development in their journey forward. The signs are there! He believes that, for too long, man has been stuck in a reactionary loop, responding to events, rather than dictating his own destiny, so things just swing from one side to the other, from highly moralistic to overly promiscuous, from spirituality to selfishness, from hawk to dove, etcetera etcetera etcetera. He believes this will be the beginning of the second age for his species, once there they begin to think on their future and make choices, rather than letting circumstance make decisions for them. And he is angered that *they* have come and prevented that from happening."

"He didn't even stop for breath, did he, Mr. Mills?"

"No, Mr. Jenkins."

I looked at Mr. Jenkins daughter.

"I don't talk." She said.

"Interesting." Mr. Jenkins nodded slowly, looking sideways at the masked lizard man, that is a bit strange, I think, I'm not sure, "So what is he going to do next?" Oh, I knew this was coming, they're asking me to tell them the ending. Um...

"The truth is," I began, the two men both staring at me intently from the very second a word came out of my mouth, "the truth is that, well... I'm not exactly sure where it is going."

"Oh, piss off!" Shouted Mr. Jenkins, "This man has been trapped on an alien world, alone, for several months, they've killed a child, the only bit of company he had, the sky is full of powerful shining silver star-traversing battlecraft, they

are transforming the atmosphere, his days are obviously numbered, and you think there's a chance he might knock on their door with a bottle of table wine?"

- "I..." That's as far as I got with that one. I must confess, I was rather taken aback.
- "Maybe some chocolates too?" Mr. Jenkins sneered.
- "I think you misunderstand." I spoke sternly, which appeared somewhat out of character, an assumption possibly confirmed by the strange looks that passed between them.
- "He thinks we misunderstand, Mr. Mills."
- "He does, Mr. Jenkins."
- "I still don't talk."
- "I did not want to come to you with a conventional story," I spoke softly, forcing their close attention to my words, "not something with a beginning, a middle and an end, not for such a brief as this. I wanted a tale that would evolve organically, one that would even surprise me as the writer, so things could happen that I would not have seen coming."
- "Oh?" Mr. Jenkins looked sideways at the masked lizard man again, he didn't seem happy with that, "I'm not, it could cause us considerable problems."
- "I don't see how, Mr. Jenkins?" I protested.

Hang on, have they been responding to my thoughts? That's not right, is it?

- "Of course we haven't!" Snapped Mr. Jenkins, "It's... it's for the advertising. You know, advertising tag lines, they are extremely important. We won't know what to write if we don't know the ending."
- "Zumble Tripweed is alone on an alien world," I suggested, sarcastically mocking Mr. Mills' movie voiceover technique, "he knows not who he is, he knows not how he got there, but he knows there is an evil alien threat. In a struggle to the death, who will emerge victorious; an old cosmic cowboy out of his depth, the entire fleet of a galactic empire, or is there another surprise yet to come. Da-da-DAH!"
- "Oh, I like that, Mr. Mills, don't you?"
- "Except the ending, Mr. Jenkins."
- "Uh-uh!" Mr. Jenkins' daughter murmured, wagging her finger.
- "I see your point, Mr. Mills, he could write anything," Mr. Jenkins' words held sway over an ominous sense of doom, "he doesn't know, does he?"
- "Is he going to attack the landing site!?" Mr. Mills demanded, "And if so, when!?"
- "Wha ...?" I stood up, I did not like the tone of voice of that masked lizard man at

all

- "Come on, Sati," Mr. Jenkins spoke like a favourite uncle, "you want to get home soon, don't you?"
- "I have two teenage children," I said, "of course I don't."
- "Home." Mr. Jenkins repeated.
- "Home." Mr. Mills repeated once more.
- "I'm in on this one," said the young girl, "home."
- "Home?" A picture came into my head, like a memory from another life.
- "So does he attack? We need to know." Mr. Jenkins reinforced his colleague's question, "And when?"
- I sat back down. Ms. Ced was in a chair next to me. That's strange, I hadn't noticed her there before. Is she asleep? What is that thing on her head? And the wires? What kind of fucking office is this?
- "We'll be putting out the adverts very soon," interjected Mr. Jenkins, his voice oozing with enthusiasm, "just tell us if we're talking a great battle book, a triumph over adversity book or a gallant defeat book? What about a suicide? A noble one, of course?"
- "I'm thinking of an ending you'll definitely not see coming at all. It's about closure," I shook my head, "you don't get it at all, do you? It's about redemption. It's about discovery. This man has been snatched from everything he knows, he has no idea what is really going on. So he gives himself a name and tries to find out what he's about. With no terms of reference and no distinct memories, all he can really do is explore his core being to find out who he truly is."
- "But will he defeat the aliens?" Inquired Mr. Jenkins.
- "Does he know he has that power?" Continued Mr. Mills.
- "With all due respect," I spoke the words quite indignantly, "I don't see that I have to disclose anything to you, it is not a point of contract."
- "Oh?" Mr. Jenkins raised his eyebrows.
- "Sorry," I raised my hand, indicating that I wished all to stop and pay attention, my just having realised the significance of Mr. Mills' words, "what power?"
- "Honestly!" Mr. Jenkins slammed his clenched fist down on the desk, trying desperately not to let me see his wincing at the pain of doing so, "Some pretty woman slips him a phone number on the train, and suddenly he thinks he's all that!"
- "What?" The room fell silent as I raised myself from the chair, "How could you possibly have known about that? None of this..."

"Why all the suspicion, Sati?" Mr. Jenkins interrupted in a calmer tone, "It's not as if it's the first time we've had you in the office, is..."

"ENOUGH!" Shouted Mr. Jenkins' daughter, standing to her feet and reaching up to bang her fist on the desk.

I definitely hadn't seen that coming.

Day 82 - Thursday 19th January 2017

I am at a loss to explain. I woke this morning, in the hide, in a sombre and reflective mood. I knew it would be a day of some sadness, the Monday I had planned to perform my farewell ceremony for the woodland child. At some instinctive level, it was as if Monday mornings were never a time of joy. Possibly something bad had happened on one in my before-life, who can say? But this one would be of particular sadness. I slid out of the hide, anxious to relieve myself. Eyes half closed, brain half asleep, I simply went about my business and did not at first notice how much greener the area looked than last night. It appeared the red light was acting faster now. Of course, I did not yet know that 'now' was not quite when I thought it was. I had brought out with me some fruit juice and one of their odd cereal bars. I say 'odd' because the flavour does not ring any bells with me, though it would be fair to say the same is true of most aspects of my life. I sat on a trunk fairly near to the hide to partake of my breakfast. The sky was clearing significantly now, though the sun was still only a bright disc behind cloud, rather than the glowing yellow star I think it is supposed to be. Their craft still do not show through, but I can hear they have not yet left our skies. Much thinner the cloud and I will get my picture. The ferns had sprung up also, I began to notice there had been surprising growth and change overnight. I was aware nature could be a little offbeat and unpredictable, I knew there were many types of fauna that grew relatively quickly when compared to animal life, but this left me quite taken aback. Nevertheless, needs must and breakfast continued. And I had business to attend to this Monday morning, everything else could wait. The coast sounded as clear as it could be, not a sound emanating from the direction of the landing site, no movement in the slightly obscured view my seat offered me. It was time.

I had noticed there were a number rounded stones, of reasonable size, half buried around the woodland, it did not take long to dig loose several with my knife. I returned to the hide to get my backpack, not possessing any kind of bag to carry

the final collection of stones in, and they would have been awkward to manage loose. I did not relish getting the inside of my backpack dirty, but it is for a lost life, against which a few earth marks pale into insignificance. As I got closer to the landing site, I softened my footfall as far as was possible, taking care not to awaken the great alien sleeping machine. It should not be hard to find the tree in question, it took a direct hit from the weapon. They were using a fairly narrow beam, obviously all it takes to kill a child, the inhuman bastards. On an academic level, I was interested to see the damage it had actually caused. There was no trace of a body, I could not even see where she might have fell, and I checked a significant area of ground. As I had thought, she had been completely vaporised. I supposed that at least she would probably have known little or nothing about it. I think I had probably thought that before. And I was sure that I would again. It's a painful experience to watch a child killed, the fact I hardly knew her is of no consequence. And she could have been the last surviving native of this world, adding even more meaning to her loss. I stopped to rest for a while, a backpack half-filled with rounded stones takes a toll on the muscles at my age. I removed it, placed it on the woodland floor and sat beside it, having long since ceased worrying about further dirtying my clothes. I wished I could have thought of words to say for the ceremony. I seemed to be reasonably skilled with words, not a giant of literature, but I obviously had some experience of the art of writing. Yet nothing would come. In any event, sometimes words can be woefully inadequate. I thought I would settle for something simple, "Good journey, my young friend, and blessed be." You can't go wrong with elementary and pure sentiments.

Having rested for a little more than half an hour, I began again to search for the tree. The woodland border looks very different in daylight, the exact positioning of things did not relate as easily as I had expected. At night, there is an almost total lack of colour, all is blacks and shadows and strictly limited to two dimensions, no true sense of depth. However, I needed to persevere, there were only so many places it could be. It had definitely been no more than two to three trees from the track edge. So, a tree with a round burn mark, or hole through it, somewhere at the edge, fairly close to the landing site. It must have taken an hour, but there was not a doubt in my mind when I saw it. Not just a burn mark, not so much as a hole through it, but rather looking as if it had exploded outwards at the point of impact. Possibly, going through the child first had absorbed some of the intensity of the weapon. God help her. But it must have been instantaneous. Small

mercies. It was a tree right at the edge, just after where the woodland border starts to turn away from the track, edging on to open fields instead, though they could only be seen if you climbed up on to the exposed roots to look over the tangled mess of growth. The height of the damage stopped me in my tracks as I stood near to it, taller than she, most certainly. If she had been stood on the ground, the beam would have gone straight over her head, only if she had been standing on the thick exposed root directly under the blast damage would it have hit her. She had seemed close to the tree, but she was also skipping, which she could not have done on the root. Night causes many illusions, distance and perspective suffer especially. Was I just seeing what I wanted to? A glimmer of hope she may not be dead? But then where has she been today? Granted, she has disappeared for days at a time on occasions, but... unless she was scared after the near miss? Please do not be wishful thinking, even though I fear that is all you are.



A photograph of the tree, a memory of the tree I could take away with me, another memory would I leave here. On the nearest bit of bare ground to the stricken tree, I built a small cairn, in the traditional rounded pyramid form. On the top stone, I

scratched a cross with my knife, I think this is something people do to mark death, though I do not recall the exact details. I said my words; "Good journey, my young friend, and blessed be." And I bowed my head to the tree and the cairn. Having done so, I sat cross legged on the ground in quiet contemplation. I thought about the child following me on my walks, ducking behind trees whenever I would look round, and I thought how she would never do that again. I thought about the child lifting her hand and wiggling her fingers, in the gesture the two of us understood as a wave, and I thought how she would never do that again. I thought about the child dancing under the light of the full moon, on that most glorious of nights, how she enchanted me and made me smile, how she warmed my soul, and I thought how she would never do that again. There is no shame to cry at loss, I think, I do not care that I am a man. My eyes moistened much, my tissues had long since been used up, leaving nothing more than my dirty t-shirt to dry them on. I had not even counted the stones. I should have counted the stones. I should always know their number. But I cannot now disassemble the cairn, that would be so disrespectful. I felt desperation pushing me to do so, but she deserved better. For her, I would do something special, I would let it go. I would... I would guess how many there had been. And then I will forget that number, because the number of stones is not important, only the number of one. One life lost. One friend lost. One outpost of hope on an empty world lost. One. We are all one, all children of one creation, all forged in the same stars, we should not be killing each other. I knew you would never be forgotten, my young friend, and I told you that; I whispered the words to the tree, I whispered the words to the cairn, I whispered the words to the sky where the full moon had been. I will see you again, no doubt, in another life. And I stood to leave.

How long it had been watching me, I could not say, but one of the new machines they had constructed was peering over the tree line by the landing site, a protruding dark rectangle pointing in my direction. It was not the targeting device of the weapon, I could tell that by the different shape, but it had the look of a viewer, I had no doubt I was being watched. I supposed this moment had always been just a matter of time, ever since my conflict with the creature. They may even have known about me for longer. Oh, but the joy they must have now been feeling to catch me out in the open. I began to walk, not back towards the hide, that would have been foolish, so I followed the inside of the woodland edge in the other direction, just for fifty metres or so. The protrusion followed my movement,

as I had suspected it would. If my other suspicion is correct, that it is fixed in its position, I may yet have had the chance to escape from its view, thus being able to circle back round to the hide later on. I do not know if aliens bore easily, but as I turned to look back and check my progress, it was already turning in another direction, apparently disinterested in me. Or it had seen something else. Curiosity persuaded me to retrace my steps back to the beam-damaged tree. The thoughts going through my head at the time mostly pertained to the memorial 'service' I had held. I had wondered if this had been some kind of 'interest' in our culture, if they believed I was one of the locals, if they really had no idea I did not belong here any more than they did. Merely half way back to my starting point, I began to get a strong feeling of being watched again. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up, I felt goosebumps on my forearms. At first, I was not certain that I was not just 'freaking myself out', an apt colloquialism I seem to remember from my youth, though where exactly escaped me, as do most things of late. I looked to the viewer peering out above the landing site, it was still looking away from me. Then I very clearly heard noises to my right. Forward and right perhaps, it was hard to ascertain where sounds originated in the woods, the sound waves would bounce around in all directions, resulting in quite misleading effects. Out of the corner of my right eye, I was convinced I had seen movement, something large. I had so wished it had been something small, my heartbeat had increased at first, the inane hope that the woodland child had returned from the dead once more. There was definitely someone there, something there, but I could see nothing, though remained conscious of being under scrutiny throughout. Then the big light went on.

The landing site was suddenly illuminated brightly, causing the sky directly over it to glow, this surely had to be for my benefit. It was something of a problem. I had nothing with me, just a water bottle, a knife and an otherwise empty backpack. No torch being the point I was making. I could not stay out this far away from the hide, I would struggle to find my way back once it became dark, even with the edge of the woodland to guide me. I did not seek to panic unduly, the dark was many hours away as yet, but inevitably, it would come. If that creature, or one of its compatriots, was indeed out in the woodland, I could not take the risk on it following me. Whether the two things were connected or not, they became entwined in my perception of events; the viewing protrusion ceases to watch me, I become aware of something the other side of me. Hardly classic

conspiracy theory, it actually seemed very rational. I continued back to the tree. Nothing had changed, the cairn sat where I had left it, the viewing protrusion focuses back in my direction again. Were they amused by my sadness at the death of the child? I felt angry, seriously angry, but what use to rage against a machine? Logic did not stop me, I shouted a torrent of abuse in its direction. It just continued to watch me. I walked away from it again, back along the woodland edge in the opposite direction. Two to three miles and I would undoubtedly have come to the waterway, where lies 'Ron', the abandoned car wreck, rusting away in it. I would still like to know what was on the other side of that bank, but I didn't have the supplies or time for such an undertaking at that moment. One day. If one day should come. I turned to look back, it had looked away again. So the creature must have picked me up at that point, allowing them to keep track of me between them. Running would have been senseless, I could not keep it up for long at my age, though I had surprised myself greatly on at least one occasion since having been here. I felt like a lone animal, separated from its herd, now being stalked, knowing it would soon be little more than nutrition for its physical superiors. "I'd not eat me, my alien friends," I had whispered to myself, "do you not know how bad excessive fat is for you?" The mind, being what it is, chose that moment to connect the notion of aliens eating me with the complete absence of bodies. Why do we torment ourselves so? It became a war of attrition, back and forth several times, until I decided to walk much closer to the landing site. Half way back from the furthest point of my mock 'walking away', the machine at the landing site refocused on me as usual, I lose any sense of the creature watching. But then this time I had kept walking. The protrusion had gone to turn away, fully expecting me to reverse direction once more, as if playing a children's game, and suddenly not knowing what to do. With each dozen steps I took, it would look to the right, then to the left, then back at me again, the creature apparently remaining absent throughout. If I was foolish enough to attribute emotions to machines, I would have said it appeared fearful. It was like it thought I was going to attack it, as if it thought I had the power to do so. One man against the might of an alien armada and it seemed to flinch at my approach? What strange beings these are.

I stopped by the memorial tree. I pointed to the weapon damage, turned to look in the direction of my mechanical observer.

"Impressive!" I shouted.

I took the camera from my inbreast coat pocket. I wanted to add another

photograph of the aforementioned damage to the records I have kept. I don't know if there may be any intergalactic force that can hold creatures like these to account, but one day perhaps, and I am happy to provide them with evidence. Optimist? Me? Never. Of course, there was also an element of bluff with my staying stationary to take a picture, a little bravado. Anything that may bait or vex our uninvited guests has to be worth doing, no? I was aware that the masked creature, for I am sure it was it that which had been stalking me, was still out there, probably not too far away. It genuinely did not scare me. Either I have balls of steel... or I am too stupid to know what I should be afraid of. Let history judge me, it's not my place. But I was not so foolhardy as not to realise I was sandwiched on two sides. I thought that just standing my ground, confidently, taking a snap or two, well... it has to fuck with their heads a little, don't you think? So, I raised my camera to shoulder height, looked at the monitor, taking great care not to glance in either direction aside from it, not wishing to give them the satisfaction that I was actually concerned by their activity. I took a couple of pictures of the tree, then knelt. I aimed the camera at the cairn. Okay, it was only a pile of stones, what use a photo of a pile of stones in a catalogue of evidence? No, this was for me. From behind me, I could hear that the creature was now much closer, maybe the photo could wait. Evidence may be something to risk one's safety for, sentimentality is most certainly not. I stood to my full height, stretching as much as I could to exaggerate the effect of my size. Looking to my right, I could see the machine still focused upon me, the sky still glowing brightly above it. To my left, the creature was making only the smallest attempt to remain camouflaged.

"So", I had muttered to myself, "you are getting a little braver? Let's see who will blink first then."

Hindsight does indeed inform me of the less than intelligent nature of this strategy, but it honestly seemed like a plan at the time.

"I'm just going to stand here and have a look at my picture!" I shouted, "No rush, is there?"

The machine's viewer locked in position, the creature was peering through the gaps in its 'hiding spot'. I lifted the camera up, gazed at the monitor, and went to flick the switch up to turn it from a live feed to a stills viewer. And there was the date looking back at me; "19.JAN.2017"

"What the fuck?" I had only whispered, though it felt like the words had echoed the infamous coverall expression of shock throughout the woodlands.

I had gone to sleep at the end of Sunday, and awoken Thursday morning? And what of the three days in between? I looked at the dark rectangle that watched me. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME, YOU FUCKING BASTARDS!?"

I screamed at it, wasting my valuable breath.

It was a machine, what did I expect it to do? Laugh in an evil manner and stroke a cat? I turned to look in the other direction, it was still crouched down, using the undergrowth for cover, but I sensed it wanted me to know it was there.

"Three days? I'll fucking make sure you know I know you're there!"

I let the camera fall to the pile of leaves at my feet and took off to run towards the creature, but I would not take my eyes from it this time. It stood up to its full height. I did not falter, it was no bigger than me, and I had the momentum. It took something from a container hooked on to its belt, raised it and pointed it straight at me. Luckily, there was still some rationale in my mind and I stopped in my tracks. I was sure it was going to shoot me. It's an odd thing, I felt no fear. I thought of the girl, how sudden death must have befallen her, confident it would take me before I even knew it was happening. And this life, alone on a planet? It was no great inspiration to survive. I closed my eyes and waited for the end to come. It felt like time had once more frozen, ceasing to drift inexorably into the future. After what felt like ten minutes of waiting to commence my journey to infinity, a thought struck me; what if it really *had* been ten minutes? I opened my eyes. It was gone. I looked around to the landing site, the dark rectangle was now pointed over to the north, the bright illumination gone. Was I even a minor inconvenience to these beings? A small object for them to toy with? Or had they just beaten me hands down at my own bluff? I walked back to the tree to pick up the camera, fortunately unharmed by my sudden disposal. And so I headed back here to the hide.

On one side of the trench system my hide had obviously at one time been a part of, though much of it had now been filled by the passage of time, there was a wide piece of root that stuck out from the earth, rather like a seat. It had become a favourite resting place with me, somewhere to sit and contemplate life, the universe and everything, whilst still in fairly close proximity to the entrance, should I ever feel the need to vanish quickly. I made straight for it on my return, threw my empty backpack on to the ground a couple of metres behind me, closed my eyes and became lost in thought. I must have dozed off. Not for long, but I had definitely slept, and was then awoken with a start by a noise to my right. It

had sounded like a carelessly placed footstep, snapping something it had landed on, instead of gliding silently in stealth. I could see nothing, but still had the sense that something was watching me. It's hard to tell with regard to sounds when you've been asleep, it's too easy to confuse a sound you heard in a dream with something in the real world. I was fairly certain it was a real world sound, but I would be the first to admit I am somewhat jumpy at the moment. I went to check where I believed the sound had come from. Possible; there was a stick amongst the leaves that looked freshly broken, but then I had walked there on my return, so I could be following myself round in a circle again. I sat back on my perch, pulled the camera from my pocket, I wanted the reassurance of looking at my tree again, forgive a sentimental old man. I was hoping the date would no longer read the same, hoping it would turn out that I'd simply misread it, imagined it all. Sadly not, it was still Thursday, Monday to Wednesday had still not happened. At least not that I was conscious of. But I must have been somewhere. Would I have had the presence of mind, had something been about to happen to me, to get a photo first? Nervously, I pressed the left cursor button, taking the camera monitor one frame back in time, afraid of what I might find. A few pictures of the memorial tree, for whatever reasons taken, would always be welcome. Following those, I was confronted with a dark screen, containing only a small light, small yet bright,



around two thirds of the way up the monitor, sixty percent across the screen from its left. It looked unnervingly familiar, but the truth had yet to return to me. A few more pictures of darkness with the odd light in, then one that made my heart stop. There, staring at me from the LCD monitor, was the masked face of that abhorrent creature, its cold reptilian eyes piercing through the white film over them. It was a night shot, I could see a part of a branch behind it, the whole thing looked just slightly out of focus, it was hard to tell on such a small monitor screen. It must



have been the night I had to abandon the camera, the one where I had left it fixed on to that tree, preparing to get some closer photos of the craft above the landing site. That damnable thing must have found it and decided to leave me a souvenir. It was taunting me. "Have your evidence, terrestrial being," it was saying, "we cannot be touched." Cunt. And before that, I was back to the rather pathetic selfie I had taken the morning my glasses broke, an image of a rather beaten old man in a cellar. So the only clue was the series of pictures of small lights on a dark background, none of which I had any memory of having taken. And I have sat here since that moment, carefully thinking over the events of this day, from my

waking until now, then writing the journal entry that you have just read. And only now does a thought occur to me; as I clearly had the presence of mind to leave myself photographic clues, regardless of my now neither remembering taking them, nor having the vaguest of ideas as to what they might be of, might I not also have left something written?

Evening - 21:41

I have been sat inside the hide for some hours now, lost in deep thought with regard my journal entry for Monday. I have no doubt that I wrote it, I recognise the style of writing, if not the content. There is little point in my reiterating or summarising its contents here, as you will have read it before I. But its significance, that would be another matter entirely. It is clearly no coincidence that it features a female child and a 'lizard man in a mask', but who the mysterious Mr. Jenkins may be, I know not. "It's not as if it's the first time we've had you in the office." He had said. The office? I... no, how do I put this? Oh Jesus fuck, that's where I was before, isn't it? The blackout, all those weeks ago, the few hours of time lost, in 'the office'. The small lights, they took me before, didn't they? And they've taken me again, for three fucking days this time. Have I been aboard their mothership? Do they have a mothership? Am I thinking of movies again? Think, man, come on. Yes, I remember a technique I learned back on the First World. My adoptive father, a man of science, he had trained me to impose a state of hypnosis upon myself, I remember it clearly. On a Summer's eve, when he had finished his day of work, I would meet him at the north-western exit of The Citadel. I loved to stand at the foot of its towering dome, marvelling at the feat of engineering they had performed. There was a solemn smile on his face as he alighted the transit, I think that was as close to a display of emotion as he ever got, but he was a good man and an attentive father. When he was there, I believe I had a mother too, but I do not seem to be able to recall her at the moment. No matter, to that Summer's eve.

"Come, Sati," he had beckoned me towards the parking area reserved for the vehicles of the men of science, "this evening I will take you to the volcanic plains, we will sit together under the stars."

No, it wasn't Sati he called me, it was something else. He was my father, he would have known my real name, even if I do not. Think, Sati, what was it he called you, something like 'Kin'? That doesn't sound like a name, just an

affectionate nickname maybe?

"Yes, father." I said.

"And what stars we will see, Kin!" He sounded excited and so happy, yet there was still little chance of a smile so large it may crack his countenance, "Once away from the light pollution of The Citadel, our galaxy fills the sky like a whirlpool of stardust."

All that romanticism, all of that passion, all of that joy, yet the stoic face never changed much.

"And you will show me the path to wisdom?" My youthful face was covered with obvious joy, I had waited for this day for so long.

"I will grant you the greatest gift you may ever have, my son," he placed his hand on the top of my head, "what secrets you shall know."

He pointed a small beam-generating device at his vehicle, I heard the locks buzz as they unfastened.

"What secrets, father?" I asked with boundless enthusiasm.

"I cannot tell you!" He exclaimed.

"Why?" I enquired, disappointment in my timbre.

"Because they are secrets!"

I thought he was going to explode into laughter, but of course, he did not. That was not my adoptive father, that is not the man he was, he was a serious man. But he had said it to make me laugh. And I did. He was such a clever man. Whilst clearly not understanding the nuances of emotion himself, he never ceased to comprehend the value of such to others. If only we all possessed the gift to see the needs of others with such clarity. I tapped my lips with my forefinger.

"Sssshhhhh!" I hissed.

The slightest curl on his lip demonstrated his amusement.

I remember it being a beautiful evening, the skies strewn with small wispy clouds, the setting sun painting its palette with various shades of violet and cerise, enhancing the bright blue background. It was nearly dark by the time we had emerged from the top of the mountain forests into the beginnings of the lava plains. I confess I was just ever so slightly afraid, but I was young. I do not recall how young, perhaps if I can see myself in the rear view mirror? No, it's too dark up here, which is why I was ever so slightly afraid in the first place. The roads are narrow, some feature a sharp drop at one or both sides, and there is nothing but starlight and those mounted on vehicle to guide you.

"How far are we going, father?"

"All the way through," he spoke softly, "I thought we could drive down the north side to home tonight. We will, of course, be stopping by The Rose on the way."

"And will you put the vehicle lights on it so we can appreciate its intricate beauty?"

He nodded. The Rose was indeed a thing of beauty, a natural rock formation, as high as our three storey home and almost perfectly round, then fractured in such a way that it resembles the petals of a rose. They say that in ancient times, the people who lived here then worshipped it as a mystical gateway to their gods. They would light a big fire before it, some of the blackness of those fires can still be seen on it now, a millennium or so later. They would cast leaves upon the flames, so that the air would fill with thick but fragrant smoke, and the chosen would walk into that smoke and never be seen again, having vanished through the gateway to a better place. Of course, in the present, we know it was just a trick, and the reason why all of the chosen were always children; at the foot of The Rose, behind a fallen rock that has sat for fifty thousand years or more, there is a narrow opening into a small cave, just big enough for a child to get through. Once inside, a waiting 'wise one' would lead them away to the promised paradise, which was most likely a heavy blunt object to their heads. It's not as if they could ever go back. Ah, the despicable lengths man has gone to for the purposes of maintaining power over others. Of course, we are a more enlightened people these days, but still it causes some alarm that their brains were no smaller or less developed than our own. They were simply us, in another time.

Father had brought a small meal for us in a temperature controlled container, fruits and cheeses, savoury oatmeal biscuits and a sweet cake for dessert. We ate and drank in near silence, the conversation seldom exceeding "May I?" or "Would you like some of this?" My father was indeed a man of few words. But, oh, when he truly spoke, what words. And life has taught me that when you speak rarely, people are more inclined to listen to what you have to say. As our meal finished, the silence became total. For some half an hour or more afterwards, every time I would make as if to say something, my father would simply raise a finger and point to a particular constellation. He was waiting for it to rise completely, I knew that, naturally. And when it was at its apex, he finally spoke.

[&]quot;We may begin."

[&]quot;At last!" I gasped.

- "The impatience of youth," he scolded, but only in that darkly humoured manner of his, it wasn't really any kind of issue for him, "yes, at last."
- "Excellent, I hear your words."
- "You see the three bright stars at thirty-six degrees to the horizontal?" He asked, pointing directly at them.
- "Yes." I nodded.
- "Follow that line upwards," he continued, "and you will eventually see a larger brighter star."
- "It's very big and bright," I said, spotting it with ease, "so why did I need to look along the line of the three stars first? It's not as if I could have missed it if you'd just pointed me straight at it!"
- "Really?" He whispered enigmatically, almost as if for his own ears only, "Try it"

I closed my eyes and turned my head back to face him, opened them, looked at the smug look upon it, then turned back to the sky.

- "Where has it gone?" I asked in exasperation.
- "Ah," he tapped the end of his nose with his longest finger, "but was it ever really there?"

Grown ups, they like to fuck with us when we're young, don't they? To mess with our impressionable young minds, fill us with fantasies. We shouldn't be angry with them for it, I think it's more a gift than a belittling.

"So I can only see it if I look along the three stars first?" I spoke with a subtle blend of incredulity and wonder, thinking he would never know of my suspicions. "Try it." He said again.

I focused my eyes on the three stars, followed their line up into the blackness, and there it was.

"It's back!"

"As you stare at it," his voice dropped to a soft monotone, "allow it to become brighter. Imagine it is coming towards you, ever closer, growing brighter, but as if you are looking at it through glass."

As I looked, it began to come towards me, but it was longer a singular light, there were several smaller ones with it. I was alone, back in the hide, looking out through the screen towards the landing site.

"Why are they coming in this direction? What the fuck do they want over here?" They had flown over this area before in what seemed to be a co-ordinated search

pattern, but the fucking things were headed straight for me.

"Now what have I done?"

I looked at my hands, I was kneeling down, looking out through the hide's viewing screen, camera in hand.

"Oh, fuck, tell me you weren't that fucking stupid?"

I clicked on the small selection switch, my last photograph appeared on the monitor, a dark screen with a small light on it. Left cursor, back one, and again, just smaller. Left cursor, back one, and again, and smaller still.

"You stupid fucking halfwit, the red focusing light, they could have seen it, they would have seen it, you knew that would happen!" I shouted at myself in angry whispers, not wishing to make my situation any worse than it already appeared to be.

Quickly, I pulled the rods down, collapsing the camouflaged netting frame on top of the glass screen and turned the camera off. Complete blackness surrounded me. I lay flat on my back, clenched my hands across my chest and waited for the danger to pass over. Shit, how would I know they had gone? The damned things don't make a sound! I pulled my coat tightly across my chest, as if trying to dampen my heartbeat. God knows, it sounded loud enough that they may have heard it. Were they gone? Were they still coming? Silence. Silence. More silence. "OH FUCK!"

Multiple narrow beams of intense white light pierced through every minute gap in my cover. I had never seen light so bright. I would have staked my life on this hole in the ground being damned near light-proof, maybe just the odd hole, that's why I was always so careful about where I held the camera or my netbook. But this. Oh fuck. It must be right overhead, this is it, they've come for me. It must have been descending, I could hear it for the first time, the ground around me was shaking, the beams of light appearing to vibrate, and illuminating the area enough for me to see bits of earth falling from the hide walls. They say that when you are about to die, your life flashes before your eyes, like a dream sequence...

I am going to count backwards from ten.

10...

"Ladies and gentlemen, put your hands together and let's hear a warm welcome for the funniest guy this side of the First World, Mr. Sati Varg!"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

9...

"Good evening," I performed a little mock plié to break the ice, "bet I'd look good in a tutu, huh? Hey, great to be here at the Verge Of Death, anybody in from the First World tonight?"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

8...

"No? C'est la vie. Help me out here. Hey, they start on you nearly the second you're born, don't they? The man... ooh... yeah, the man, getting you ready and conditioned for the life you're going to lead. You see the gender stereotyping in children's toys?"

I thought I heard a gentle laughter, they're warming to me.

"Oh yes, they tell you the role you're going to play in life. The boys get all the action stuff; toy guns, rock and roll; 'Be a good little soldier, kill and die for your country when we tell you to!' I remember all that, we never had a choice, boys will be boys. And boys must grow up to be men. Get your hair cut! Join the army! Kill Johnny Foreigner!"

Yes, I think they're laughing now. It's not really funny, it's deathly serious, but that was my childhood, I never felt like I belonged. Forgive me, I'm a stranger here.

"Girls," I smiled, walking across the stage, desperate to get them following my every move, "they probably get it the worst. I mean, toy kitchenware, what's the message there? 'Serve your husband, cook for him, dinner on the table when the breadwinner comes home!' Toy vacuum cleaners, 'Happy Housewife' play sets, 'Serve your husband, clean up after him, he'll lift his legs if you ask nicely!' Oh yes, you ain't having no life, woman.' Honestly, you may as well give them a toy wet patch so they can get used to sleeping on that as well!"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

As I do so, I will feel myself slowly waking up.

7...

"Your parents," I soldiered on, continually looking up at the dazzling arc lights above the stage, trying in vain to escape the sense of menace I felt from them, "when they're not trying to get you to tidy your room, they're trying to plan your life for you, innit? 'What shall we have him be? A doctor? A lawyer? Nothing

beneath the family name, of course."

I'm connecting, everyone associated with that one. Universals, stick on universals. But it's your life at high speed? Fuck it, make the best of the material you have. You can only play the cards you are dealt. But you can play them well

"When I was a kid, I loved telling people what to do, thought I was always right and had an invisible friend. My folks thought I was a cert for the clergy."

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

6...

"Sex," I said, pausing to let the word sink in, get their attention, "it's all you think about through adolescence, eh?"

I could hear a dirty laugh coming from a middle aged guy in the front row.

"It's like a big playground out there, so much sexuality to explore, starting from the moment you discover masturbation, eh?"

"Did he say 'masturbation'?"

Ignore her, prudish cow, what's she doing at a gig like this anyway?

"You wanna have a go at everything, don't you? 'What can I try next, Mr. Willy? Would you like me to pour fizzy drinks over you again?' Oops, awkward, was that just me? Honestly, if your mums ever found out, eh? Sexuality is a strange thing when you're growing up, you always feel like something is expected of you, but you're never sure you want to go the way society tells you it thinks you should. Who wants to conform when you're a teenager? Me? I wanted to shock people, oh yes. I wore beads and bangles, painted my nails, died my hair and went out in turquoise dungarees."

Even the prudish cow is grinning at that image. Come on, Sati, you're winning them over

"I even toyed with the idea of going gay once, it was quite trendy when I was a teenager, but like you have a choice in stuff like that, huh? Oh yeah, I was flirting with this guy quite outrageously, I could see he was getting quite aroused. But something stopped me, a little voice in my head says 'No, Sati, don't do it, you're just making a rod for your own back.""

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

5...

"There are many rites of passage on the way to becoming a grown up, ladies and

gentlemen," I went cross-eyed, hoping it wouldn't be lost on them in this lighting, "the twenty-first birthday was the big one for my generation."

There were a few middle aged guys in the front row nodding enthusiastically.

"I remember going out drinking with some mates, knew I was going to finish the evening tied to a bollard in my underpants, but such is life. They rescued me after an hour or so, then we all went back to... actually, I can't remember anybody's name at the moment... we went back to someone's place and watched dirty movies on one of those old film projectors. Remember those? Showing my age now, ooh!"

The middle aged guys were all looking at each other, winking and making gestures like the hand-cranking of an ancient movie camera, while their wives shook their heads in mock disgust.

"Funniest thing was at the end of the evening, matey played the reel of film backwards. Laugh? We nearly wet ourselves, like this movie suddenly became about odd moustachioed guys with hairy chests and little pink vacuum cleaners." I made a sucking noise for comic effect. I was struggling, but you can't beat a good knob gag.

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

I will remember everything I have discovered on this journey.

4...

"And then you grown up and become master of your own destiny! You are an adult, you are in control!" I nodded, strolling across the stage, I was in my stride now, "Hey, every few years, you get to walk to a school building or church hall and pencil a cross on a piece of paper."

I paused.

"How much *fucking* control do you want!? **HAH!**"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

3...

"Then you come to finding someone you want to spend your life with, what a fucking minefield!"

I caught the eye of the middle aged guy with the dirty laugh, nodded in the direction of his wife and shook my head. His laughter bellowed, the rest of the audience keen to join in with him. Except his wife, of course, that went without

saying.

"I've always had a great love of science myself, but not my wife. When I said to her that I'd like to go to Jodrell Bank, she asked what was wrong with the one in the High Street?"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

2...

"Of course, you have to get married in the end..."

I paused again, you're getting ahead of me, comic effect.

"You can't be happy all your life."

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

I will feel relaxed and able to think through these events without fear.

1...

"Children, hmmmn." I began in a mock-ominous tone, "That's the next one. Don't get me wrong, I love my kids, like a little treasured possession, they are, a precious souvenir..."

They're eating out of my hand now, wait for it...

"...of the last time I had sex!"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

0...

"And, of course, there's only one way the journey ever finishes. Have you ever noticed how dead people can never remember names? Just the letter they start with, how weird is that? I have someone coming through, he's got a message for... I can only tell you what they tell me... it's a man's name, begins with a J? Is there a man in the audience whose name begins with a J? Hang on, hang on, there's more, I think it's Jack? Jacob? Jake? James? Jeff? Jim? Josh? Joseph? John?"

"That's me! My name is John!"

"He's waving to you, John, he's so thrilled to see you again. He says you were always such a great... is that 'friend' he's saying? Son? Nephew?"

"I think it's my neighbour, he died just recently, he used to wave to me a lot."

"That's right, John, he's telling me he lived next door, he says you were such a good neighbour. He's telling me he died of... was it cancer? Cardiac arrest?"

"He died in a car crash."

"He says you're a gullible twat! Thanks for coming, ladies and gentlemen, you've been great, I've been Sati Varg! Goodnight!"

A soft humming noise, bright light and vibration.

I died...

And I'm back in the room.

Day 83 - Friday 20th January 2017

They've gone. It's all gone. I didn't sleep too well last night, it wasn't noise or anything like that, it was quiet as death out there. It was just knowing I'd been in their clutches for three days, wondering what they might have done to me. I stood outside the hide this morning, soon after first light, stripped completely naked, checked as much of my body as I can see. I found a small round mark on my

bicep, about the size of a fingertip, two puncture marks in it, like some kind of twin-point injection. There's an odd bulge in my stomach too, between my solar plexus and my navel, rather creates the impression a giant slug lives under it. I don't remember it being there before. A lot has happened, it's almost too much to take in. Maybe I'm panicking unduly, but I would have thought I'd



have noticed a bulge like that, it's not as if I haven't strip-washed since I've been here. Over and over, I've re-read that strange journal entry for Monday, trying to make more sense of it. Was that something I wrote without their knowledge, possibly under the influence of strong alien narcotics, to try to tell myself

[&]quot;Yes, of course, I thought it was a 'c' he was giving me. He says he's very happy where he is now and you shouldn't worry about him."

[&]quot;Thank you so much, Mr. Varg, that's a great comfort."

[&]quot;And he has a very important message for you, John."

[&]quot;He does? What is it, Mr. Varg?"

something, leave myself a message? Maybe that was as clear as I was able to be? Maybe I 'coded' it in some way? I don't know, it's not that it was badly written, it just doesn't make a great deal of sense. But then how many different scenarios could there be? They were looking for me, sky lights up directly above the hide, I lose three days. Come on, where the fuck else could I have gone? I doubt I won a dream holiday without memories in a random prize draw. I had to be onboard one of their craft, or maybe they have built a base here. Then I just populated my interpretation of it with the only two living beings I've seen here; the woodland child and the alien creature. But the girl on the train, the receptionist and the enigmatic Mr. Jenkins, clueless. Maybe that's my name back in my before-life, maybe I am Mr. Jenkins, maybe my subconscious was trying to tell me that. Maybe what was actually happening to me, the environment in which it was all happening, maybe it was completely beyond my human brain to comprehend, to make any sense of. Yes, that's a lot of maybes, I know, but hear me out; so let's say my mind constructed something familiar; I'm a writer, nice house, wife and two kids, I get called in to the office, I go on a train. All very ordinary, why would I think there was anything unusual about that? Unless the story wasn't my construct, but something they had planted in my mind to put me at ease, make me more susceptible to their methods. But why were my 'employers' asking about what the character in the story was planning to do to the aliens? Was that them asking me what I intended to do? Why would they be bothered?

After I'd got my clothes back on again (it may be unnaturally warm for the time of year, but the time of year is still January), I decided to walk down to the landing site, knock on the saucer door and ask them. What's the worst that could happen? They've taken me once, possibly another time before that too. They can take me anytime they like. Does it matter if they abduct me from the hide or their own doorstep? The fear has gone. Completely. I'd only taken half a dozen steps before it hit me, causing me to stop dead in my tracks.

"Fuck, it really IS as quiet as death out here!"

It was at that moment that I realised the hum had gone. For three months that sound had filled the sky, the ever present background hum, and now it was silent. I put my head back and looked upward. I'd not seen the clouds so thin since I had been here, and not a hint of silver anywhere, even in the large blue holes now appearing. The sky was empty of anything that did not naturally belong there. Of the life that should be there also, sadly, but it is only the birds I shall mourn. I

continued my walk to the landing site, still expecting to see movement or hear some ungodly noise as I drew closer. I heard nothing, I saw nothing. From the woodland edge, I stepped out on to the track, stared intently across to the tree line that masked their terrestrial base. The weapon was not standing up above it, the watchtower also absent. They slept?

"Let's go pay them a wake up call."

For the first time ever, I crossed the track. At the corner where the woodlands began to veer away from the it, there was a gate into the field. I looked at the barbed wire that adorned the fencing cable and thanked the powers that be for small mercies. It was a simple 'lift and push' mechanism, which I did. I confess, my heart did accelerate somewhat as I pushed the gate open. It was an almost symbolic moment, as if it represented a significant happening in my life. I looked down to the ground under the gate, hoping there would be a clear line I could step across and punch the air in glory. Of course, all that generally exists below field gates is mud, so rather than punch the air, I kept my eyes on my footing instead. I closed the gate behind me instinctively, maybe Mr. Jenkins was a farmer? With these hands? I don't think so.

"Tree line." I murmured under my breath, "What is that? Half a mile? Whatever, walk."

And I walked, never taking my eyes off the trees, not even to blink. Okay, I must have been blinking, we do that all the time without realising, but that's how it felt; like a machine, striding to its greatest moment of destiny. Do machines have a destiny? Perhaps we can talk about that later. As the tree line grew closer, the silence held its domain. There was only the lightest of breezes, the occasional gust would register on my ears, but save for that, the only sound was my footfall. It was eerie. I hadn't realised the difference the hum had made, how uncomfortable true silence really makes one feel. I fear we are not creatures built for solitude. I am aware that I like my own company, but I seem to have found my limitations, a life alone is far from appealing. If I ever manage to leave this place, perhaps there are lessons I can take back with me to my before-life, let it not just be three months I have lost from it. Perhaps, beyond those trees, is alien technology that can deliver me to my home world in the blink of an eye. Strangely, of more interest at this moment is the question of why they left?

The tree line was not as solid as it had appeared from a distance. I was not about to enter another woodland, just pass through some trees and bushes, obviously

planted to serve as a boundary. I could see there was nothing behind them, long before I touched the first one.

"Blessed are the trees of this world," I said, hand laid upon it, "cursed is the alien blood that misused that blessedness to camouflage their unwelcome presence."

The tree stood silently oblivious to my words of good will, though I hoped in some context of reality, they would mean something to it. I eased my way through the trees and bushes to the opening at their back. It was bigger than I had thought, actually another field, though not of the scale of the one I had just traversed. I turned and looked back to my two favoured watch-points, both of which were clearly visible through what I had taken to be a solid tree line. I felt relief that I had not known this before. Triangulating, I was able to work out exactly, or of good estimate, where the watchtower and weapons had stood, and where the craft had risen from. I walked around the field in circular movements for what must have been two hours, each circle a metre or two less in diameter than the last, gradually working in a spiral to its centre. And in all of that time, I saw not a mark on the grass to indicate anything had ever touched it, let alone stood on it for many weeks.

"The burn marks." I thought aloud.

Raising my eyes to the tops of the trees, where I had seen them through my binoculars, I saw nothing but the mixture of buds, living and dead leaves that I would have expected to. There was not a mark to suggest they had ever been burned. But I could look back to where I had come from and be beyond one hundred percent certain that I was in the right place. Why had I not been able to see through this tree line from over there? I looked this way with the binoculars many times, it never appeared penetrable, you couldn't see a damned thing through it. I am in the right place, aren't I? It was a rhetorical question, I knew I was. It must just have been because there was a lot of matter behind the tree line at that time, making it too dark to see through it. Yes, that would have been it. But the complete lack of physical evidence that anything had ever been here, that was utterly beyond comprehension. I had arrived in triumph, camera in hand, ready to document the wreckage of their absence, the indentations in the ground, the dead and yellowed grass. Nothing, not even a goodbye note. This place, one that had held such fear for me, such foreboding, it was idyllic. A beautiful field of grass, unspoiled by any living thing. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Looking back, I rather suspect I did a little of both.

The hide is packed up now, there is no reason to be here any more. In the morning, I shall take a drink and some food, then begin the march back to The Base, a building I can honestly say I never thought I'd see again. There is a sense of intense loneliness that has now fallen over me. I never realised that they had, if only in the most perverse of ways, been company of sorts. It now occurs to me I am entirely alone on this world. There is spacetime, there is a spherical ball hanging on nothing in it, upon which there is me, and no other living thing, nothing but the trees to talk to. Why would you traverse half a galaxy, destroy all life on a world, then turn around and go home? "We must go now, our mum is calling us." Where is the sense in that? Was this just the most extreme of punishment beatings? Is my function merely to be The Witness? And who shall I tell they are not ones to be fucked with? Do they intend to return? Why haven't I leaped yet? What am I doing here? Is there any real sense in my anger? No, I do not believe there is. It is not real anger, I promise you. I am relaxed here, sat on my perch, a bottle of water at my side, sweet biscuits in my stomach, somewhere beneath the giant slug. I look at the sky with something of a smile on my face. Without their presence and their red light bathing the surface, maybe I can survive here. If they are out there, then so are others. I find it hard to believe that no other space-faring beings would be aware of the actions of these ones, maybe rescue is not an impossibility. Forgive my complete lack of knowledge, this is more a matter of hope now, in that I need to believe there is some. I think I will sit out here in the dark tonight, at least for as long as I am warm enough. It is my world now, my world alone, I am king. I can sit here and command the sun not to rise if I wish. Oh, it will ignore me, I have not parted company with my senses, but allow me the complete enjoyment of my moment of glory. They've gone.

Day 84 - Saturday 21st January 2017

It feels strange to be back here at The Base again. I suppose quite an amount of time has passed since last I sat here, most of which I have memories of, some sadly not. The additional space is most welcome, I have room to breathe again, a choice of indoor environments, and far more resources at my disposal. However, I no longer have purpose. I have gone through phases of hope, despair, anger and resignation over these last few months, but through all of it, those emotions had focus; them. Now they have gone, and there is nobody else left to do battle with, hate or curse. Or befriend, love and converse. It is an unpleasant feeling to be

master of all you survey when all you survey is akin to nothing. I can be master of the trees, but unless my bidding is to stand where they stand and be pillars to the glory of mother nature, they will not obey me. My thoughts now are purely of escape, but I confess I have no plan, nor semblance of an idea from which to form one. My only hope would be to pick a straight line and keep walking. Hopefully, I would eventually come to something or somewhere of use. Maybe beyond the far bank of the waterway to the west? Maybe over the ridge beyond the landing site. There could have been vast cities beyond each. Or nothing. I never really got the chance to go through the magazine I found cover to cover, and now it seems to have gone. I think it was lost somewhere during my abduction, perhaps one of my abductors fancied it as a personal souvenir. But, from what I remember of the browses I had, the settlements here were things of beauty themselves. Uncrowded, plenty of green space, the almost complete absence of tall buildings. What a pleasant world it must have been before they came. I don't think mine was like that, but I have such mixed memories; a hectic suburban life, a peaceful rural life, it is hard to know what of my recall is genuinely my own.

I have felt all around the walls and floor of The Base, upstairs, the basement and the cellar, just in case there were any hidden doorways or concealed technological portals. It occurred to me that I probably wouldn't recognise one if I saw it, but my only other choice was to sit and stare into space. I have no transport to drive or fly away in, just the boots on my feet to walk. I suppose there are only two viable choices. The waterway held promise because of the wrecked vehicle in it, that does rather imply civilisation is not far away. Or beyond the landing site. There was a pylon up on the ridge, power lines will either lead me to a generating station or a consumer, either of which would be welcome. I have gone through all manner of magical and mystical solutions; that if I do or say the right thing, the spell will be broken and I will return home to wherever, things of that ilk. It's almost impossible to work out how to leave somewhere if you have no idea how you got there in the first place. Walking, it really is the only option that makes any sense at all. I'll rest up for a day first, I think. Sunday tomorrow, isn't that supposed to be a day of rest? I really don't recall why at the moment. Maybe just a casual walk. I know! The Green Glade! I haven't been there since Christmas. My God, what a lot has happened since then. I know of nowhere here I would rather be. In fact, if it turns out I am trapped, I think I might ultimately choose to live there. I can carry wood and tools over many journeys, the walk there is always a joy, there is no rush, obviously. So what do I do? Walk in a straight line or accept my fate and live somewhere I choose to? Yes, definitely, I'll walk to the Green Glade in the morning, take the tent, a bit of food and drink, spend a few nights there. And a knife, fire-lighter, just in case, this could yet be a trap. Oh, come on, now you're being paranoid. Trap! They've had you once, twice even, they'd have killed you then if they wanted you dead. But they could be playing with you, I suppose. What would make *me* so important? There's nothing so special about me. In many ways, I feel quite defective, like something isn't wired quite right. Of all the people to abandon on an alien world, you couldn't have picked anyone who would fit in better. I wouldn't feel I belonged in a club I was the only member of. Actually, I'm not so sure I would join a club that would have me as a member! That's nice, I've made myself smile. Well, if you'll forgive me, I really must get on, I have the hugest pile of nothing to do.

Day 85 - Sunday 22nd January 2017

Now THAT is what I call sleep! It was noon before I knew anything today, quite inadequate time to get packed up and make the walk all the way to the Green Glade. I've not been a complete loafer, I have at least done the former, so it will really be breakfast and go on Monday morning. Make a nice change after getting summoned to the office last week. Consider it a holiday, Mr. Varg, you've earned it. My reward for single-handedly repelling an alien invasion. Hah! Zumble Tripweed, Cosmic Cowboy, takes down the small green ones outside the saloon at high noon! Where did I get that name from? Sounds like a leftover from the Summer Of Love. Seriously though, I don't know why they left. I could write a whole encyclopaedia of don't knows at the moment, the sum total of my actual knowledge would make for dull reading. But I still find it hard to reach any other conclusions, based on what I have seen and heard. While understanding that perception is not necessarily reality beyond doubt, I believe I have experienced enough, that when the sum of all the parts are placed together, they equate to a plausible whole. What other explanation for a world devoid of life? That alone is enough to convince me that what I have witnessed here is extraordinary. And there has been so much more beyond. But now, I just sit here, watching my empty world going dark, wondering what the fuck I am supposed to do now. I still find the idea of 'the long walk' daunting, it is a very high risk strategy. I am limited to the amount of food and drink I can carry, so if I should run out before I find any source of replacement, I believe that dying of thirst will be an extremely unpleasant certainty. Relocation has its merits, there is an air of romanticism and adventure about it. At least until one analyses it to a greater extent, begins to let one's mind move forward to the point where growing food becomes pre-requisite. It would be a hard life and I'm not getting any younger. Oh, don't think I haven't thought of it. You know, the other option, the one we only dare whisper the name of. I'm not sure I have the... would it be courage or cowardice... I'm not sure... I just don't think I have whichever it would take. I would have to be seriously desperate. Or too old to look after myself any longer. Who would want to be old, lonely and helpless? In an ideal world, that is not a situation that would ever occur. But this is not an ideal world, as you've probably noticed. Forgive me going over my options here again, consider this thinking out loud for me, a forum to explore my own thoughts and feelings. Reading this again later stimulates thought, it's not as if I have anyone else to discuss this with, I just have you to talk at, my silent friend.

An extra day of thought has lead me no closer to understanding what I found at the landing site. How perplexing to find no evidence they were ever there, save for the damage their weapon did to the memorial tree. Why would you go to all the trouble of constructing a weapon on a site, test it, and then vanish in to the ether? Does anything in this world make sense? There are times I feel like I am just about to wake up and find myself wired to a special table, some futuristic helmet on my head, silver speckled goggles et al. It threatens often, but never seems to happen. The ground feels as dirt should, save for the absence of anything that slithers or scurries. The air smells as air should, the rain is as wet as any I can recall. But there is something of an air of virtual reality about it all. Not in its look or my own sensory input, purely in its paralogical state of being. I expect to be able to turn a corner, then discover reality ends twenty metres in front of me, melting into a linear grid. And if I stepped into that, it would mean digital disintegration, which would undoubtedly stand in for death in such a domain. To be honest, it sounds no less likely a thing to happen than anything else I have experienced here. It would almost be a relief if it were true, if I were to hear a voice saying; "Well played, Mr. Varg, great game! Now you just lay there for ten minutes or so, let your brain readjust to the real world, you may find you feel a little nauseous for the next couple of hours. How'd it go? Did you get to carve up the alien?" It's not going to happen, is it? Good, it spares me the embarrassment of saying; "No, the lizard faced fucker got away." But don't think I haven't sat picking at the bark on trees, hoping to find some kind of electronic control plate underneath them. No, I've not written that before, but why would I? Think about it; if this truly were some kind of elaborate electronic synth-world, then these journal entries would probably have been how they monitored me. Just plant the idea in my head that I need to keep a record of what I think and feel, then I end up spying on myself on their behalf. So I've always kept my suspicions on that front to myself. So why have I brought them up now? Perhaps it is a strategy. Does that worry you? I have also given a lot of thought to who might be reading this. Not just the casual idea of it being a friendly alien in the distant future, or one of the invaders enjoying the fruits of it labour, but deeper thoughts I have not previously thought it wise to share. Because I have never known truly known whether you be a curious reader, seeking knowledge or entertainment; or my nemesis, seeking information and control. Does that concern you? That I might finally be onto something? Has this entire journal been a skewed version of what has really happened? Now there's food for thought. Imagine, I may have coded actual events in such a way that it would only truly make sense to me. So, place your bets; curious reader and actually as I have experienced it / nemesis and wouldn't you like to know?

At this moment, you are either sitting there with a non-understanding 'what the fuck' look on your face, or you are a reptilian extra terrestrial, running round in a state of panic, wondering how the fuck I worked it out. What clues did you foolishly leave? Was it... oh no, how on earth could you have missed that? How long have I known? Worrying, isn't it? Oh, if only I could know for certain which of those realities was the truth. I'd love to be able to see up from the words on the page, observe who is actually looking back at what I went through these last three months. I'd love to see if you are reading these 'Second World Chronicles' in the form of a book... my God, am I going to be here long enough for this to become a book? Or maybe some futuristic device, some kind of electronic book. Does that sound a little too sci fi? I'm sure it will happen. It's a big universe, it will have happened somewhere already. Or would I see those big lizard eyes, staring down at me through the white film over the eye holes in your black mask? I'd love to see the confusion on your face right now. Can you show confusion through that mask you wear? So I'd see it in your eyes, I have a good imagination, sue me. I bet you would be wondering; have I really been having these thoughts for several months, have I really picked up subtle clues and deduced the true nature of the pseudo reality around me? Or have I just made this stuff up on the spot to fuck with your little green brain? I like this feeling. For once, it is I that has the power. Your great show of force is a thing of history now, you're gone, I'm still standing. I get to taunt you from a few lightyears of relative safety. "Computer, end program!" Hah! To hell with it. I'm dropping one of those 'interesting' tablets with breakfast, should make the walk to the Green Glade a lot more fun. Consider it a holiday. From reality! Where's 'smiley face'? Why can't I do a 'smiley face' on here? Okay. Ha ha. Doesn't have the same impact, does it?

Fuck, I've just realised how dark it's getting out here. And so quiet. No, I mean seriously quite. There's not even a breeze this afternoon, evening. I can hear myself breathe. It almost feels like I can hear myself think. I miss that hum. It's just that it reminded me there were other living beings in the universe. It looks even bigger up there now, the cloud has cleared completely in some patches of sky, there are stars in abundance, and certainly no light pollution to talk of from down here. And I look at those stars, and I know that some will actually be even more distant galaxies, that I am looking out billions of lightyears into the distance, and billions of years in the past. And I think of all the civilisations that live, and have lived, in my field of vision. Their number must be legion. And the billions of members that made up those civilisations. And I can see or converse with none of them. I wonder if anybody out there even knows I'm here? And what I can see isn't everything, there is much more out there, quite invisible to my own limited visual senses. And who knows how many realities layered upon this, that none of my senses are able to detect, to any extent whatsoever. And, to me, all of this creation, all of this spacetime, is utterly silent. How do you follow that? You don't, I'll shut up now.

Day 86 - Monday 23rd January 2017

"And where do you think you're going?"

The voice came from behind me.

"What?" I responded instinctively.

I started to turn around, but my intention was clearly read.

"Don't turn around," the voice said, "let's just stand still for a minute. I need a word."

Think, man, think. Fuck, these things are kicking in faster than I'd expected, I only took them twenty minutes ago. But you're not my imagination, are you? No, you sound very real. Well, I say 'real', but actually your voice sounds... what's the word... just ever so slightly synthetic, does that make sense? "It does."

Oh shit, the office, the characters in that... was it a story... fuck knows... they responded to things I thought.

"Would you prefer that I did not?"

"Please."

Do I let on that I'm on psychoactive drugs?

"Oh," I think I would have said that was delivered with an air of superiority, "I'm way ahead of you... what is it you're calling yourself these days? Ah, yes, Mr. Varg."

Optimistic, that's how I'd woken this morning. I couldn't say why, it's not like I have much to feel positive about, I hadn't even come to a decision about the negative selection of options I could choose a future from. I just did. I get these strange mood swings, I wake up feeling high as a kite some mornings, accepted I have a little chemical assistance right now, but I felt good the second I open my eyes. I was looking forward to a break at The Glade, I love that place. So, breakfasted, watered and pharmaceutically enhanced, I stepped out of the opening, complete with backpack and tent, ready for my few days of reality evasion. I had decided on counter-clockwise, I liked counter-clockwise, there was something very comforting about, very natural. It's the way my homeworld rotates. Well, if you're looking down on it, from the top, which seems normal. I suppose you could be laying flat on your back, looking up on it, then it would be clockwise. Actually, this world must rotate clockwise from the top if the sun rises in the west. I hadn't thought of that before. Odd. Anyway, as I was saying, counter-clockwise. It wasn't purely an aesthetic decision, of course, it also meant I had to traverse only one wall to the south corner, rather than the three wall route I would have encountered had I gone the opposite direction. Not that I mind a walk, it's pleasant, but this building looks much the same all the way round, and the best bits of the woodlands are some way from here. So, I reached the southern corner of The Base, leaned back so the point of the corner pushed slightly into my backpack, then took a dozen steps forward. That's when I heard the voice. They must have been waiting for me along the south east wall. How could they have known I would go the other way? The thoughts. Yes, that would be it, thinking is pointless, I may as well talk to them.

"On that we agree. Have you finished rambling now?"

"I think so."

"Good."

Synthetic, slightly, I think that's a good description. Is it male or female? No, it's kind of gender neutral, with a slight echo. No, that would be the pills. I hope taking two of them wasn't too unwise, one was pokey enough last time. Was it one I took last time? I don't remember. Oops. It has an unreal tone to it as well. It's not Mr. Jenkins, is it? I have no idea what his voice was like, I don't remember any of that.

"Yet you were there." The voice interrupted my train of thought once more.

"I thought we'd agreed you weren't going to do that." I snapped.

"On the contrary," the voice corrected, "we had simply agreed that you would prefer me not to."

"Why are you talking to my back? What's to stop me turning around and punching you right in the middle of your face?"

"About 200 micrograms, I would estimate."

"Well...

"You are free to turn round now," the voice paused, "if you so wish."

It is all most of us can ask of life; the right to face our accuser. And there it stood; some six feet tall, not dissimilar to the average of my own species, dressed in black... is that black... possibly navy blue... dark... yes, definitely dark, the joys of being colourblind... what is that... a jumpsuit? There's a break in the middle, a belt, I think. It has a sheen to it, not a matt substance, definitely a slight sheen. Then the black mask at the top, with the white film under-mask layer showing in the two eye-holes and the triangular space where a nose and mouth would look more comforting. The skin, what I could see of it through the mask, had a distinctive reptilian edge to it, maybe a yellowish hue. But no mouth? How does it talk? Some kind of telepathy?

"Yes, Sati, do you mind if I call you Sati?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Thank you, Sati. Let's call it 'some kind of telepathy', that sounds nice and scientific, doesn't it?"

It indicated I should walk back into the building, utilising the gun in its hand. How had I missed that? It has a gun? An ordinary hand gun? What kind of fucking alien has an ordinary hand gun? I wish he'd stop waving it, the traces are quite distracting.

"Aren't they?" He muttered nonchalantly, "Let's go indoors, put the proverbial kettle on, shall we?"

"No sugar for me." I hoped a little bravado would keep it ill at ease.

"I can assure you it won't."

It made no attempt to back away as I passed it to walk back along the south western wall. For the briefest of seconds, I considered trying to make a run for it, but the way the trees were looking at me soon made me realise the foolishness of that plan. It wouldn't particularly be sensible to think up any kind of plan when a creature who can read your mind like a book is a couple of metres behind you. How do you beat that? I'm sure I read a story somewhere that had that situation, or maybe a comic book? Yes, I remember it. Well, sort of. A superhero, I think, or some space series. He had to fill his mind with complete gibberish so the telepath wouldn't know what was going on. Kippers. Underpants. I'm a rainbow trout. Where's my slippers?

"I suspect you will get bored with that before I do." It spoke without a hint of emotion, a sort of tired and jaded quality to its voice, as if it were as resigned to its fate as I.

"I'll shut up."

I had never seen the blocks The Base had been built of in such intricate detail, being in fear of your life is certainly an excellent enhancer of these kinds of substances. There were thousands of small letters and numbers forming patterns all over the grey surface, small droplets of brightly coloured oily liquids dripping from the disconnected pieces of piping. The passage around the building felt so soft underfoot today. And the breeze passing the leaves on the trees performed a symphony of white noise. Quite suddenly, I felt the need to dance. Big fish, little fish, cardboard box, big fish, little fish, cardboard box. To all of my sensual and joyous astonishment, the creature placed its gun on the ground, turned to face the trees as I had and joined me in a celebration of motion. The two of us danced in perfect synchronisation for several hours...

™ BIG FISH, LITTLE FISH, CARDBOARD BOX,

BIG FISH, LITTLE FISH, CARDBOARD BOX J.

This is so brilliant, even the trees are shaking their booty with us, this is what it's all about. This alien creature has some cool moves, respect, lizard man thing. Ya know, if I'm going to die today, even that would probably be amazing. Lizard

man is smiling, he's making that 'we are one' sign at me, this really can't be happening, can it?

"It's not very likely, is it? Do go inside, Mr. Varg."

"We are not one," I shook my head sadly as I stepped through the opening into The Base, "but we *are* all made of stars."

"Take a seat, Sati."

I looked around. It was tidy these days, not too much dust about, but it still lacked the usual household amenities, chairs and the like. I usually just sat on the floor, but that doesn't seem right when I have guests. Quite without warning, it rather violently kicked over one of the filing cabinets.

"Take a fucking seat, Sati."

It didn't shout, it did not betray a hint of anger, its voice flatly monotonous. I don't have to be scared of this thing, it's not going to hurt me, I can sense it. So what is it here for? I thought they'd gone.

"It seemed rude to leave without saying goodbye, you know how it is."

I sat clumsily on the upended filing cabinet, I would have to put that back in its correct place later, I really didn't like it in this position. It had fallen at approximately 75 degrees to the remainder of them in the row, that's not right. Sitting felt better, I had not realised quite how unstable I felt on my feet.

"Y'all come back now." I drawled in mock Texan.

"Oh, I promise you, Mr. Varg, we will, but that is a tale for another day, it is you that rather fascinates us now."

"Us?"

"Would you like me to tell you I'm from the planet Alpha Nebuli IV, for example? Or anything else that may fit more comfortably into your science fiction scenario? In truth, would any name I might give make you any the wiser?"

"Truth is always best, I find."

"Truth, Mr. Varg? Now there is an alien concept if ever I heard one. Shall we discuss the nature of truth?"

"You have the gun."

"Aren't you the sharp one?"

Sarcasm? That seems very... well... me... my species. And this is an alien? Is sarcasm so universal?

"I couldn't say, Mr. Varg, I haven't been everywhere."

Why do I keep forgetting it can do that?

"That 200 micrograms again, I would think." It continued immediately, giving me no time to regret today's unfortunate choice of leisure aid, "Why are you here, Mr. Varg? This is not your world."

"Is that confirmation?" I paused, letting the implications of what could possibly be the first solid fact I had heard in some months wash over me, like the cleansing waters of an underground spring, "I thought this probably wasn't my world, but I honestly cannot remember how I got here."

"Maybe somebody drove you?"

It winked at me. Was that a wink? Do aliens wink? Maybe it means something else?

"Maybe," it continued, "maybe it means we know something you do not."
"We?"

"You think I am just one man, Mr. Varg?"

"Man?" I laughed, "I don't think you are a man at all. I accept I'm not thinking too clearly at the moment, but.... oh, yeah, Mr. Jenkins, who is this Mr. Jenkins?"

"Just a reference from your own culture, Mr. Varg, an old name for an evil being in your folklore. We thought the familiarity would make you feel all warm inside."

It talks like a man. It looks like a man from the neck down. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised humanoid life would develop elsewhere. But its mannerisms, its way of talking, its not how I imagined aliens would talk.

"You've met a lot then?"

"Now you're asking." I smiled, an amusing anecdote coming to mind, "When I was in my teens, seventeen maybe, possibly even a few years older, sorry, finding it hard to concentrate at the moment. Anyway, so I'd dropped some acid one evening, had a little night trip planned. Hey, it was a long time ago, I was young. Went out for a walk at one point, must have been two, maybe three in the morning, just wanted to go out and see the stars flitting around the sky. There was a recreation ground not too far from my house, so I ducked in there and sat on the swings, gently swaying back and forth. There was some kind of industrial site next to it, looked very dark and foreboding, something quite otherworldly about it, radio signals to beyond et al. I kept seeing saucers landing on its roofs, kept me amused for aeons, though that's a completely

irrelevant term when you're in that state. It was an amazing substance, as is this one, a unique enhancer that allows you to look into parts of your mind you would not normally have access to, shine lights in the most hidden of corners. Oh, but don't shine lights in the darkest ones, stay away from them, they are places you do not want to go. Went there once, really didn't like it, no refunds, know what I mean? So, I could explore emotions, memories, I could smile, I could cry, it was all valid experimentation. On this occasion, my mind presented me with a small green man, wearing a bowler hat of all things! Honestly, you have to wonder where this stuff comes from, don't you? So he sits on the swing next to me, there were two, did I mention there were two? Okay, so he looks at me and says 'Hi there, my name is Albert.' Stark naked, he was, apart from the bowler hat, of course. No penis, that was fortunate, I think I might have been uncomfortable sitting on the swings with him if he'd had a little green willy down there. But like I said, luckily not, I wonder how they bred? Ya know, I never thought of asking him that. You don't know him, do you? Neighbouring planet or anything? Can't remember what he said it was called now, sounded something like a mental illness, I seem to recall? Never mind, don't suppose it really matters now. So, we talked and talked and talked, all the way till the sun came up, the things I learned that night. Course, couldn't remember any of them when I came down, but I had the secrets of the universe for a while there. Anyway, then he had to get back to his saucer, back up on the roof, fly back up to their base on the dark side of the moon. There's a moon here too, isn't there? Quite beautiful, is that were you lot come from? No, I'm not mad, I know I was just imagining him, the whole thing was a construct of my own mind. Sure, it was ornate and imaginative, but all just a construct. He wasn't a real alien. Oh. and..."

I looked up. It's face remained as inexpressive as ever, but something told me I should choose that moment to stop talking. Oh, was I getting close to some kind of truth? Alien on the swings, alien in a derelict industrial building, could this all be a construct in my mind as well? Now there lies the point; is this just my brain cooking up phantasmagoria in a chemical soup? Am I inventing all of this? It's a definite possibility, isn't it? Am I still leaning on the southern corner of the building, looking out at the trees? Oh, but this stuff distorts time, doesn't it? You get those 'moments of eternity', don't you? Could one such moment have become a three month 'moment'? Am I still sat in that cellar on

day one? Further back than that even? Am I sat at home in my bedroom, tripped out of my tiny mind? Shit, mum and dad will be home from work soon and I'm still high as a kite, I can't even see the fucking wallpaper. You're an old man, don't be stupid, this stuff is just messing with your head, it's probably been thirty years or more since you did anything like this. Why couldn't I have imagined a friendly alien like the last time? Why this lizard head freak? And why did I give the fucker a gun? Why is it looking at me like that? I stopped talking, didn't I? Minds, it reads minds, get a grip, focus. The cellar, you have to still be in the cellar. Why is it walking towards me? What's that shiny thing its taken from its belt? Cellar, I want to be back in the cellar, none of this is real, I'd just locked myself in the cellar, that's all, shouldn't go in cellars when you're tripping, especially not at my age, daft old fucker. Get away from me with that thing, why can't I move? Just fuck off, will you? Look, my wife will be home from work soon. I think she might be driving me to hospital, I seem to have taken a little more than I can handle. I have to admit, it's got the better of me. No fool like an old fool. I'm ready to wave the white flag now, help? Close your eyes, nothing can hurt you if you close your eyes. Footsteps, I hear footsteps.

"I'm in here, the key's hanging up in the utility!" I shouted, "Thank God you've found me, I must have locked myself in, twat!"

I heard the bolt move on the other side of the cellar door, caught a glimpse of my saviour in shadow through the gap down the far side of it.

"I must have been in here all night," I explained through the wooden door, "I'll tell you, you have the weirdest dreams when you're locked in a dark cellar. Really creepy in here, woooo!"

The door opened. As my eyes began to readapt to the light, they came to focus on the gun. Why would my wife have a gun? Has she found out I used her best pastry brush for wood glue?

"Don't you think you're over-reacting, dear?" I put my hands together in mock prayer, "Look, I'm sorry, I'll buy you a new one at the weekend, pretty promise."

"Good morning, Mr. Varg," no, that wasn't my wife, that's a relief, she hasn't noticed it missing yet, "are we feeling a little better this morning?"

[&]quot;It's Tuesday?"

[&]quot;It's Tuesday."

Day 87 - Tuesday 24th January 2017

- "What happened to yesterday?"
- "You weren't," it paused, "how should one put this? You weren't being entirely co-operative."
- "You took me again."
- "Guilty as charged."
- "Then you put me back in here, so I'd be disorientated when I woke up." It nodded.

"I fear we got off on the wrong foot yesterday," it sounded almost genuinely concerned about my impression of it, almost, "you see, I don't think you can be entirely sure that what you remember of yesterday was one hundred percent real. We have rather expedient methods of obtaining the information we require. They should be of no concern to you, none will do you any lasting harm"

"I'll be sure to recommend you to my friends."

It put the gun to my lips.

"Open." It commanded.

My head said "Go fuck yourself." My mouth opened regardless. It pushed the barrel of the weapon into it some two inches. Not enough to cause pain, but enough to inspire psychological discomfort.

"Do I have your attention now, Mr. Varg?"

I stared back at it, quite determined not to allow it the satisfaction of seeing any fear in my eyes. I made a noise with my throat, it was all I was capable of doing.

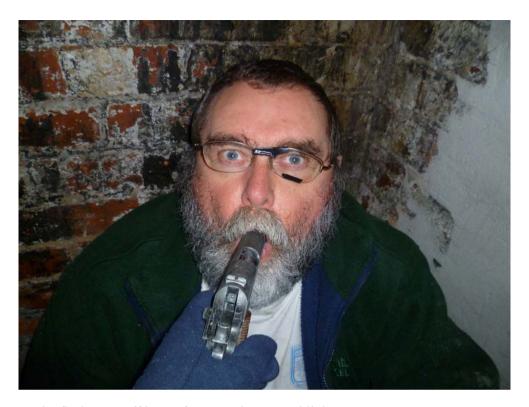
"Oh, I am sorry," it said, "of course, you can't really talk with a gun barrel in your mouth, how rude of me. Tell you what, one blink for yes, two for no. Do I have your attention now?"

I blinked once.

"Good," he continued, "oh, I have an idea, where's your camera? You keep it in your inbreast pocket, don't you? Hey, shall we get a souvenir for the folks back home?"

It reached into my pocket and took out the camera, flicked on the power switch with a gloved finger, never removing the gun from my mouth.

"Say 'cheese'!"



The flash went off in my face, causing me to blink.

"No, no," it said, "come on, all your friends are going to see this, let's see a bit of defiance. Tell you what, I'll hold the camera back a little bit, let's try again."

Flash

"And one more for the pot."

Flash

"And there you go, a nice souvenir of your stay with us. 'Wish You Were Here', eh?" It laughed, slipping the camera back into my pocket, "I know what you're thinking, I've read the book."

It removed the gun from my mouth and shrugged.

"Why the long face? I was never going to shoot you, make for an exciting photograph though, don't you think?"

I watched as the gun went into an open topped pouch on the left side of his belt, my left. I calculated the speed I would need to move to hit it hard in the stomach, get the weapon and blow the back of its head off.

"More likely," it said, "you'd be slowed by a twinge in your knees as you tried to stand quickly, or maybe you'd feel a little faint if you succeeded in getting to your feet that fast, things would probably turn a shade of purple. I wouldn't recommend it. In any event, I am not your enemy, that is just the human mind attempting to simplify what it perceives. There is no black, there is no white, there are only manifold shades of grey, remember? Come, walk with me."

It reached out a gloved hand to help me to my feet.

"How do you know I won't pull you forward smack your h

"How do you know I won't pull you forward, smack your head against the wall, grab the gun and say goodnight?"

It laughed heartily at my question, quite oblivious to my obvious annoyance.

"I've read the book, remember? Anyway, it's morning. Come."

It gestured with the gloved hand again. I took hold of it and allowed it to help pull me to my feet. Its hand did not have the feel I had expected. I was thinking in terms of hard reptilian skin, so I expected to feel something cold and solid through the glove, but it was actually warm, almost human. But when the light caught its eyes as we exited the cellar, any thought of its partial humanity left my head immediately. They were cold, impassionate. Was I being judgemental? Should I rightly expect another species to show the same signs as us in terms of emotion? Should I even expect them to possess the same set of emotions as ourselves? There was no way the head beneath that mask was even vaguely human, but perhaps I should not be so certain that humanity is anything to boast of.

"Wise words indeed." It interrupted my train of thought, "You were going to the place you call The Green Glade, I believe?"

"I was." I nodded my head, "It's the only place I've found on this forsaken world that holds any peace for me."

"It is pleasant, yes. We are not above the enjoyment of nature."

"Really?" I adopted a sardonic tone, "Would that be why you wiped out every living creature on this planet?"

"You're still alive, aren't you?" It said, seeming almost offended at my slight, "In any case, things are not always what they seem."

"I've imagined a planet devoid of life then?"

"Not exactly," it hesitated, "you're an intelligent man, you understand that perception and reality are quite different things, how your senses do not have access to all available information, how they filter even the small proportion

you can comprehend?"

"I know we see and hear in limited ranges, yes," I confirmed, "I have always assumed this would also extend to our other senses."

"Quite. Come along, I'll walk with you to The Green Glade, I fancy a nice walk. And you'll like walking with me, I get along well with everyone."

"I'll need my rucksack."

"Please." It gestured for me to walk back inside The Base and collect it.

I am at a loss to explain why, but any thought of picking up any kind of weapon while out of its sight seemed inappropriate now. It had bestowed trust upon me, and though I found it a being of extremely questionable morals, I felt trust to be an important matter, something that should not be easily betrayed. I fumbled awkwardly to get the straps over my arms, wriggled to get the backpack to fall into a comfortable position, fastened the strap across my chest and walked back out into the morning light. Looking at the sun, I would have thought it to be about two in the afternoon, but on this world, I had come to know that would actually be ten in the morning, a time which agreed with my wristwatch.

"So," I paused, admittedly for little more than effect, but took a deep breath as well to add some weight to it, "you terrorise me, kill the child that was the only company I had here, now we're going to go for a walk together?"

"Child? What child?"

We walked forward into the woodlands, heading due south.

"What exactly has happened here?" I asked, "Am I experiencing some kind of vision? A portent of future events?"

"Spoilers," it said, seeming to deliberately pick the most inappropriate word it could think of to use in relation to genocide, "I think genocide is actually a rather strong word."

"Please accept my apologies for any offence caused."

"Of course. I'm not a bad man, you know, not really, just misunderstood." "Man?"

"It's not like I wake up each morning and plan my evil deeds for the day." He brushed aside a low branch that would otherwise have hit him across the bridge of his... well... where one of us would have a nose. I confess, I found it a little hard to contain my disappointment that I'd failed to distract him from seeing it. Why am I referring to it as 'him' now? "Perhaps you're warming to

my personality, Sati? I told you I get on quite well with everyone."

"You should write self-help guides."

"What an interesting idea, Sati, I am rather busy for the most time, but thank you for your input. As I was saying, I don't get out of bed in the mornings and plan evil deeds. Our actions have purpose, we wouldn't simply wipe a people out on a whim, what kind of monsters do you take us for?" He didn't pause for an answer, "You referred to me as 'he', I like that. No, we are not monsters, on the contrary, we have a plan, as always."

"I had considered many possible scenarios," I explained, "not all saw you as evil. In fact, I am not sure I believe in evil as a force, an entity, or whatever. I think it a quality, descriptive of, simply an adjective. Its values change from one culture to another, we are probably all a little quick to stand judgement over each other, forgetting how easily stones will penetrate the glass towers we shelter in."

"Interesting. I am genuinely surprised you have learned so much from your limited experience."

I looked at him curiously, his head did not turn from a forward direction. To be fair, he was probably aware I wouldn't warn him about any low branches now.

"I cannot comment on my experience," I said, "limited or otherwise, I cannot remember anything much of it."

"No," he said, I'm sure I detected just the slightest element of sympathy in his tone, "it does put you at something of a disadvantage, I do understand. But it's nothing to do with us, I promise you."

"Heaven forbid."

"Quite. No, we are not fools, Sati, I detect that note of resentment in your voice, I understand that you are angry with us for what we have done here, but please don't take it so personally."

I shook my head in disbelief. They invade another world that I happen to find myself trapped on, they kill billions of its inhabitants, countless billions of its lower lifeforms, they begin to transform it for their own alien needs, they kill a small child for target practise, and it...

"Ouch." It interrupted solemnly, "We're back to 'it' again, are we? I understand, when you put it like that, it does make us sound a rather unpleasant bunch. But you must believe me, Sati, we have not done anything

intended to hurt you. On the contrary, we have given you the greatest gift any man could be given. What has happened here will set you on the path you are meant to tread. You have been lost, my friend, but we have found you now. You know they say that how 'The Sepian Light' says sacrifice will lead to paradise?"

I've heard that somewhere, I know those words, the very mention of them and all around me has fallen silent, as if time has ceased in a single moment. Oh, the myriad possibilities that open up before my eyes. I could spend a lifetime analysing every nuance of those words, drawing from them each and every subtlety, each veiled meaning. Will I find that one applies to me? And is it enough to find an answer? What use an answer if one does not know the question?

"You know, masked lizard creature, may I call you masked lizard creature? I remember a man of faith once asking me thus; 'If you could ask one question of God, what would it be?' I thought about it for a few seconds, then the answer became so patently obvious; 'God, what question *should* I ask you?' Not that it is for mere mortals to question the words of gods, though it would be remiss of us not to question the words of those who claim to speak for them."

Silence.

"We approach things from the wrong direction." I continued, "We all seek answers, we want to see every 't' crossed, every 'i' dotted, everything neatly explained and cross referenced, but we do not truly know what it is that we are asking. So, invader, tell me, what exactly should be my question to you?" Silence.

I turned to see if I had yet stimulated a reaction from those inhuman eyes, but the creature was not there, just empty space where it had been minutes earlier. I stood alone on the moist track that ran alongside the stream, mine the only set of footprints I could see behind me. I had not even realised we had come this far, time has such strange rules in this domain. I know the creature was real, that was most certainly not the question to ask, rather I think to ask the actual nature of its reality. I could see The Green Glade ahead of me now, resplendent in its natural beauty, so sad there was not another living being on this world to appreciate it. But it seemed I would end my days here now, I was sure of that, it would no longer be alone. I sat on a flat rock by the side of the

stream, listening to the sound of the water. I find there is much peace in the sound of moving water, whether it be the trickle of a small stream or the storm driven waves of a large ocean. I think I've found my lunch-spot. A shame my alien friend couldn't join me, sample some of the local fare. And I suppose I should hope its vile alien throat would choke on it. But, somehow, call me human, I cannot bring myself to do that.

Evening - 17:52

I expected it to return, but it has not, I remain alone. I thought I saw the child earlier, just out the corner of my eye, but there was nobody there when I turned to look. When I close my eyes, I still see her dance sometimes, it generates a smile, though one that cannot quite mask the sadness. I thought it may have upset me more, but I feel strangely devoid of my normal emotions this evening, nothing seems to be able to touch me to any great extent. I am tired though, I think I'll put my head down early. My tent is all set up, weird thing that it is, just thought I'd write a few more words before sleeping. No, nothing can phase me tonight, not even the blackout. Ten minutes ago, the stars, and there were quite a few visible this evening, they all just totally vanished, the sky went black. I've seen it before, of course, when their larger craft move, I think. I suspect this is the last one leaving, piercing the atmosphere, my walking partner now safely on board. Were there any doubts in my mind that they had left this world, I think they have now passed. There is no longer a cloud in the sky, the stars are shining brightly. But that silence, it cuts like a knife.

And what next? One day I'm a cosmic cowboy, riding on the wings of creation. The next, I'm just a little boy lost, somewhere deep in the woods, no idea how to get back to his mummy. Then there is no going back, I've talked to one of them now, there was no attempt to deny what they had done, there is nothing else alive on this world for me to find. But why did they talk to me now? What's special about this day over any other? And to what end their words? Would that be the question I should ask? And would I want to know the answer? Would it make any sense if I did? Do I stay on this dying world? Do I have a choice? Do I spend however long I can manage to stay alive here

contemplating what I have discovered today? Perhaps, more importantly; do I accept its assertion that I have been blessed with some great gift? Should one deny truth because it is spoken by those who repulse you? And would you know a lie when spoken by one who makes your blood curdle? I do not believe I could ever have felt so helpless. Was that the plan? Peel away the surface, see what lay underneath?

I cannot pretend to even begin to understand what has happened to me these last three months, I can only hope the passing of time will bring some kind of clarity. Am I seriously to believe this be my path to redemption, a chance to wash away the sins of a tainted past, albeit one I can no longer recall? Have I been given a second chance? Is that what this is really all about? Why would I deserve to be the only being to walk away from this apocalypse? Or is this to make me understand the cold and arbitrary nature of the realities we occupy? I cannot help but feel I am missing something. Many greater philosophers than I have questioned reality and our place within it, what could one such as I possibly add to the sum of their wisdom? I have much to think on, for although I knew little when I set out upon this voyage, I believe I now know nothing at all. However, if 'sunrise' was truly meant to be the word it started with, perhaps I can at least test a theory...

[&]quot;I wonder." Mumbled Zumble, riding off into the sunset.

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