

**SENTIENT – N.W. ENGLAND – COMMISSION**

**GEOFF DUPUY-HOLDER**

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**PROTAGONIST**

MARLEY WINSER (22) has just been booted out of Sandhurst military academy under mysterious circumstances. With her dream of being one of the first female officers on front-line combat shattered, she hasn't found her way in life.

**WAKE-UP SCENARIO**

Marley wakes up in a cellar with a bloodied axe in her hands. Next to her is DELIA (10), her half-sister, a socially withdrawn child who rarely speaks. Marley cautiously leaves the cellar, axe at the ready, and discovers her upmarket rural family home has been hit by an unusual storm. Disoriented and bleeding from orifices, she stumbles upon the bodies of her two younger brothers, each clearly killed by the axe. Also with them is the body of her stepmother, bearing no obvious injuries.

Marley searches the house – to her obvious relief there is no sign of her father, JACK (45). She needs to contact the police and her friend Sam but is dismayed to discover her mobile phone is humming but useless, and all other comms are down – and the family car doesn't work for some reason. But her horse is still in the stables, terrified but alive. Still suffering the after-effects, Marley places her sister behind her and rides off.

From hiding, Jack watches her leave.

**1-PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS FOR PILOT**

Failed officer cadet Marley Winser wakes up in a cellar having survived an attempt by her psychopathic businessman father to kill his entire family. As she tries to reach the police in her rural area she discovers that communications are down and virtually everyone in the area is dead, victim of some unknown catastrophe. As the horrors mount and her father seeks to foil her efforts, Marley takes charge of the few survivors and leads them to what she hopes is safety. But nowhere in the world is safe now.

## **PILOT SYNOPSIS**

### **Teaser Act**

Following the wake-up, Marley and Delia ride off. Seeing the devastation, Marley says there must have been some kind of storm, but Delia is still silent – she hasn't said a word and seems in a world of her own. Marley says she hopes Sam is all right.

This is the Lake District, a large rural area and the most-visited National Park in the UK, in Cumbria, northwest England.

Marley is disoriented and does not spot a local bus freewheeling downhill towards them, its engine off. As the horse rears she and Delia fall off. The bus crashes next to a lake. On the bus Marley finds a dozen dead passengers.

Other seats bear the shadow of their former occupants. Marley touches one – and the ash floats away. All mobile phones on the bus are humming, but none work.

The driver, BOCK (29), is still alive, just – he's blind and semi-conscious. Marley drags him out then rides off to the village police station. As she and Delia dismount, a rifle shot rings out from a hidden location and the horse falls dead. Jack, having cycled on another route, is the shooter. Had he actually been aiming for Marley?

The police station is deserted apart from another ash outline. Marley and Delia escape through the back way and arrive back at the bus. Bock, his sight returned, is standing there in consternation – Marley sees that all the bodies in the bus have disappeared.

### **Act One**

Marley accuses Bock of taking the bodies on the bus. Bock, his mind half-scrambled, vehemently denies it.

A foreboding shot of the nearby lake is suggestive that it has some relevance here, but it is not yet clear what.

Marley tells Bock someone's trying to kill her and they have to get away. They try various vehicles – none work. Marley is desperate to find a phone so she can call Sam. Marley says that a storm wouldn't knock out engines and deduces that an EMP has hit. An EMP is the

side effect of a nuclear blast, so she concludes that the storm was not natural, but a nuke going off somewhere. Then she thinks about the ash shadows – has a completely new weapon been unleashed? Has WW3 started?

Bock contradicts her, pointing out that there are still planes in the sky. And indeed, they can see aircraft circling at a distance, as happens when flights have to be stacked awaiting landing at Manchester Airport, 100 miles away. Bock is something of a loser and a failed fantasy author, his head filled with strange facts and theories. His view is that they have been hit by an extreme storm, and the supposed EMP was merely a natural side effect – earthquakes and faults have been known to produce electromagnetic effects, although not usually on this scale.

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Back at the village, Jack tries the vehicles, finding them all dead. He pokes round the buildings – all empty. He loots shop tills and loads up with cash and whisky.

There are footsteps behind him.

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Marley decides that she has to find her friend Sam. In the absence of any other plan, Bock sets off walking with Marley and Delia in the general direction of Sam's house, a good many miles away. Marley is worried about Delia. She tells Bock that Delia rarely speaks and finds it difficult to interact with others.

They meet two survivors trying and failing to find a working vehicle - REVEREND SCALA (30s), a very 'modern' vicar, and FITZ (20s), one of the local dealers in hash, ecstasy and speed. Both are in a bad way. They link up under Marley's leadership.

The group's progress is halted when they run across IMOGEN and PIERS, both members of Jack's class – well-off, golf-club business people. They are armed with hunting rifles or sporting shotguns. To Marley's horror Jack appears. Imogen and Piers were the ones behind him in the shop. He hugs her and Delia and acts like any father who's just recovered his daughters. He whispers to Marley that, in light of the current situation, she should just shut the hell up.

## Act Two

The uneasy group of survivors decide to break into a shop so they can have lunch. Marley leaves money then keeps her distance from her father. Fitz loads up with high-priced walking gear – he looks ridiculous.

Bock tells her about the previous night – he was driving the bus and as they reached the crest of a hill the sky was filled with red spore-like things. When he came to he was half-blind. Blundering about, he set the bus in motion and it freewheeled down the hill. He asks Marley what happened to her. She can see Jack listening to them so she just gives vague details. Rev. Scala offers platitudes. Fitz says he heard Marley was at Sandhurst – what happened? Marley is surly with him – she’s from a wealthy family and he’s council estate trash, so they get on each other’s nerves.

Delia stares off towards the middle distance, focusing on something no-one else can see.

Food over, the group walk through a deserted rural world. Usually over-busy tourist villages are empty – except for the crashed vehicles, most of which have ash shadows inside.

They can still see planes circling in the distance.

Fitz starts acting erratically. The others assume it’s the drugs.

Jack engages Marley in private conversation (*flashback to the night of the storm. Marley had been on Skype with her unseen and unheard friend Sam when Jack went postal, murdering her two brothers and chasing her through the house. Marley had wrested the axe off her father and taken refuge in the cellar with Delia. The last thing she remembers is Jack hammering at the door – and then the strange reddish light*).

Jack tells her how he was going bankrupt, he was going to be arrested for embezzlement and fraud, it was all too much – so he snapped and decided to kill his family and then himself. He stopped when he saw the beauty of the spores above him. And now they are in a new world, and he feels a different man – all his troubles have vanished. He feels as if the universe has changed things solely for his benefit, and dismisses Marley’s opinion about a nuclear war. Given that they’ve had the storm of the century and the bloody government aren’t coming to get them, continues Jack, the survivors have all got to stick together – so

let's bygones be bygones, eh? Besides, who's to know, with all these deaths? Who would believe her? They need to work together to survive, so get used to it.

Marley asks him how he killed her stepmother – he said he didn't (which is strange because Marley saw her stepmother's body).

Fitz's behaviour becomes extreme, as if his personality is disintegrating. When he runs off, Marley goes and gets him – to find him in the process of committing suicide. Marley comforts him. Fitz tells her he's never felt so strange in his life – completely different to the drugs. Rev Scala arrives and prays fervently for Fitz's life - but Fitz dies.

Marley insists they bury him. Rev Scala and Bock agree, but the others are reluctant. As they are digging the grave, they hear a strange sound – a car engine!

Belting round a bend comes a classic open-top car, the pride and joy of GAVIN (40s, technician). In the passenger seat is RAHUL KAN (30s, senior engineer). Both are from the Sellafield atomic power station 50 miles north – and they tell the others the plant is approaching meltdown. The course of the fallout cloud will depend on the weather, but they all need to get far away.

Jack hijacks the car at gunpoint, but Gavin persuades him that only he can drive the ancient vehicle and keep it running, so he's allowed to stay. Piers and Imogen menace the others with guns and squeeze into the small back seat. At the last minute Jack grabs Delia, and they drive off, leaving Marley, Rev Scala and Rahul to fend for themselves.

### **Act Three**

Marley, Rev Scala and Rahul run along a road. They have no choice – they need to head south as fast as possible in the hope of escaping the radioactive cloud.

While running, Marley has a flashback to a run at Sandhurst in full gear. It seems she made a mistake and a fellow cadet was badly injured. That was why she was booted out.

Marley comes out of the flashback, realising she has run too far in front of the two men. It's obvious they're not going to get far like this. As she waits for them to catch up something astonishing catches her eye.

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In the classic car, Gavin tells the others they need to get south and as far away as possible. He has a countdown on his watch, estimating when the radioactivity will arrive.

As they negotiate a vehicle-clogged road, Delia jumps out and runs into the countryside. Jack wants to chase her but she vanishes into the trees. Knowing that every second counts, Jack has to leave her behind. They drive off.

Delia stops at a small lake. She studies the water in anticipation, but then turns away, disappointed.

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Back at the Winsor home, the flies buzz around the corpses of Marley's two brothers. Her stepmother's body lies some distance away. There are no flies on it.

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Marley has found a pedal-taxi – a tourist vehicle with two bicycles at the front attached to four covered seats at the rear. They pedal off as fast as they can.

Rahul has a Geiger counter which he consults regularly. He also has a countdown on his watch.

An airliner passes low overhead. Marley assumes they're running out of fuel and trying to land on an airfield further east.

As the airliner descends further, its engines cut out.

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The same airliner, engines off, glides just feet over the classic car.

Gavin has to brake the car to avoid the airliner's landing gear.

The plane is trying to land on the road.

Which is far too small.

It crashes.

## Act Four

Marley's group see the smoke and explosion from the distant crash. Two other airliners pass overhead, their engines failing as they dip to a low altitude. They're heading off at a different angle. Marley guess they are trying to land on water. Observing the events, Rahul thinks the effects of the EMP, or whatever it is, are potent to just a few hundred feet above ground level, which is why the engines cut off.

Marley tells the others they need to get to Sam's house and then proceed further on towards the coast, to try and get a boat. Bock supports her and helps convince the others.

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The group in the classic car reach the downed airliner. Astonishingly, some passengers are still alive. When one of them tries to get the group to help, Jack shoots him.

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Marley's group reaches Sam's house. Marley rushes inside. There are two tell-tale outlines of ash in the living room. Another in what is clearly the bedroom of a young boy. Desperate, Marley rushes into Sam's room – the place where Sam was when Skyping with Marley the moment Jack went postal. But there's no ash outline. Sam is nowhere to be seen.

Sam's room is that of a young woman. For the first time we realise Marley is gay.

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Rather than helping the survivors of the air crash, Jack forces Gavin to turn the car round. The crash has blocked the main road east so they have to find another route that will take them from the radioactivity – every second counts if they don't want to die. Having seen what Jack is capable of, the others fall in line.

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Marley is distraught about the absence of Sam. The others need her, however, so she reasserts her leadership. They need to get to the coast.

As they pedal along, Rev Scala's behaviour changes – he starts to recite scripture out loud.



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Jack's group find a tree across the road. As they get out to shift it an armed man, CHARLIE, attempts to take the car from them. Jack and he fight – Jack wins, but the car is damaged. Gavin guesses it will take many hours to repair. His countdown is just an hour away.

A radio crackles in Charlie's belt.

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Marley's team reach the coast – to find a ragtag group of survivors fighting over a sailing boat. As Marley watches the boat collapses, holed and useless. The argumentative group wade ashore. Marley has to fight the loud-mouthed leader, WILL, to restore order.

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Jack's group find the source of the radio call. Charlie is a survivalist, and his cowed wife and children are in a well-stocked underground bunker. With everything up to and including radiation suits and a Geiger counter, the bunker seems their best bet. Jack's group tie Charlie up and take over the bunker.

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Marley's leadership qualities come to the fore and she rallies her group. But there are no boats – the wrecked one was the last.

Time is running out as the radiation cloud approaches. Rahul's watch shows 55 minutes.

Marley decides the only way to escape is to walk across Morecambe Bay to the south. For centuries there has been a public-right-of-way across the sands of the estuary, accessible twice a day when the tide recedes.





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In the bunker, Gavin checks out the Geiger counter, discovering that unused batteries work. He's puzzled. The others start to close up the bunker.

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Back at the Winsor home, the corpses of Marley's brothers are starting to decay.

But her stepmother's body is nowhere to be seen.

Ducks paddle in the duck pond.

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Marley's band set out across the flat sands. At the last minute she looks back and sees Delia waiting on the shore. Marley rushes back and puts the silent girl on her shoulders.

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Gavin the Geiger counter does another scan with the Geiger counter. To the astonishment of the others, he steps outside the bunker.

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Back at the crashed bus. The water of the adjacent lake bubbles as if something is rising up.

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The 12km route across the bay is treacherous, rife with quicksands, water channels and lacking obvious landmarks. But Marley's group have to hurry – the tide races in faster than a horse can gallop.



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Gavin says the background radiation level hasn't increased – in fact it's reduced. The environment is nowhere near as radioactive as it normally is.

It's as if something is sucking all the radioactivity out of the environment.

### **Act Five**

Half way across the sands, Marley's band prepare to cross the River Kent, which winds on an ever-changing route through the middle of the sands. On the opposite bank of the river they

see a group dressed in entirely inappropriate holiday clothing. They are the survivors of one of the planes, which landed on the water.

Marley's group and the plane survivors each plunge into the river, which at this point is waist deep --

-- and they discover it is full of hundreds of bodies floating face down.

Shock/revulsion.

The tide starts rushing in – they're going too slow and the waters will overtake them. Marley tries to organise them.

Then a body lying in the water channel starts to jerk.

So do others.

Delia, propped up on Marley's shoulders, raises a hand in greeting. One of the bodies returns the gesture.

All the bodies rise up.

And where their faces should be – there are just stars.

## **EPISODE 2**

Marley wakes up. Somehow she and the others have been taken to the shore, and safety. The tide has come in – they should have drowned. The people with stars in their faces are nowhere to be seen. Delia is happily skipping along the beach, totally unconcerned.

The realisation that they are not alone causes panic to break out among the survivors. Marley's authority is challenged – because she has no answers – and some of the group depart on their own, with Will as the *de facto* leader.

Rahul finds the radiation has not increased as predicted – in fact it has decreased.

Marley decides they should head to the port of Barrow-in-Furness, where nuclear submarines are built. She reasons that that's where any military authority would converge.

On the way, Rev. Scala spots a church that remained untouched by the storm. He takes it as a sign and takes up residence. Some of the others stay with him. Marley, Bock, Delia, Rahul and a few others carry on.

Bock and Rahul both start to have feelings of attraction for Marley. Rahul is confident and practical whereas Bock is a self-effacing loner whose skill at role-playing games has no evident value in this new world.

Delia starts drawing strange images, as if something had been released in her by the Sentient. Marley tries to comprehend what the enigmatic sketches mean.

Jack and his band commandeer a fleet of classic cars from a stately home. They are now mobile. Jack tries to find Delia. Learning she is with Marley, he sets out to track them down.

Marley reaches Barrow and discovers the military have captured a Sentient and are torturing it. When they ask it who sent them, the Sentient replies:

“God.”

## REST OF THE SEASON

- The Sentient dies under torture.
- It is revealed the Sentients shut down the Sellafield nuclear plant, absorbing the radiation. This is something they do as a matter of course, because they do not want the ecosystem to be poisoned by radiation. They similarly control explosions of toxic chemicals.
- Rev. Scala will change from a liberal, well-meaning vicar to a rigid fundamentalist. Joining up with a radical imam, thus uniting Christian and Islamic bigotry, he will lead the humans into a demon-hunt that will see Sentients tortured and murdered. The new religion will become a source of authority and will be courted by all camps. Its adherents will be like priests of medieval Europe, able to cross borders and carry messages from one side to another.
- Jack will establish himself as a natural leader. He will burn down the county record office so all his legal misdeeds vanish, and then have Imogen, who is a lawyer, draw up a document that makes Jack the owner of the entire county – so he is legally a feudal lord.
- Piers, a former army officer, will connect with scattered survivors and integrate them into Jack's 'kingdom'.
- Some of Marley's group will crossover to Jack.
- Imogen, Piers' wife, will start an affair with Jack. This will cause tension in Jack's camp that will eventually see Piers join Marley's group.
- The military HQ at Barrow will capture Jack and, with Marley's help, put him on trial for the murders of his family – but Jack allowed himself to be captured to get inside. His supporters take the base. Marley will have to flee.
- Bock will be the first to fully embrace the Sentient worldview. Given the billions of deaths caused by the Sentients, Marley considers this to be a betrayal and they fall out.
- Delia will acquire a mystical link with the Sentient. Some in Marley's group will want to drive her out or even kill her, while Jack will see that Delia could be a useful asset in dealing with the Sentient. This will exacerbate the tug-of-war between Marley and Jack over Delia.

- Marley's 'accident' will turn out to be caused by her fellow cadets sabotaging her – another example of 'the patriot betrayed'. The cadet who was paralysed in the accident is still alive (or Sentient?).
- Marley's family history will be laid bare. Her mother, BRIDGET, met Jack at university, when they were both idealistic neo-hippies (Bridget named their first child after Bob Marley). The marriage foundered under Jack's increasing avarice and Bridget's mental instability. One day Bridget just left, never to return. After the divorce Jack married AURORA, a more pliable woman. They had three children – twin boys, and Delia. Marley secretly resented Aurora and while Jack became ever richer as a property developer, he grew apart from Marley, preferring to focus on his children with Aurora. Marley, in consequence, tended to idolise Bridget, the biological mother she has not seen for more than 14 years.
- Now that his psychotic episode has passed, Jack, driven by guilt and the desire for a dynasty, wants to recover Delia above all else.
- The history of the love story between Marley and Sam will be teased out.
- The ultimate author of the sabotage episode at Sandhurst will, to Marley's horror, turn out to be Bridget, who became a person of influence in the radical environmental movement and did not want her daughter to become a soldier.
- Rahul will be aggrieved when Marley rejects his romantic approaches.
- Marley's stepmother Aurora, whose body was seen to vanish at the family home, will be revealed as a Sentient. Her re-appearance will cause problems for Jack, because the truth about his murderous rampage will be revealed.
- Marley will continue to search for Sam. When she finds her, Sam is a Sentient – one of those who saved the group from the tide. Sam is destined to mate with a human male – part of the process of creating Hyper Sapiens. Marley has lost her.
- The humans will adapt to living in a world without electricity or agriculture. They will have to cope with food shortages, births, medical emergencies, winter weather, transport issues and social organisation.

- Parts of the planet start to heal under the Sentients' guidance.
- The Sentients will discover that taking on a human shape starts to make them think and feel like humans. The torture and murders start to radicalize some of them. Some form the opinion that humanity's remnants are beyond hope and need to be exterminated once and for all.
- Conflict with Jack's forces will see Marley lose several of the survivors close to her. In her despair, she will almost kill the Sam Sentient. Badly wounded by Jack, Marley will be forced, in extremis, to consider embracing the Sentients' offer – to be the first to conceive a 'star child'.