

## **SENTIENT: CUMBRIA (UK) - PILOT SYNOPSIS V2 @ 31 MAY 2018 Geoff Dupuy-Holder**

### **Teaser Act**

Marley wakes up in a basement with a bloodied axe in her hands and blood on her clothes. Asleep next to her is DILLON (14), her sister, a socially withdrawn child who rarely speaks – borderline autistic. Marley cautiously leaves the basement, axe at the ready.

The location is an upmarket family home in an isolated rural setting – a converted farmhouse at the head of a valley. As Marley enters the lounge from the basement, she sees the view through the picture windows: the air is a heavy apocalypse red. Disoriented and bleeding from ears, eyes and nose, Marley cannot shake off what seems to be a persistent tinnitus-like background hum. She stumbles upon the dead bodies of her two younger brothers, NELSON and CURTIS (both with significant gunshot wounds). At that moment Dillon wanders in and sees Marley bending over the bodies with the axe.

*Flashback – 12 hours earlier.*

Marley in her room chatting on her computer with her boyfriend SAM (20s) about the upcoming general election. Nelson enters, looking for help with his homework. Marley reluctantly agrees. The internet abruptly cuts off. Marley looks for her phone but it's missing. At that moment the power goes out and there's a loud bang. Marley tells Nelson to hide under the bed and goes out in the hallway, calling for the other members of the family. In the lounge she sees Curtis, dead from a gunshot wound. AMY (40s), Marley's mother, is freaked out, crying over the body – and JACK, Marley's stepdad, is reloading the shotgun. As he points it at Amy, Marley runs forward and pushes her mother aside, knocking her out. At the same time, Nelson leaves Marley's bedroom to see what's going on and Jack, his shot at Amy spoiled by Marley's save, turns the gun on Nelson and kills him before Marley's eyes.

Marley runs, gathering up Dillon from another room. Jack stalks them through the darkened house, describing out loud how he only married Amy for the money, and now it's time to cash in, with a set-up of a tragic murder-suicide. And the perfect patsy is Marley, recently cashiered out of the officer cadet programme at Sandhurst after a scandal where another cadet was killed. Marley may not have been prosecuted, but everyone knows she

was to blame for the accident, and isn't it terrible how she's been unable to live with herself ever since, and how she refused to attend the counselling sessions, just bottling it up inside?

Marley grabs an axe and attacks Jack, cutting him, but he retains the gun and she just escapes, taking Dillon into the basement. Jack is about to fire at the basement door when he sees a terrifying sight outside – a waterfall of red spores spilling out of a hole in the sky, spreading out over the countryside. Trees shake and items are thrown around the yard by strong winds as a destructive red haze rushes up the valley below to engulf the house.

In the basement the red storm is visible through the top windows. A hum rises to a crescendo, passes the level of human hearing – and Jack collapses outside the basement while Marley and Dillon pass out inside.

*End of flashback.*

## **Act One**

The red haze hangs over Sellafeld atomic power station. Pylons have fallen in the storm, fences are down. A sub-station sparks ominously. Alarms sound.

Inside the control room, GAVIN (40s, technician) and RAHUL KAN (30s, senior engineer) wake up. Gavin cannot speak and Rahul is bleeding from his mouth and eyes. Both are disoriented. The alarms continue to sound. They realise they are surrounded by the dead bodies of their colleagues and the plant is in crisis. Despite their conditions they attempt to deal with the immediate situation.

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In Marley's house, Dillon points at her and screams. And screams. Marley manages to calm her down, saying she had nothing to do with it, and right now they're in danger and she needs Dillon to be quiet. Dillon abruptly stops screaming. Marley asks Dillon if she has seen mum or dad – neither of them is there. Dillon shakes her head. Marley tries the landline – dead. She finds all the family's mobiles in Jack's office where he had hidden them – all don't work and just give off a strange hum. Marley winces at the hum and is relieved to find that Dillon can hear the hum too – it's in the environment. With the red mist outside,

it's dark in the house, so she turns the electricity back on – but nothing happens. No current. Marley and Dillon are now completely creeped out, but Marley rallies.

They step outside into a world of red and devastation. Marley tries the family car – it doesn't work for some reason. But there is a mountain bike. Still suffering the after-effects, Marley places her sister behind her and rides off. First she visits the cottage down the road – but her neighbours are nowhere to be seen. Ash flakes float in the air. Dillon gathers some in her hands, fascinated. Marley says there must have been a big fire nearby.

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In the nuclear plant, Gavin is horrified to find one of his dead colleagues turning to ash. The ash floats away.

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Marley reaches the local village. This is in the Lake District, a large rural area and the most-visited National Park in the UK, in Cumbria, northwest England, so the village is very picturesque – although less so in the red glow and the wind-whipped ash. Marley enters a tourist shop in search of a phone so she can call Sam and the police.

*Flashback – Marley working in the shop, conversation with the kindly owner about how she is looking forward to going to Sandhurst. End of Flashback.*

Back to the shop. Phones dead. Marley finds the body of the kindly owner.

Dillon wanders into the school. It is empty. Photos of Marley as a prize-winning pupil some years ago. Dillon is still silent – she hasn't said a word and seems in a world of her own. Marley tells her she doesn't know what's happened, but they have to get to the big town, get to a hospital, contact the police, and find someone in authority.

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At the nuclear plant, Gavin and Rahul, in full-on panic, realise the plant will go into meltdown in twenty-four hours.

## Act Two

Marley and Dillon cycling through countryside painted in red and ash. Marley is still disoriented and does not spot a local bus freewheeling downhill towards them, its engine off. She and Dillon fall off the bike. The bus crashes next to a lake. The driver, BOCK (29), is still alive, just – he’s blind and semi-conscious. Marley drags him out. Bock is something of a loser and a failed fantasy author, his head filled with strange facts and theories.

On the bus Marley finds two dead passengers, a spackle of light blue electricity ghosting their skin. Other seats bear the ash shadows of their former occupants. All mobile phones on the bus are humming, but none work.

A herd of terrified horses charge across the road in front of them, spinning Bock to the ground. Marley tries to catch one of the horses but fails due to her continuing disorientation. When she comes to, she finds Dillon has dragged her into the bus for protection against the winds, while Bock is still blind and freaking out. Marley sees that the bodies on the bus have all disappeared. Dillon doesn’t come up with an explanation, but her attention is constantly focusing on the nearby lake.

The bike is a wreck, and Bock is blind, so Marley decides to lead the three of them towards the town on foot. It’s slow going, as trees have been blown down and the trio are all still damaged from the wake-up. They pass various surreal sights – a car has spun off a mountain road bend and into the top of a tree at the same level. A perfectly laid-out picnic at a beauty spot is empty apart from drifting ash. At a stile leading to one of the most popular hill walks there is a scattering of abandoned walking sticks and rucksacks. Marley gives Bock one of the sticks to help him move along.

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In the power station, Gavin and Rahul argue about what to do. Gavin decides to leave and runs out, but Rahul opts to stay. At the last minute he decides to join his colleague, but Gavin has just driven off in his antique car. Rahul tries other vehicles but none work. The only thing he can do is go back inside the plant with its ringing alarms and try to slow down the meltdown.

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Marley, Bock and Dillon arrive at the big town. It is deserted. Crashed cars are on fire, toys lie scattered round an empty fairground, the mechanical rides turning aimlessly in the wind and the blown ash. Election posters everywhere. The police station is vacant apart from ash shadows. Marley tries the comms system in the station and radios in the police cars but nothing works. In hope she tries an electric car and then a biofuel vehicle – but they are just as useless as the petrol and diesel vehicles.

They get to the hospital. The same story – empty, power off. We see a patient unconscious on an operating table, but Marley doesn't notice him. Marley looks around a ward – just beds with ash outlines on them. When she returns to look through the operating theatre moments later – we see the body has gone!

Exploring further, Marley finds a stack of bodies piled up against an exit door. The man at the front is naked from the waist up, a distinctive tattoo stretching across his back. Bock, still blind, asks her what's there. She says it's nothing, and heads off Dillon before she can see the corpses. As they leave, faint blue electricity runs over the bodies.

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In the nuclear plant, Rahul is dealing with alarm after alarm as the crisis escalates.

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In the town, Marley finds someone alive – PIERS (50s), the right-wing candidate in the election. He tells her that, in view of the obvious fact that there has been some form of attack by a foreign power, he has declared himself the head of the political and administrative system locally. In other words, he's in charge. He too is whacked from the storm, and he thinks there are a host of people working for him – when Marley can see they are just ash shadows. Only IMOGEN (40s), Piers' secretary, has survived from his election team. She is quietly forceful and has secretly been in love with Piers for years, but both are married. They have been joined by REVEREND SCALA (30s), a very 'modern' vicar with liberal views, and FITZ (20s), one of the local dealers in hash, ecstasy and speed. Both are in a bad way. Marley drags them all to the hospital to see the bodies – but they have disappeared.

Now she looks like a fool, and neither Dillon – who saw nothing - nor the still-blind Bock can back her up.

The incident builds into a row. Marley storms off with Dillon – none of the others will follow her. Just then, belting into town, comes a classic open-top car, Gavin's pride and joy. He tells them the nuclear plant is approaching meltdown. The course of the fallout cloud will depend on the weather, but they all need to get far away. They have no more than X hours. Piers and Imogen push to the front and pile into the car, leaving the others behind to their fate.

### Act Three

Marley takes charge now. Their only hope is to run south to the coast and try and get a boat. But it's hopeless – Bock for one is in no state for that. Marley takes a watch from an outdoor pursuits shop and starts a countdown. She finds a pedal-taxi – a tourist vehicle with two bicycles at the front attached to four covered seats at the rear. It is an incongruous sight in the circumstances, but apocalypses beget such inversions of the norm.

They pedal off as fast as they can. As they pedal, Fitz says he heard Marley was at Sandhurst – what happened?

*Flashback.* Marley in a cadet uniform at Sandhurst, a smoking gun in her hand. To her horror another cadet, OLIVER, keels over from the gunshot wound to his eye. Marley, stunned, drops the weapon. *End of Flashback.* [This flashback will build in later episodes. Marley was the patsy for an officer's mistake, although everyone believed it was her fault as all the circumstantial evidence was against her. When she tried to tell the truth about the accident she was kicked out of Sandhurst and her future dreamed-of Army career was over.]

Marley is surly with Fitz – she's from a wealthy family and he's council estate trash, so they get on each other's nerves.

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

The group pedal through a deserted rural world. Usually over-busy tourist villages are empty – except for the crashed vehicles, most of which have ash shadows inside. Dillon doodles in a notebook.

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

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.

Rev Scala insists they bury him, but the Marley overrules him – they have to move south.

The mood is sombre as they pedal on, Marley and the Reverend on the wheels. The roads are hilly and clogged with crashed cars, so the going is slow and tiring. In the back seat, Bock slowly recovers his sight. He realises they are not on the direct road south. Marley tells him she knows what she's doing. The countdown on her watch continues.

Bock asks Dillon what she is doodling. She shows him a well-executed sketch of Marley with the axe and the bodies of their brothers. She adds some words to the sketch: "Marley is a killer." Bock makes Dillon hide the notebook. He stares at the back of Marley's head, freaked out.

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In the power station, Rahul knows the end has come. He brings out the photos of his family and kisses them, then recites the Muslim declaration of faith and the statement of faraj for imminent death.

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Marley's group reaches Sam's house – she had not told the others about where they were going. Marley rushes inside. There are two telltale 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, her boyfriend, is nowhere to be seen.

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. This annoys the others but he carries on.

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Gavin, Piers and Imogen find a tree across the road. As they get out to shift it, CHARLIE (40s) appears – and he has a gun.



## Act Four

Piers and Charlie fight – Piers wins with Imogen’s help, 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. Something electrical works!

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Marley’s team reach the coast in their pedal-taxi – to find a ragtag group of about a dozen survivors fighting over a sailing boat. As Marley watches, the boat collapses, holed and useless as a result of the disagreement. The argumentative group wade ashore. Marley has to punch out the loud-mouthed leader, WILL (20s), to restore order. [Will be a contender for Marley’s affections later, but his alpha male attitude will not succeed.]

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Piers’ 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. Piers’ 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 – the radiation cloud approaches. 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. Some in the group disagree. Marley explains the route is indeed dangerous, but the staying behind in the radiation cloud is certain death.

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In the bunker, Gavin checks out the Geiger counter. He’s puzzled – most electrical things don’t work, but both his car and unused batteries function fine. The others start to close up the bunker.

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Back at Marley's home, the corpses of Marley's brothers are starting to decay. Flies buzz. Ducks paddle in the duck pond – only to be disturbed by something unseen.

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Marley and Dillon set out across the flat sands. Some of the group hover, unsure of what to do. But Will and most of the band follow Marley – at least she has a plan and seems to know what she's doing – and eventually the last of the reluctant ones join in. Bock remains unsure, but eventually he too goes with the group.

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Gavin does another scan with the Geiger counter. Double checks the result. To the shouted 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 water channels and lacking obvious landmarks. It's even stranger in the red glow. But Marley's group have to hurry – the tide races in faster than a horse can gallop. Still disoriented from the storm, some of them stumble into quicksands. One of them is Bock – and Marley hauls him out to safety. Bock is confused. The Rev Scala recites more and more Scripture, shouting above the sound of the wind and tide.

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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.

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In the power station, Rahul is astonished as one by one the alarms turn off.

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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. As the waters get higher Marley mounts Dillon on her shoulders.

Then an incredible, unexpected sight - a wrecked airliner, mired in the water.

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Gavin says it's as if something is sucking all the radioactivity out of the environment.

## Act Five

A few survivors from the plane wreck are nearby, dressed in entirely inappropriate holiday clothing.

With time running out, 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 dozens of bodies floating face down.

Shock/revulsion.

One body catches Marley's attention – the one from the hospital with the distinctive tattoo on the back.

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

As they cross the river, a blue electrical sparkle glows in the water. This added to the rapidly incoming tide increases the panic. Some people drown.

Dillon, propped up on Marley's shoulders, gets excited and points, but Marley, herding the others from behind, is now waist deep in water. And it's getting higher. Another survivor drowns.

Marley just makes it to the other side. The others are exhausted, soaked, terrified – but they've made it. They breast a sandbank --

-- and one of the floating bodies rises from a pool of water in front of them --

-- and where its face should be – is a blackness filled with stars.

Total terror. They run for their lives --

-- only to arrive into the arms of a posse led by Jack.

"Hello Marley."