

THIRTY DAYS

by

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(for NaNoWriMo 2010)

I am writing 'Thirty Days' for National Novel Writing Month 2010. I am also writing it to raise money for charity. The specific charity that I want to help is St Luke's Hospice (Harrow and Brent). They provide care and support to terminally ill patients and their families from the Harrow and Brent areas of north London, regardless of their background. In May 2009 my father sadly passed away, but his final days were made more comfortable by St Luke's, and I'm grateful for the care that they gave him and the support that they gave to my family. And so I would like to raise some money for them as my way of saying thanks. You can find out more about St Luke's via their website at www.stlukes-hospice.org

If you would like to sponsor me you can do so via my Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/karlsgreen I and St Luke's will be grateful for anything that you're able to give.

And finally, I've also set up a page on Facebook about the novel where I'll be posting any news about what I'm doing, and you can find it at <http://bit.ly/9OfC6p>

This file, and all other chapters, will be made available on my website at <http://www.karlsgreen.co.uk/thirtydays> You may freely distribute this file subject to the following two conditions:

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DAY ELEVEN

STEVE'S RETURN

She started to panic. Whilst she still couldn't detect the Other, she knew that it would be getting closer to her. It had always been chasing her, which is why she had to keep on running.

She didn't know how much time she would have. She never stayed on any world for more than a few weeks for fear that that would be sufficient time for the Other to catch up with her. But she never knew just how far behind her the Other was.

What she didn't know was that whilst the Other's phase was shifted it moved a lot slower than it would move when it was in the normal plane of reality. And it was a long way behind her.

A very long way.

She remained locked in the basement for over two thousand years...

The Apocolynium – XI

I last told you about Steve back on the seventh day. Whilst he had been able to get back up onto his feet on that day, he was still very weak. He spent much of the eighth, ninth, and tenth days still recovering his strength. Also, Naomi preferred to keep him in her house, where she had erected her protection field. As long as he was here she knew that the Dragon Keeper wouldn't be able to find him. She also knew that the downside to this was that Lisa also wouldn't be able to find him, but she decided that that had to be a calculated risk. The cost of Steve falling into the hands of the Dragon Keeper were too great to take the risk.

On the eighth day Steve had received a call from his office on his mobile phone. They were concerned that he hadn't appeared in the office for a few days. He simply told them that he was sick. He got a reprimand from Maria who told him that it was his responsibility to call in when he wasn't feeling well, and that, as he had failed to do so, he would be facing formal disciplinary procedures once he did return to the office. Steve didn't have the energy to argue, and just ended the phone call.

He actually found it to be a bit of a relief to be out of the office. The place had been steadily increasing his stress levels, almost to breaking point. A break from it was exactly what he needed. Granted, this wasn't exactly what it was that he had had in mind regarding a break, but it was still having the desired effect. For a little while at least he wasn't going to have to do any brain dead work for what was barely enough money to pay his bills.

He was starting to wonder whether that office was worth it anymore. Yes, he had been planning to work harder there and then try to get a promotion, but now he started to wonder as to whether or not that was something that he actually wanted. If he did get the promotion then he would have more challenging work to do, and some more money. But he would still be

working in that place, still having to deal with Maria, and still working within a legal area. If he had to be honest with himself, he didn't really find that work to be particularly interesting. He didn't really want to be there at all.

And so he needed to decide what it was that he did want to do instead. He still had a mortgage and bills that needed to be paid, and so he still had to do something that would bring in some money. He thought about what it was that he might actually enjoy doing instead.

Before he had taken up the job at the legal firm he had considered training to become a teacher. But after three years of Uni he hadn't felt up to doing any more training, and wanted to earn some money instead. And so he had applied for a load of jobs doing various things, but mainly office type work. And eventually he was offered the job at the law firm down in Elephant & Castle. He didn't think it was ideal, but it did mean that he was at least doing something and was finally, for the first time in his life, earning some money.

Whilst it was nice to be earning money at first, it started to disappear very quickly. He managed to find all sorts of ways to spend it, mainly on DVDs he rarely had the time to watch, and video games that he rarely had the time to play. Eventually, after a couple of years, he decided to stop buying more DVDs and video games, and start watching and playing the ones that he already had. The money that he saved by doing this he placed in a savings account.

Eventually, these savings started to grow, and, before long, he had a nice bit of money in there. Then, sadly, his last surviving grandparent died, and as he was their only grandchild, he inherited a fair bit of money. Not a vast fortune, nowhere near enough to retire on, but, when combined with his savings, it was enough to put down a deposit on a relatively cheap flat in Harrow. He moved out, and was happy.

Or so he thought. He wasn't so happy when things started to break down and required him to spend more money to put them right. He wasn't happy when his bills went up and his pay didn't go up as fast. And he wasn't happy about the fact that, somehow, he had ended up being stuck in a job that he wasn't enjoying but which he had to stick with if he was to be able to pay his bills. He wasn't quite sure how all of that had come about, but, nevertheless, it had. He felt trapped and unable to escape.

It was almost like when he had been trapped by Welt. He wanted to escape, to get away, but somehow, part of him wouldn't let him. He just couldn't take the steps that were necessary to make an escape. He never applied for any other jobs, or looked into the possibility of doing any training for a new career, such as teacher training.

But now, lying in this bed in Naomi's house, free from work (albeit temporarily), he felt that maybe, just maybe, he could make that escape. He imagined what it would be like to be a

teacher, standing up in front of a class, a room full of eager children willing to learn from him. OK, he realised that that was perhaps an idealised view of things, but that didn't make the whole idea of becoming a teacher any less desirable.

There was still the issue of money. He had very little left in his savings. If he were to give up his job to go and do some teacher training he would need to find a way to keep up the payments on his mortgage, and pay all of the bills that he needed to pay, not to mention finding a way to actually fund the teacher training course that he would have to do as well.

But, was that really impossible? He wasn't sure, but maybe there was a way that he might be able to get some financial assistance from the government if he were to go and do teaching training. He didn't know if they offered anything like that, but then had never bothered to go and find out. He made a mental note to go and do so at the next opportunity.

He could also see if he could work part time whilst he did the training, or possibly find a way to work in the teaching sector whilst training at the same time. And if he approached his parents maybe they'd be willing to help him out for a year whilst he did the training. He'd never know if he didn't ask. Yes, there were lots of things that he could do, he just had to put his mind to it and get on with it.

But first he had to resolve the situation that he currently found himself in. He still wasn't sure just what on Earth was going on. He didn't know who Welt was and where he had come from, but he had a suspicion that maybe, as fantastical as it seemed, maybe he wasn't of this world. If that were the case he had no idea how he had come here or why, but there had to be something different about him if he was first able to trap him as he had done so, and then, once he was free of the trap, he ended feeling as weak as he had been.

He asked Naomi several times about what was going on, but she just told him that he shouldn't try and worry about it and that he should just concentrate on getting rest and recovering.

It wasn't that Naomi wanted to keep the truth from him. It was just that she didn't want him to stress any more than he needed to. His rest and recovery was the most important thing right now, and that would take far longer if he was too busy stressing and worrying about what was to come.

In the meantime she was doing her best to try and find the other half, and Lisa. The computer program that she had designed to help her with this, but it wasn't perfect, and it struggled to locate them, Lisa in particular. It had been placed on her computer a long time ago, in preparation for when Naomi was awakened by coming into contact with Steve. Naomi didn't

know who it was who had placed it there, but she had been informed by Ian about it a long time ago, before she was asleep.

Whilst the program wasn't perfect, it did seem to indicate that Natasha and Lisa were somewhere to the north of where they were now. Naomi had gathered from Steve that he lived in Harrow, and the computer seemed to indicate that Natasha and Lisa were in the general direction of Harrow.

Then, late last night, there was a spike in activity. This started at the same time as Natasha went to bed last night, with the artefact inside of her head. Naomi's computer showed that that this spike of activity had to belong to the other half, and was definitely in Harrow, somewhere to the north-west of Harrow, near the edge of the built up area of Harrow.

She now had a very important decision that she had to make. She needed to decide whether or not to risk taking Steve away from here and try to get him to meet with the other half. The risk with that, of course, was that as soon as he stepped outside of the house the Dragon Keeper would be able to locate him, and would then start to come after him.

One alternative that Naomi had was to go and try and find Natasha herself and then try and get her to come to her house to meet Steve. But she wasn't too confident about that plan. She didn't know what had caused the spike in activity last night, and she didn't know that Lisa was with her. As far as Naomi knew, Natasha could have been completely unaware of everything that was going on. And if that was the case, what chance would Naomi have of convincing her to come to Kilburn to meet some guy she's never seen before in her life?

Still, she could have gone up to Harrow, and tried to establish everything first before deciding what to do with Steve. However, that would all take time, something that they didn't have a lot of. If she waited for too long the Dragon Keeper might have got to the other half first, and if she did that then Steve was almost certainly be doomed – once the Dragon Keeper had Natasha's essence then she would be able to use it to locate Steve, regardless of the protection that Naomi had been able to provide him with.

She weighed up all of the options. Naomi knew that it was quite possible that the spike in activity last night was caused by the Dragon Keeper trying to attack Natasha. The computer seemed to indicate that she was not successful on this occasion, but that just meant that she would surely try again. She therefore had to get Steve and Natasha to meet as soon as possible, and the easiest way to do that was to take Steve back to Harrow, and then to try and locate Natasha there, and maybe Lisa as well. Yes, there was a risk involved in this, but she decided that now was the time to take that particular risk. The risk of waiting any longer now seemed too great.

She went into Steve's room and asked, 'How are you feeling today?'

'I'm feeling much better, thanks.'

She took a deep breath, and then said, 'I know you've been wanting to know what exactly has been going on. The only reason I haven't told you yet was that it was important that you got better. I now think it's time to tell you what it is that you need to know.'

Steve started to feel apprehensive. Here it was – now he was going to get some answers.

Naomi continued, 'Welt isn't from your world, and neither am I. He is from a planet called Pyna – that's on the other side of your galaxy. You don't need to know about where I come from, just that I'm nothing to do with Welt. He came here to take something from your planet, something that he absolutely can not be allowed to have. Fortunately, it's not something that he can easily get.'

'A long time ago there were others who prepared for just this eventuality. It was them who had arranged for me to live on the Earth undetected, and to then bump into you at the precise moment that I did. Our touching woke me up – before that I believed that I was one of you, a human, when in fact I had been placed here to find you and save you from Welt.'

'You are one of two halves. The people who put me on the Earth also came to see you when you were just a baby. They gave you something, something that is now contained within your DNA. What you have is half of a key. The other person that they came to see has the other half in their DNA. Welt, and the person that I fear he now works for, need to obtain both halves of this key in order to gain access to what it is they seek from the Earth.'

'We need to stop them. I've kept you here in this house because it is protected from Welt and the person he works for, they can't find you here as long as they don't find the other half first. But last night I think they did find them, and that they tried to attack them. Thankfully they were unsuccessful. However, I think now is the time for us to go and try to find the other half.'

Steve was struggling to take all of this in. The idea of aliens coming and putting something in his DNA all sounded a bit too much like 'The X-Files' to him, but he had to accept that things here were out of the ordinary, otherwise Welt wouldn't have been able to do what he had done. He said, 'So, we find this "other half", I meet them, and what? We save the world?'

'Actually, yes, in a way we do. Once you and the other half meet the key will be complete, only it will be within our control, and not the side that Welt works for.'

'And are you working for anyone?'

'Well, not exactly, but there is another of us who I need to try and find. Her name is Lisa, and I think that she may already be with the other half. If we can find her as well, then, once the

key is complete we will be in a much stronger position to defeat those that would mean harm to your world.'

'And what exactly would happen if this other side were to get this key thing first? What will they be unlocking exactly?'

'You don't need to concern yourself with that. Just know that it is bad, very, very bad. We do not want them to get the key, no matter what.'

'OK then, so, do you know where my "other half" is – listen to me, it sounds like you're setting me up on a blind date with my soul mate!'

'Yes, I believe I do know where they are – they're somewhere in Harrow, somewhere towards the north-west I believe. Harrow Weald seems to be the most likely place.'

'In Harrow? You mean I'm going home?' Steve was in two minds about this. Whilst he got that there was some great task that he needed to perform, he had grown accustomed to staying here with Naomi. It was like a holiday for him, and it was helping both his mind and his body to relax for the first time in a very long time. He didn't know what effect going back to Harrow would have on that.

'Yes, in Harrow. I suggest we leave now, if you're up for it.'

'Well, I guess there's no time like the present...'

Steve put his shoes on and got ready to leave. He still couldn't quite believe that all of this was really happening. He was off to save the world, by being taken to meet his 'other half'.

As soon as Steve stepped outside of Naomi's house, the Dragon Keeper looked up and took notice. She could sense that something was different, that something had changed. She went to Claire's computer. Again, it had a program put on it by someone else a long time ago, which worked in much the same way as Naomi's. Only this one was more powerful – and was able to identify that Steve, the second half, was now in the open and on the move. The Dragon Keeper could see that he was in Kilburn. She quickly realised that the one that had been protecting him all of this time may very well have located where the first half, the girl called Natasha, was, and was taking the second half to meet her. And if they did that then her plans would be in ruins.

Welt saw the heightened activity in the Dragon Keeper. 'What is it?' he asked.

'The second half, I now know where it is!'

'Will you need me to go after them?'

'No, I've learnt my lesson from last time. Never send a boy to do a woman's work. No, I will go and handle this one myself.' Welt was taken a little aback by this – the failure with

Natasha had nothing to do with him, he had played his part perfectly, but he decided against arguing this point.

The Dragon Keeper started to think about how she might go about getting Steve under her control. And then she came up with a plan.

Steve and Naomi made their way quickly to Kilburn station, where they got on a northbound Jubilee Line train. Naomi had to quickly make another decision. There were two ways that she could get them to the part of Harrow that they wanted to be in. She could either take this train four stops to Wembley Park, switch to a Metropolitan Line train to Harrow-on-the-Hill, and then take a bus towards Wealdstone and Harrow Weald. Or they could stay on this train for a further three stops to Canons Park, and then take a bus from there to Wealdstone, where they could then walk to Harrow Weald. The train journey's would probably both take a similar amount of time, whereas the buses from Canons Park would take longer and were less frequent than the buses from Harrow-on-the-Hill, and they needed to get to where they needed to go quickly.

On the other hand, she also knew that the Dragon Keeper would be able to detect Steve now, and would be coming after him. She would probably expect them to take the fastest route to Harrow Weald, which, right now, appeared to be the Metropolitan Line route. Which meant that the Dragon Keeper may go there straight away and lay a trap for them. Naomi therefore decided that the safer, if slightly longer, option was to take the Canons Park route.

Once they got to Wembley Park they could see that there was a Metropolitan Line train just across the platform. Steve said, 'Shouldn't we change here for the Metropolitan Line? It'll get us there faster.'

'No, we should stay here, it'll be safer. Trust me.'

Steve was starting to feel worried. This talk about this route being safer made him feel like there was an assassin out to get him.

The Dragon Keeper did indeed expect them to take the Metropolitan Line route first, and she almost teleported herself to within the vicinity of Harrow-on-the-Hill station to try and intercept them there. Then she realised that if the person protecting the second half was capable of setting up a protection field to prevent her from detecting him, then they would have to be clever. She surmised that they would probably be doing all that they could to avoid her, including taking the less obvious route – which, if they were starting out in Kilburn, meant that they would be heading towards either Canons Park or Queensbury.

The computer confirmed that they had indeed gone beyond Wembley Park on the Jubilee Line, and so were almost certainly going towards Canons Park or Queensbury. The Dragon Keeper couldn't wait around any longer to see where they were going to go exactly, and so she had to make her decision quickly.

She quickly decided which one she felt was the more likely, and then teleported into position.

The train arrived at Canons Park and Naomi and Steve got off of the train and quickly made their way out of the station. They crossed the road to the bus stop, where they waited for the bus.

Steve said, 'I hate having to wait for 186 buses, they always seem to take forever.' There was quite a strong wind blowing. Steve looked up in the sky and saw the clouds racing past. He thought they had an ominous look about them.

Naomi, too, was concerned about their need to wait for a bus, but she knew that they had no other option. This would be the fastest way they would have for getting to Harrow Weald, certainly from their current location.

After about five minutes a bus did arrive, and they got on it. Naomi was relieved, they were finally on their way again, and soon, with luck, the two halves would be reunited.

Only they weren't the first to board this bus. There were other passengers there, including one in particular that had boarded the bus back in Edgware.

Naomi didn't recognise the Dragon Keeper – she was unable to detect that she was not of this world, and they had both looked different during their last encounter. The Dragon Keeper, however, using the powers that she possessed, could tell that the second half was here. She could see the power that lay within Steve. She had him within her grasp. And this time she had a new artefact to hand, one that he wouldn't be able to fight off.

The bus made its way through Harrow. Once it got to Belmont Circle the Dragon Keeper made her move. Whilst Steve was looking out of his window in the direction of his flat, and wondering about the fact that it had now been a while since he had been inside of it, the Dragon Keeper got up to make her way off of the bus. As she did so she deliberately bumped into Steve, where she was able to place the new artefact in his shoulder. As she apologised for bumping into him the artefact made its way up his neck and into his ear, much in the same way that the one that had been sent to Natasha had done so. Only this one wasn't going to wait until Steve was asleep before it fully activated.

The Dragon Keeper got off of the bus at Belmont Circle, and she stood and watched as the bus continued on its way towards Wealdstone. She smiled as it left, knowing that everything had gone according to her plan. There was nothing that neither the second half nor Naomi could do – the two halves would now not be able to meet.

The bus went on towards Wealdstone, and Naomi and Steve got off it at the end of Locket Road just before it got to the high street. They crossed the road, and continued to the end of Locket Road, turning right towards Harrow Weald. At this point Naomi was thinking that she was now going to have to start relying on Steve to try and find the other half. He didn't know that he had any power, but once she told him what it was he did have, he could then use it to try and locate the other half, similar to a compass.

However, by the time that they had reached the clock tower towards the end of Wealdstone she could tell that something was going wrong. Steve was clutching his chest and was slowing down. The artefact had activated – it was slowing his heart down so that it couldn't circulate blood around his body properly. His body was slowing down, and he was struggling to walk.

The Dragon Keeper had designed this artefact simply to weaken Steve. It wouldn't put him in a deep sleep as had Natasha's – that would enable him to be able to fight it. No, this would simply weaken him sufficiently so that he would be unable to travel all the way to Natasha. Whilst he may know where Natasha is, the Dragon Keeper was certain that Natasha didn't know where Steve was. She was also fairly certain that Naomi didn't know Natasha's precise location and would have had to rely on Steve for this. And so with Steve unable to go to Natasha, they would never be able to meet. Which meant that now all the Dragon Keeper needed to do was to concentrate on getting Natasha back under her control somehow, and then she could take both of their essences, and acquire the key to the Earth's power.

Steve had to slow down to a complete halt, and then sit down on a bench. He was completely out of breath. He was at an utter loss as to what was happening. He had spent most of the past few days resting and recovering at Naomi's house, and when they left he had been feeling better than ever. But now he was feeling even worse than when he did shortly after he was free of Welt's control.

Naomi quickly deduced that Dragon Keeper must have got to him somehow. She didn't know how she had done what she had done, but Naomi was certain that she was involved in this. Naomi knew that she wasn't going to be able to reunite the two halves today, and so now her top priority was to protect Steve from any further attacks.

He gasped, 'Call an ambulance, there's something wrong...' Naomi thought about this, but decided that an ambulance wouldn't be a good idea. Once he was in a hospital he would be out of her control, and as this was the work of the Dragon Keeper there wouldn't have been anything that any doctor could do for him.

'We can't do that, it's too dangerous. Just rest here for a bit.' Then a thought came to her, 'You live in Harrow, don't you? Whereabouts?'

'Belmont... Kenton Lane...'

This was good, Naomi thought. It wasn't too far away. 'Steve, once you've got some breath back, I want you to see if you can make it back onto a bus. I need to get you to your flat, OK?'

He nodded.

After about ten minutes he was ready to make the attempt. He placed his arm around her, and they slowly made their way back to the bus stop. Fortunately, this time a bus arrived almost immediately. As they boarded the bus the driver asked, 'Is he alright? He's not drunk is he?'

Naomi answered, 'No, the stupid idiot left the house without his medication again!'

'Shouldn't you call an ambulance?'

'No, he'll be fine. We live in Belmont. It'll be faster if you just take us there. He'll be fine until we get there, won't you Steve?'

He nodded once more.

The driver decided to let them on, and they took a couple of seats near the exit doors that a couple of elderly ladies vacated to allow Steve and Naomi to sit down.

Once the bus arrived at Belmont Circle Naomi helped Steve to get off the bus, and then asked, 'Which way do we go?' He indicated that they needed to go to the right, and so they set off for his flat.

Once they arrived at his door he gave his keys to Naomi, who opened the door and helped him in. They went towards his bedroom, and she helped him onto his bed. It was just like it was when she had first brought him back to her house in Kilburn. Only now she was a lot more terrified. Without her computer and other equipment she wouldn't be able to erect a protection field here, and so the Dragon Keeper would be able to know exactly where he was.

And Naomi still didn't know what had caused this, or what they could do to fight it. And she didn't know where exactly the other half was, and yet the Dragon Keeper did. It looked like all was going to be lost.

Yes, dear reader, I am afraid too. It would seem that the Dragon Keeper now has the upper hand, and that all our hopes will soon be over. Our last hope lies in Lisa now. It is imperative that she locates where Steve is, and quickly...