

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:

1. You do not alter the file in any way, shape, or form.
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DAY ONE

THE RETURN OF LISA

In the beginning there was everything and nothing. For there is no beginning and there is no end. What will be has been, and what has been is also yet to come. Such is the cycle of existence. And yet, pockets of existence do have a beginning and work their way towards an ending. Some such pockets are vast, and some are small. Only the All Seeing bear witness to these beginnings and endings.

It was from one such pocket that she came from. The pocket itself was unremarkable, tiny in itself, and largely passed by unnoticed by the All Seeing. And yet they would all stand witness to her strength and her power. So much so that they grew to fear it, to fear her, and yet love her at the same time. She was a Worry. She was a Concern, for the All Seeing had not foretold her coming.

Nothing is ever static. Nothing is ever certain. There are always random elements, and she was such an element.

The All Seeing considered such elements to be dangerous.

They also considered them to be outstandingly beautiful...

The Apocolynium – I

Today, on Earth, is the first day of November in the year 2010. I thank you for joining me, dear reader. You join me at an important time. I have a very bad feeling at the moment. A very bad feeling indeed. There is something that isn't quite right. Something that isn't as it should be. And it's worrying me. Worrying me that it is there, and worrying me that I can't quite pinpoint it. However, I feel that there are two places where we need to look.

The first of these places is on your good Earth, in the city of London, in the country of England. I awoke to this at midnight, local time. There were two people, who, for a brief moment, were both touched by a spark.

One of these was a man by the name of Steve, who resided in the London Borough of Harrow, specifically near an area known as Belmont Circle. Steve is an unremarkable man, it has to be said. He is not a bad man, not by any means. He wakes up in the morning, he goes to work, he does his job, he comes home again, he eats, and he sleeps. Not a bad man, but not a remarkable man.

However, despite this being a Sunday night (although by now it was Monday morning), and despite the fact that he is supposed to be going to work later on that morning, Steve is still awake, and at his computer, and is furiously typing away.

This year Steve has decided to take part in something that is known as National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo for short. I dare say some of you who are reading this will

already be familiar with what it is. I now ask that you bear with me whilst I give a brief explanation to those of you who are encountering it for the first time.

Despite its name, National Novel Writing Month is international in scope. It started in the city of San Francisco in the United States of America back in the year 1999. Since then it has grown each year – in 2010 over 130,000 people have so far signed up to take part.

The aim of NaNoWriMo is to write a novel of at least 50,000 words during one month, specifically, the month of November. I'm sure that you will agree that this is not an easy task. And people take part in it every year, with many people returning for several years.

This year Steve has decided to attempt NaNoWriMo himself for the first time. He had heard about it a few years ago, but never quite had the courage to take the plunge and actually attempt it himself. Steve had always been one of those people who said that they would write a novel 'one day'. Only, that 'one day' never seemed to actually arrive. But Steve decided that this year would be different. This year he was going to have a go at it and actually get his novel written.

Steve had been attempting a lot of new things this last year. At his job he had been content to just stay at a low grade, do as he was told, get his work done (and no more than was needed), and get through each day quietly. But, for some reason that he could not quite figure out, this year he found that this was no longer satisfying. And so he started to take on some extra work of a more challenging nature, to the point that later on this month he would be attempting the promotion scheme that his office runs. And he was quietly confident that he would succeed.

Steve was also the sort of man that didn't go out much. His evenings were mainly spent watching DVDs and playing video games. But, again, this year, for reasons that he himself didn't know, he found himself going out more. He would meet his friends in a pub on a Friday evening. He would often go into London on a Saturday. In fact, on just the preceding Saturday he had made his way to a pub called The Mad Hatter in Waterloo to meet several other people from the London area that were also attempting NaNoWriMo.

There he met a great many people. There were some who, like Steve, were attempting their very first NaNoWriMo, and there were some who had attempted it several times in previous years. Steve even saw a man there who had written over 100,000 words in 2009, and was now attempting to write 150,000 words. Now, I'm sure you will all agree, anyone who aims to write 100,000 words in a month is ambitious, but anyone who aims to write 150,000 words in a month is certifiable. However, I shall not focus on this man, who is quite clearly insane and in serious need of help, for I feel that he has no great part to play in the story that I am here to tell you. No, it is Steve that I am to focus on from your world. Him, and one other.

Her name is Natasha. She was also at the NaNoWriMo meet up, as she too was attempting it for the first time. And, like Steve, she also lives in Harrow, although she lives in Harrow Weald rather than Belmont Circle, although they are not that far from each other. However, neither Natasha nor Steve was aware of their connection for they did not speak to each other during the meet up. They looked at each other briefly, smiled, and then returned to the conversations that they were already engaged in.

At the same time that Steve was starting his novel, Natasha was also awake and starting to write hers. In fact, neither of them knew it, but they both struck the first letter on their keyboards corresponding to the first letter of the first word of their novels at exactly the same time, right down to the tiniest fraction of a second.

Let me tell you a brief bit about Natasha. Like Steve, she too can be a little shy, although she is not quite as shy as he can be. She also goes to work most days, does her job, and then comes home again, although she goes out more often than Steve does. However, unlike Steve, she hasn't felt a recent urge to progress at her place at work. Don't get me wrong, she is very good at her job and her colleagues all appreciate the work that she does. It's just that, for her, her job is simply a means to pay her bills. Writing is her dream. She wants to do her very best with her novel (well, as best as she can do when she tries to write 50,000 words in just 30 days), and hopes to one day see it published, to see a book with her name on it in a bookshop, and for people to then buy that book, read it, and be moved by it. She was aware that the realisation of that dream was a long way off, but that starting her novel at the start of NaNoWriMo was an important first step to making that dream become a reality.

We shall leave Steve and Natasha now whilst they carry on with their novels. I said that there were two places that we needed to look where I believe my feeling of uneasiness may be connected to. The second of these places is the village of Yendal, in the country of Allana, on the planet of Pyna. Or, to be more precise, on the outskirts of Yendal. Like Earth, Pyna takes 24 hours to spin on its axis, and the time in Yendal corresponds with the time on London on your Earth. You may think that may be a remarkable co-incidence, but I assure you it is not. There are a great many worlds that are the same size as Earth, far more than you can count. With so many such worlds it's not that unremarkable that we should be able to find one that takes the same amount of time to spin on its axis as your Earth does. And once we have such a world, and we find that that world is also populated by an intelligent species similar to your good selves, it is more than likely that part of that world will have a settlement that has the same time as somewhere on Earth. And so, whilst it was midnight on a chilly November night in London, it was midnight on

an early autumn night on Pyna – Yendal's time of day may correspond with London's, but its seasons do not.

You may be imagining a peaceful autumn night in a quiet place like the village of Yendal, and normally Yendal is a very quiet place where not much happens at all. Only tonight that was not the case. For on the outskirts of the village a band of adventurers were ambushed by two armed gangs in a pincer movement of the road. There was a deep forest on either side of the road, and one could easily get lost if they went in there in the middle of the day, let alone at midnight. Our adventurers were outnumbered.

I'll briefly introduce you to them. Their leader was a fearsome warrior by the name of Prion. His wife, Sarna, was a healer. Her brother, Parto, was an archer by trade. And the quartet was completed by Gramshaw, whose main trade used to be a lumberjack, but he discovered that he was good at finding other uses for his axe.

As I was saying, they were outnumbered and out manoeuvred. By all intents and purposes they were dead, or at the very least they thought they would be shortly. Bandits were a common problem in this part of Allana. Our party had encountered several such gangs on their travels. In fact, it was by confronting them and bringing them to the attention of the authorities that they were able to make most of their money. They had acquired quite a reputation in the local area for doing so. Too much so, in fact. Two rival gangs in the Yendal area had agreed to a temporary truce in order to deal with their nemesis once and for all.

'If you have any bright ideas now would be a good time to share them!' Parto said to Prion.

'Unfortunately, I'm all out of ideas.' He tried not to show the fear that he felt in his heart, but was starting to lose that particular battle.

(I should probably add at this stage that the people of Allana, and of Pyna, do not speak English. There are a great many languages spoken throughout Pyna, and there are several languages spoken in Allana. In this region of Allana the main language that is spoken is called Kritent, and believe me when I tell you that Kritent is a most wonderful and beautiful language. But in order for me to tell you the story that I have to tell you it will be necessary for me to translate what they say into English for you.)

The leader of one gang stepped forward and said, 'Well, well, well, so you're the great Prion? You've been causing us a great load of trouble, you have, mister. A great load of trouble indeed.'

The leader of the other gang then said, 'Hey, let's stop messing about here and get this over with? The sooner we can get rid of this lot, the better.'

The first leader replied, 'I couldn't agree more.' He then raised his sword and charged at Prion and his party.

But then, just at that moment, a great and beautiful event occurred. An event that even I had to marvel at. The forest was suddenly filled with the brightest and purest light that you had ever seen. Everyone present had to shield their eyes, which stopped the two rival gangs from attacking Prion's party. There was no sound to accompany the light, but there was a warmth emanating from it. It stayed like this for a full two minutes as measured by your time pieces.

Once the light dissipated there was a new figure on the road. And, oh, she was beautiful. Her skin was the purest white, her long blonde hair looked like stands of gold. She was wearing a deep blue dress, the hem falling just above her knees, and her feet were bare. She had the appearance of a woman in her late teens. She looked around at both armed gangs with her brilliant green eyes and said in a voice that was so soft and yet so strong and commanding, 'Leave this place immediately and never return.' Without hesitation the two gangs dropped their weapons and ran as fast as they could. Whilst they too marvelled at her beauty as I did, they feared her wrath. They knew that the only way that they could please her (and they felt in their hearts that they would want to do anything, anything at all, that would please her) was to obey her command. They felt that if they did not the suffering that they would subsequently endure would be unimaginable, and so they fled, confused, being both in awe and terrified.

After they had left she turned to face Prion's party. She looked at each of them in turn. First at Prion, then Parto, then Gramshaw, and then finally at Sarna. As she looked at each of them they felt her warmth enter their souls, and they felt at peace. Sarna then said, 'It's you, isn't it? It's really you?'

The woman smiled and nodded her head. Sarna immediately bowed before her. 'Who is it?' Parto whispered.

Without looking up Sarna spoke her name, and even I felt a shiver run down my back as she said it. For her name was Lisa.

Upon hearing this name Prion, Parto, and Gramshaw all bowed before her, as well they should. And you would do as well if you were to ever see her.

We'll now turn our attention back to London. Both Steve and Natasha went to work, although they work in different places. Steve works for a firm of lawyers in Elephant and Castle. Things are fairly quiet there. Everything there has gone on pretty much as it has done during the three years that he's been there.

Natasha also works for a firm of lawyers, only hers are much closer to home in Wembley. Occasionally they find each other on the same Bakerloo line train as they go into work, although they've never noticed each other. She always gets off at Stonebridge Park and has an early start at

work, whereas he stays on the train all the way to the end and has a later start. Both have told their colleagues about their NaNoWriMo ambitions.

Natasha's colleagues are very supportive. The firm that she works for is small and friendly. Not long after she got in that day John, one of her colleagues who's the same level as her, asked, 'So, how did it go last night? Did you get a lot of words written?'

'Not that many I'm afraid, only 507. I was so tired it was really hard for me to get anything done. But I'm glad I've made a start.'

'And are they any good?'

'Well, they're not exactly literary genius, but that's not what NaNoWriMo's about. It's all about quantity, not quality. The idea isn't to do any editing during November – just get the words down so that you have a rough first draft by the end of it all. We can start doing the editing from December onwards, although, to be honest, I think I'll need a bit of a break by then!'

'Cool. So how many more words have you got to write today?'

She thought for a moment and then said, '1,160. I'll need to write an average of 1,667 words per day.'

'Well, good luck with it!'

'Thanks, I'll need it!'

Her manager, Frank, was also very understanding of her aims and was encouraging. 'I hope you'll let me read it once it's finished.'

'I'm not sure if I'll be letting anyone read it immediately, it depends how bad it is!'

'Oh, I'm sure it won't be that bad. I think it's impressive what you're trying to do. I wish you all the best with it.'

'Thanks!'

The rest of her day at work was fairly unremarkable. She got on with her work quietly, whilst all the time thinking about what she was going to write next in her novel when she got home.

Steve's colleagues weren't quite so encouraging. He didn't really speak to the other people he worked with all that often, and so didn't have any particularly close friends. Oh, there were people who he would say 'hi' to if he passed them in the corridor, but no one that he would go out with in an evening. But he had mentioned in passing his attempt at NaNoWriMo to a few people. Most of them seemed a little bemused at the idea, and few of them scoffed at it. '50,000 words in a month? Are you mad?' Robert had said. He was the same grade as Steve, but worked under a different lawyer.

‘Hey, compared to some people I’m relatively sane. There are some people aiming to write a lot more than that – I even heard of one guy who was planning to do three times as much!’

‘But what’s the point? Who’s going to want to actually read it?’

‘Well, you know, there may be some people who’ll be interested. I’ll just have to wait and see.’

‘If you ask me it’s a complete waste of time. But you do what you want to do.’

Steve’s manager, Maria, was even more discouraging. When she saw him yawning she asked him, ‘Did you have a late night last night?’

‘Yeah, I did. I was making a start on my novel. There were lots of other people who were starting at midnight and I didn’t want to feel left out.’ Steve had felt pleased with his efforts of the previous night – he had managed to write 832 words, nearly half of what it was that he needed to write that day. The downside was that he didn’t go to bed until shortly after 2am, and he had got up again at 7am, and he’s a heavy sleeper at the best of times.

‘Well,’ said Maria, ‘You shouldn’t have. You’ve clearly haven’t had enough sleep which means that you’re not as effective to me in the office. If you want to do this novel writing nonsense, that’s your business, but make sure you do it on your own time and that you don’t let it interfere with your work.’

Steve didn’t say anything in reply to this. He had never really got on with Maria, and he never quite understood why. She always seemed to try and find fault with him. He decided that the best way to handle her was to just keep his head down and get on with things. If everything went to plan by the end of the month he would have secured his promotion and would be moving on to bigger and better things. And, more importantly, better paid things.

Like Natasha, he got on with his work for the day, whilst thinking about what was to come next in his novel.

Back on Pyna, shortly after Lisa had revealed her identity she said, ‘Please, don’t bow before me. I don’t deserve it.’

‘But, you’re Lisa...’ said Sarna. ‘You’re *the* Lisa, the one the legends speak of.’

‘Don’t believe everything that you hear in the legends. Now stop bowing!’ They all did so.

I suppose before we go any further I should probably tell you a bit about the legends that Sarna refers to. Don’t worry, I won’t dwell on them for too long. The legends say that 10,000 years ago there was a great evil that resided on Pyna. This was an evil that didn’t want to just create havoc on Pyna itself, but which wanted to create chaos throughout the cosmos. The legends say that this evil gained its strength when things were destroyed. There was a country

called Galvanon which was far in the east and which worshipped this evil being, believing that if they provided assistance to it, it would spare them from destruction. They gave this evil a name – Marloki.

And Marloki did spare them from destruction, for a time at least. But when the Great War broke out on Pyna it deserted them. The destruction brought about by that war fed Marloki's strength, to the point where it was almost able to escape from Pyna itself and start to spread its destruction across the cosmos.

But there was one thing that Marloki hadn't counted on – Lisa. Lisa had been present on the world for a far longer time than Marloki had been. Until this time she kept a low profile, making herself known to individuals and helping them out in times of need. But the Great War saddened her deeply, and so she decided to make herself known to the world, and challenged Marloki to face her.

Marloki did not fear her, and gladly accepted her challenge. They faced each other at the top of Mount Agan, which was the tallest mountain on Pyna – it was about one and a half times the height of your Mount Everest. It was said that they fought a mighty battle on top of the mountain. The precise details of that battle were never known, but neither Lisa or Marloki were ever seen again. The war quickly ended, and peace spread throughout the world, with Galvanon disappearing from the maps as its territory was absorbed by other nations. It was widely believed that Lisa gave her life so that the planet could live.

And so that's how the legend goes. Is it true, or is it simply a story to be told around the campfire late at night? Well, dear reader, I'm afraid that that is one that you will have to decide for yourself.

What is true, however, is that many people believed in this legend, to the point that Lisa was now worshipped throughout the world. And so now I'm sure can understand why our friends were in awe when they met Lisa herself.

'Come on,' said Lisa, 'We have to go.'

'Go?' asked Parto. 'Go where?'

'For starters, into Yendal. We'll stay there for the night. Then tomorrow we have to set out for Practor.'

'Practor? Are you crazy?!' Practor was the capital city of Triceria, which was the country that bordered Allana. Allana and Triceria were not enemies, at least not at the present time, but they weren't exactly allies either. Tricerians looked upon Allans with deep suspicion. There was still a lingering bitterness in Triceria over the territory that they had lost to Allana at the end of the last war that they fought, even though that was 147 years ago.

Gramshaw then said, 'If you want us to go to Practor, then I will gladly go with you, my lady. But I can't see how we will get in. The Tricerian authorities won't allow bounty hunters like us into their country. And there are no weak points in their border for us to pass through.'

Lisa responded with, 'You leave that to me. The border isn't an issue. But we have to be in Practor by the day after tomorrow, no matter what.'

'The day after tomorrow?' Parto expressed with alarm. 'But Practor's three days ride away, and we don't have any horses. We can't possibly get there that quickly.'

'Again, just leave that to me. I can get us there in time. But we have to go there.'

'But why?'

Lisa sighed. 'You don't understand. A chain of events has started. I came back to the wrong place at the wrong time. But things aren't too late yet. There's still time to stop it from happening.'

Prion then spoke up, 'To stop what, my lady?'

Lisa turned to look at him, 'To stop the end of this and all other worlds.'

That evening, on Earth, Steve and Natasha returned to their respective homes where they carried on with their respective novels. Steve carried on writing about dragons and warlocks and a battle for the heart of a fair maiden. Natasha carried on writing about a pair of young lovers separated at the start of the Second World War. That evening in Harrow was clear, and peaceful, and calm. They knew nothing of Prion, Sarna, Parto, Gramshaw, and Lisa. And yet I can feel that they are somehow connected. The unease that I feel is somewhere within those two areas. How they are linked, I do not yet know.

But what I do know is that Lisa has been to the Earth herself before. She has appeared in many guises and at many times, but always calls herself Lisa. But yet no one on Earth really knows her. But if she is talking about an evil that will destroy not only Pyna but all other worlds as well, then I am deeply concerned. Very deeply concerned indeed.

Yes, now there is something else. Oh... yes... something very bad indeed. This is not good. This is not good at all. Come, dear reader, I have to take you back to Pyna, to the capital of Triceria, Practor. Lisa was right, she has to get there, and quickly.

In the heart of Practor there is a great citadel. It is over 2,000 feet tall, and can be seen throughout the city and for miles around. But I have to take you deep inside its basements. Within these basements there is a room. It is not a very large room, only about 7 feet squared. Nor is there anything particularly special about the room. It is a largely empty room made of

stone. It is sparsely furnished with just two chairs and a table. But it is what is on that table that worries me.

On one side of the table sits a man by the name of Welt. He works as an advisor to the Council of Three who rule Triceria. Opposite him sits a man known only as Black Club, who would say that he works for no one, when in reality he is on Welt's payroll.

Welt looks at Black Club, and then looks at what Black Club has brought him. 'This is good,' he says, 'This is very good indeed. You have done well.'

'Indeed, it was hard to find, even with your directions. I'm sure you will understand that the price for this is not cheap. I lost three good men getting this for you.'

'Oh, yes, of course. I fully understand and appreciate its value. You can be rest assured that you will be appropriately rewarded for your efforts. You have served me well for many years now...'

Silence descended upon the room. Black Club started to feel uneasy. He didn't like silence, and especially not in the presence of Welt. Eventually he said, 'Well, if you can just give me my money I'll be on my way.'

'Very well. You shall be given your reward.' However, instead of reaching inside his pocket to produce a bag of gold coins as Black Club had been expecting, Welt reached across the table to pick up the object that Black Club had brought him.

It was a dark grey stone. If you were to just look at the stone you would think nothing of it. To you it would look like any number of other stones that you have seen during your lifetime. Even to the eyes of the people of Pyna the stone would have appeared to be unremarkable. However, Welt, like me, can see it for what it is truly is, and it is a frightful and terrible artefact.

Welt held it in his hands and then looked directly into Black Club's eyes, deep into his mind and his soul. Welt felt a power surge from the stone, through his arms, through his eyes, and then into Black Club. He died instantly.

Welt looked down at Black Club's body and smiled. 'Thank you so much for bringing this to me. It really does mean a lot.'

The stone that he held in his hand was none other than the Stone of Marloki, which hasn't been seen on Pyna for 10,000 years.

I do hope Lisa can get there in time...