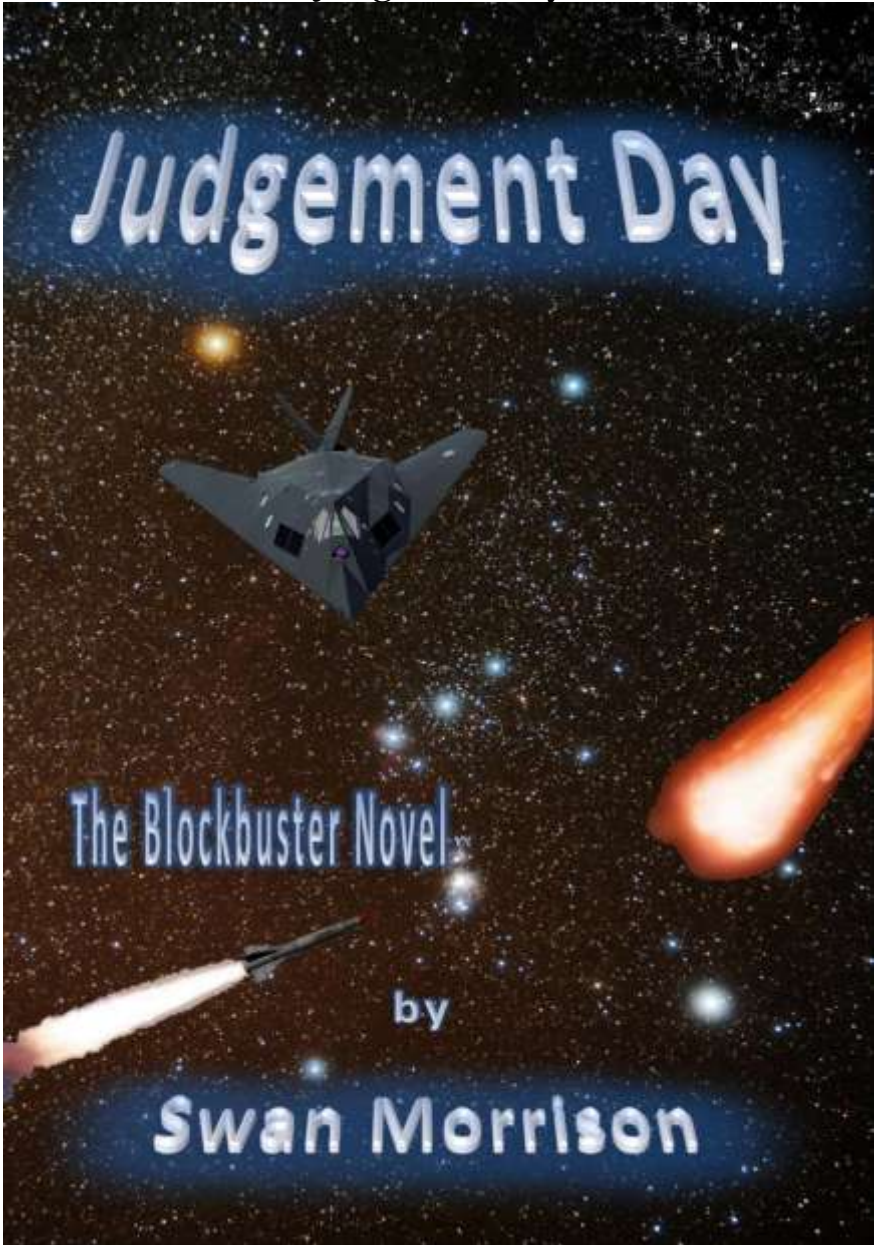


Judgement Day



# Judgement Day

The Blockbuster Novel

by

Swan Morrison

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to:

Alan, Bob and Tony, who each continue to be an inspiration to me;

Robin, who also continues to be an inspiration to me and was kind enough to volunteer to proofread this book;

Ted, who I have only recently met but who is rapidly becoming an inspiration,  
and

Linda, who I love very much.

## Foreword

This is a true story. To preserve confidentiality, however, all the characters, facts and circumstances have been changed.

When a meteorite destroyed a house in a sleepy, English village, no one could have predicted the chain of events that would lead Swan Morrison and Helen Hargreaves to romance and would ultimately propel them into an epic battle for the very survival of mankind.

How can one adequately describe a novel that is (in alphabetical order): an adventure filled; archaeological; comic; crime featuring; dramatic; erotic; espionage laced; horror tinged; political; religious; romantic; science fiction; supernatural thriller with philosophical, satirical and allegorical undertones?

This affectionate tribute to many classic storylines is where the writers of the Archers meet the creators of Indiana Jones meet Dan Brown meet John le Carré meet E. L. James meet Stephen King meet Isaac Asimov meet Barbara Cartland meet Harold Robbins meet Colin Dexter meet Ian Fleming meet Woody Allen meet Douglas Adams – to name just a very few.

Incorporating a diversity of themes and genres exceeding the works of Shakespeare, together with an exploration of the relationship between man and God that is comparable to the great religious texts – all skilfully woven into a breathtakingly complex plot – this ground-breaking, multi-genre masterpiece may yet be judged to be one of the finest works of literature ever written.

**Swan Morrison – October 2014**

# Chapter 1

*15<sup>th</sup> January*

Sam and I inspected the patterns in the stars above us.

‘I wonder if Betelgeuse will go supernova in my lifetime,’ I said, looking towards the constellation of Orion.

The hunter, with the dog, Sirius, at his feet, stood poised in the clear, January sky, ready to wallop Taurus between the eyes with his club.

Possibly an unwise plan, I had always thought, but the almost imperceptible movement of the heavens was such that it would be countless millennia before the weapon found its target and countless more while the great bull considered his response.

My eyes tracked across to the star at Orion’s right shoulder. Our village was sufficiently far from any large conurbation to allow good quality dark skies. The red colouration of the star could easily be discerned with the naked eye.

‘I think there may be something to see in Orion sooner than you think,’ replied Sam enigmatically.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘I can’t say more,’ he responded, ‘but it’s all in the book, Swan. ... It’s all in the book,’ Sam repeated as he began to walk away from me along the footpath.

I admired the stars for a further few minutes before setting off, in the opposite direction, towards the Dog and Ferret.

As I walked, I thought about Sam: I knew him as a lifelong bachelor who had lived at number eighteen for all of his seventy-six years. I had first met him while he had still been a professional archaeologist.

In those days, I had only seen him intermittently because he had spent many months of each year in the Middle-East or North Africa, involved in archaeological digs.

He had apparently been something of an authority on ancient cultures – in particular their religious beliefs.

During the past two or three years, I had spent more time than most in his company. He was my next door neighbour, and he had taken to calling upon me, randomly and unannounced, about once a week.

One objective of his visits appeared to be a check that my collection of malt whiskies remained in peak condition. He confirmed this by extensive sampling.

Sam had long since detected my boredom with discussions of ancient history and religions, but we had both devoted much of our gardens to vegetable growing, and this, together with the week's news, often kept us talking for hours during his visits.

'It's all in the book,' had become something of a catch-phrase for Sam: 'I knew that was going to happen,' he would often announce as we discussed some turn of world affairs. 'It's all in the book.'

Despite this, he would never be drawn on the precise nature of 'the book'.

## Chapter 2

*16<sup>th</sup> January*

It is a varied life on the way to becoming a meteorite.

Your elements begin life in the heart of an exploding supernova.

You might then travel through space for billions of years – perhaps growing larger from collisions with other nomadic debris.

You might then enter the solar system and silently make your way towards the Earth.

You might then blaze your way through Earth's atmosphere – your exterior being spectacularly burned away by the heat of friction with the air.

Finally, your last remaining thirty kilograms of iron might approach the ground, ultimately crashing through the front wall of number 18 Church Road, Waterford, Hampshire.

## Chapter 3

*16<sup>th</sup> January*

I do not remember the impact.

My first recollection was of being carried by a fireman from my house into the cold night air and being helped to sit down on the step at the back of a waiting ambulance.

I had a headache. I touched my forehead, which resulted in a sudden, stabbing pain. I then became aware of wetness on my fingers, which the internal lights of the ambulance revealed to be blood.

‘You were knocked out when your ceiling came down,’ said a paramedic. ‘How many fingers am I holding up?’

‘Three,’ I replied. ‘How many did you have to start with?’

‘*And* you’re not joking,’ he responded. ‘You’ve got concussion. We’ll take you to the General Hospital for a proper check-over.’

‘Rubbish!’ I replied indignantly as I rose to my feet, ‘I’ve never had concussion in my life!’

I took a step, fell forwards onto the tarmac, and everything went black.



## Chapter 4

*18<sup>th</sup> January*

‘Are you awake, Swan?’

A familiar voice roused me from sleep.

I was in a bed in a brightly sunlit room. Sitting beside the bed was Helen Hargreaves, who lived in the house across the road – directly opposite to mine.

‘Where am I?’ I said to Helen.

‘You’re in the General Hospital. You’ve had a nasty bump on the head, but they say you’ll be fit to leave in a day or two.’

‘What the hell happened?’ I asked.

Helen paused as if confirming that the unusual and unique sentence that she was about to utter was actually true. ‘Sam’s house was hit by a meteorite.’

I suddenly recalled the fireman, the wreckage and the ambulance. ‘Oh God,’ I replied. ‘How’s Sam?’

‘I’m sorry, Swan,’ she said with tears forming in her eyes, ‘he’s dead. The police think the meteorite actually hit him.’ She paused. ‘He wouldn’t have known anything about it.’

We both remained silent for several moments. I was stunned at the thought of not seeing Sam again. Another thought then drifted into my mind – a thought about how Sam might be viewing his demise if he were looking down upon the aftermath. I suddenly laughed out loud.

Helen looked puzzled.

‘Sorry,’ I said. ‘I’m really upset about what’s happened, but it’s kind of the way he would have wanted to go. With all this weird prediction stuff he’s been going on about during the past couple of years, being hit by an object from outer space somehow seems fitting.’

Our eyes met, and Helen burst out laughing too.

‘Poor old Sam,’ I said with cathartic tears of both sadness and mirth running down my cheeks, ‘at least he didn’t suffer.’

We both sat quietly for a while longer during which my mind returned to my own situation. ‘Did you say someone had told you that I could go home in a couple of days?’

‘The nurse said that you could probably leave hospital in a day or two. You might not be going *home* for a bit though, I’m afraid.’

I gave her a questioning glance.

‘Your house and Sam’s were two halves of a semi-detached. The meteorite went through the front wall of Sam’s house, through his bedroom, through the dividing wall between your houses and through the back wall of your house. It then buried itself in the ground beneath your patio.

‘They’ve propped up the walls that are still standing and used tarpaulins to keep the weather out. That’s to give time to recover as much of your stuff and Sam’s as possible.’ She paused before delivering her final summary. ‘Both houses are all but demolished, Swan.’

On reflection, that should have been obvious to me from my recollections of the event, and I wondered if I was still concussed. I had left a building which looked ... well, looked as if a bomb had hit it.

I switched into problem solving mode. ‘Not having a house is going to be a problem,’ I said. ‘I can contact my insurance company while I’m still in hospital. I expect they can pay for storage of whatever I can salvage and also pay for some temporary accommodation.’

‘Look, Swan,’ interrupted Helen, ‘I’ve got a spare room. You’re very welcome to stay with me while all this gets sorted out.’ She paused. ‘Although,’ she added self-consciously, ‘I won’t be offended if you want to make some other arrangement.’

I had known Helen for about ten years – since she and her husband had first moved into the village.

Julie and I had invited them over for dinner on a few occasions, and they had reciprocated.

Helen and John had seemed happily married, so I was surprised when he had left her for someone he had met on the Internet.

That had happened about five years ago.

It had seemed hard for Helen at first, but within a couple of years, she appeared to be coping well and had become a leading light in village life.

We had met at various village events and had enjoyed lunch together on a few occasions.

Once or twice, Helen had mentioned, in passing, that she missed having a partner.

She appeared to me to be a very nice, caring person, and she was a stunningly attractive woman. For a long time, I could not understand why she had failed to find another relationship.

I believed that I had better understood her position three years ago, when I discovered that Julie was having an affair.

Shortly after I confronted her, she left me and went to live with her lover in America.

Before Julie and I split up, I could have imagined many of the feelings and the practical difficulties associated with a separation and a divorce. The devastating effect on my own self-confidence and ability to trust others, however, was not something I would have considered.

After Julie left, I had wondered whether similar feelings might be preventing Helen from taking a risk on another relationship.

‘Thank you, Helen,’ I said. ‘That’s very, very kind. Yes, I’d love to take up your offer.’

## Chapter 5

*19<sup>th</sup> January*

Chief Inspector Mandy Watkins turned left into Church Road, Waterford and glanced at the clock on the dashboard of her car. It was two in the morning.

Her week of late shifts was over, and she was looking forward to a couple of days of leave.

Mandy had lived in the village for many years, and despite the constraints that the Force placed on her time, she tried to stay involved with village life. For example, she had planned to give a talk about policing in Hampshire to the March meeting of the village Women's Group – a group coordinated by Helen Hargreaves.

As she passed Helen's house, she glanced at the metal security fencing which now surrounded the property opposite. In all her years of policing, she had never heard of a house being demolished by a meteorite.

Suddenly, her attention was drawn by a flash of light from inside the ruins of Sam Collin's house.

She pulled over to the side of the road and stopped her car.

Her police experience had taught her never to ignore something that appeared odd. Indeed, she already had a theory to explain her brief sighting of a light in what remained of that building.

If she had had to place a bet at that moment, she would have put ten pounds on one of the lads from the council properties in Well Lane trying to see what he could steal before everything was properly cleared up. If she had had a further five pounds to wager, she might have predicted the intruder to be Dan Summers, an individual who accounted for about eighty percent of the, albeit minor, crime in Waterford.

Mandy pulled a torch from the glove box of her car and walked back to the site. She squeezed through a gap between the end of the fencing and the neighbouring wall – the route that she guessed had been used by the current occupant of the building.

She thought about whether to shout: ‘Police, come out of there,’ or to go for broke with her second bet and shout: ‘Police, come out of there, *Dan*.’

She went for the former.

She heard a noise. Then, from the rear of the property, a hooded figure emerged and ran away from her down the garden.

Mandy quickly followed.

Sam’s garden was surrounded by a substantial hawthorn hedge. There was no way through it, and twenty seconds later, Mandy was just feet away from the trapped fugitive.

‘Police, stop!’ she shouted.

The hooded figure stood still, aware that there was no escape. The intruder turned to face Mandy.

From the height and build, she now knew that it could not be Dan.

Mandy shone her torch into the intruder’s face.

Both looked at each other, and it would have been difficult to judge who was the more shocked.

‘Reverend Leadbetter,’ said Mandy, ‘what are *you* doing here?’

## Chapter 6

*17th February*

‘I think we’ve pretty much salvaged as much of your stuff as we can,’ Barney said to me, brushing the brick dust from his hands.

Barney was the owner of the demolition contractor that my insurance company had commissioned. His job was to make the property safe and to help me salvage as much as I could from what had once been my home.

He and his men had been really helpful – carefully moving timber and masonry, ensuring it was safe to retrieve items and then carrying what could be saved across the road into Helen’s garage for storage.

I walked to the edge of the recently exposed hole in the ground that had been caused by the meteorite.

It wasn’t the crater that you might expect from looking at pictures of meteorite impact sites. The object had punched its way through the thin concrete of the patio and buried itself in the ground, leaving a neat hole – half a metre in diameter. It had caused radial fractures in the surrounding patio, similar to those caused by a bullet passing through glass.

‘How much would you want for digging it out?’ I said, turning towards Barney.

Barney joined me and looked down into the hole. ‘The sides have fallen in,’ he said, ‘so I can’t see how deep it is. If it’s no more than five or six metres down, I could do it for two hundred quid.’

‘OK,’ I agreed.

‘That’s a lot of money and effort for a bit of rock,’ he said.

‘It might be just a bit of rock to you,’ I replied, ‘but it demolished my house and killed a friend. I think I’d like to *see* the villain.’

‘I’ll get the JCB,’ Barney replied.

‘Mr. Morrison.’ An unfamiliar voice called out my name.

I looked round to see a black Range Rover parked in front of the site and a short, plump man in a dark suit waving at me.

‘Yes,’ I replied, walking towards him. ‘Can I help you?’

‘My name’s Andy Fletcher of Fletcher, Fletcher and Watson,’ he answered. ‘I was Sam Collins’ solicitor. Can you spare me a few minutes?’

‘Sure,’ I said, ‘what’s it about?’

‘Mr. Collins presumably didn’t have any close relatives,’ Andy Fletcher explained. ‘His will leaves his entire estate to you.’

I was stunned. Sam and I had enjoyed some interesting evenings together, but I didn’t feel I knew him *that* well.

‘That’s a bit of a surprise,’ I said. ‘I don’t mean to sound mercenary,’ I added, ‘but just to get some perspective on this, how much money are we talking about?’

‘The house wasn’t insured, I’m afraid,’ Andy Fletcher continued, glancing at the rubble, ‘but the site is probably worth one hundred thousand pounds. Sam had around a further one hundred thousand pounds in savings and investments. Beyond that, it’s just anything valuable that survives from the contents of the house.’

Andy Fletcher reflected for a few moments, looking again at the remains of the houses. ‘You would, of course, have to spend some of the money to salvage his property and make the site safe, just as, I assume, your insurance company is doing for yours.’

Ten minutes later, I walked up to Barney as he sat in the cab of his JCB. ‘I’m too good to you,’ I said. ‘I’ve just found you another salvage and demolition job.’

## Chapter 7

*19<sup>th</sup> February*

Whilst in hospital, I had missed the media circus that had followed the meteorite impact.

Helen told me that Church Road had taken on the appearance of a street carnival – with TV crews filming and reporters interviewing anyone they could find.

Meteorite experts had apparently been located by the media, who had answered questions on the basic science.

For example, the authorities knew that it was a meteorite, not something that had fallen off the International Space Station, because all man-made space debris that could cause damage on re-entry is tracked. In addition, CCTV coverage of the meteorite's path had also allowed the experts to rule out man-made space junk.

The experts had explained that the flaming meteorite did not set fire to the buildings because it was cold. It appears that a meteorite is very, very cold due to having been in space, and friction with the Earth's atmosphere is not sufficient to warm other than the very surface layer. Finally, the experts predicted that the meteorite was most likely to be of a type they called 'stony'.

I recalled that an Echo reporter had briefly interviewed me as I left the hospital, although he had known more than I had. All I could say at that point was how sad I felt about Sam's death and how my only current plan had been to deal with the damage to my house and property.

I recognised the same reporter when I opened Helen's front door in response to the doorbell.

'Hello, Mr. Morrison,' he said cheerfully. 'We spoke when you left hospital.'

'I remember,' I replied. 'What can I do for you?'



‘Just tying up some loose ends for our readers,’ he answered. ‘I wondered what happened to the meteorite. When the story first broke, any crater was buried under rubble, and everyone was concentrating on the human story.’

‘I asked the salvage and demolition company to have a go at digging it up,’ I replied. ‘We didn’t find anything that we could recognise. That might have been because it disintegrated on impact or because it was made of stone – and we couldn’t tell the difference between a meteorite and a lump of hardcore. Anyway,’ I concluded, ‘we filled-in the hole again. At some point, I might dig there with expert involvement, but at the moment, I’ve got other things to think about.’

The reporter looked a little disappointed, thanked me for my comments and walked away.

I did not see any further related news items, which presumably indicated that what I had described did not amount to a story.

I closed the door and walked back through the house into the garage, where Helen was continuing to scrub the earth off an irregular lump of solid iron. The object was about fifty centimetres long, thirty centimetres wide and thirty centimetres high.

‘I’ll ring my brother,’ I said, picking up my mobile. I selected his number and listened to the ringing tone.

My only sibling, Duck, had taken over from our father the running of our family’s Oxfordshire farm, and he had bought-out my share.

I had never had any inclination to become a farmer, but our dad always liked to joke about whether he would have a Duck or a Swan succeeding him.

These were not the names on our birth certificates. Dad had called us by them for as long as we could both remember, however, and that remained the way we were both known.

Duck finally answered his phone.

‘Hello, Duck. ... Fine *now*, thanks. ... I need some help. ... I’ve got the meteorite that hit the house, and I’d like you to help me get it to the farm and hide it there. ... I need a winch and a trailer. ... I think it weighs about three hundred kilogrammes. ... Helen and I

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