

JOHN I COBY

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2123

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NOTES

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The novel 2123 is the volume sequel to the novel 2023.2,
which is in turn the volume sequel to the novel 2023.
That is why 2123 begins with Chapter Sixty-One.
It is thus recommended
that the reader read the story from the beginning,
from Chapter One of the novel 2023,
as the plotlines and characters are highly developed by this stage.

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Chapter Sixty-One

ISS

1

Crewmember, Eichii Tanaka, floated in the cupola of the orbiting International Space Station and observed slack-jawed as the main core of Travers' comet flashed by less than five miles away and slammed into the centre of the United States. Overcome with fear for the safety of his family in Tokyo, he witnessed the massive explosion.

Australian astronaut, Major Shane Meggs, everybody called him 'Ginger', who was floating next to Eichii in the cupola, quipped,

'We're about as useful as tits on a bull up here, Itchy.'

Ginger was the larrikin of the station. He had a nickname for everyone. He rechristened Eichii Tanaka, 'Itchy Knackers'.

2

Sixteen seconds after the main core of the comet buried itself forty miles into the planet, a quarter-mile-wide piece of rock, travelling at 12.5 miles per second, smashed the International Space Station into eternal oblivion.

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Chapter Sixty-Two WORMWOOD

1

Noah stood upon the upper hull of his spacecraft, which hovered just above the top of a thousand-foot-high butte that was located a few miles to the east of the town of Green River, Wyoming. He scanned the million-strong crowd sprawled out one thousand feet beneath him. Taking a deep breath, he wrapped his left hand around the master time chip, which hung around his neck by a thin piece of leather, then looked straight up. His eyes locked onto the lethal menace hanging in the sky directly above him like a giant celestial chandelier. His people named it Wormwood some six thousand years before. He could clearly make out the 25-mile-wide core and many of the accompanying satellite projectiles that were hurtling directly towards him at 12.5 miles per second. He knew that in 60 seconds time, Wormwood would bury itself forty miles into the Earth's crust right where he was standing. He raised his right arm and pointed directly at the plummeting projectile.

2

By design, the master time chip was to be activated telepathically. When activated, it in turn activated 144,000 other time chips that were implanted in 144,000 carefully-selected human beings located all over the Earth. Also activated were over six-million, time chips that were embedded in every kind of creature that walked, crawled, flew or swam above or below the surface of the planet. When activated, these time chips were programmed to time shift 36,525 rotations of Earth around its axis. Essentially, the time chip disappeared from the present and reappeared in the same location 100 years in the future. In accordance with the law of connectedness, the time chip pulled whatever was physically connected to it through time with it.

3

Five seconds before Wormwood entered the atmosphere, and ten seconds before it slammed into Green River, Noah activated the master time chip.

In that moment, he saw the comet disappear from the sky and the sky change from a clear, cerulean blue to a smoggy, yellowy brown. His next breath came with an acrid smell of sulphur. He looked down and observed an endless, smouldering lava pit. Where before his ship hovered a mere foot above a flat-topped butte, it now, all of a sudden,

hovered thousands of feet above what he saw as the 'pit of hell' for as far as the eye could see. There were smoking pools of glowing-red, molten lava, interspersed by miles and miles of solidified, black igneous rock with patterns in it that made it look like toffy. He could hear hissing and cracking, and the occasional explosion, and he could feel the radiant heat rising from the hellish cauldron below. Finally, it was the sulphuric stench that drove him back into his ship, but before he did so, he took a moment, looked up into the sky, placed his hands together and gave thanks to 'the One' for allowing him to successfully be time shifted one hundred years into the future. He also prayed for all the humans and animals that were time chipped and for their successful time shift. Done praying, and comfortably settled inside the silver disc, he set off for his first scheduled stop, a mountaintop in the Californian Sierra Nevada Range that went by the name of Pike's Peak.

4

Although he knew roughly what to expect to see one hundred years after the huge impact of the 25-mile-wide comet slamming into the Earth at 12.5 miles per second, he also knew that there was much that was impossible to predict. He knew that the final crater should be over 220 miles across and that it should have cooled down enough to allow the rest of the Earth to revert back to a semblance of pristine wilderness. He also knew that the impact shuddered the whole planet and that the stability of things such as geological faults were impossible to assess. He knew that earthquakes, of the magnitude 10+ on the Richter scale, rampaged around the planet, shaking all the infrastructure of human civilization into rubble and dust. He knew that tsunamis the size of mountains swept everything out of existence clear across whole continents. However, no one could predict the stability of fault lines. There was no way of knowing which ones would snap and which ones would hold. So, this initial venture into the unknown future was still very much a journey of discovery for him, and a profound education.

He began to rise vertically from what was previously ground level. He sat in his seat and observed the scene outside the ship on the spherical holographic display, which completely surrounded him. He rose slowly, about one thousand feet per minute, and took everything in. Pure hell boiled and hissed for as far as the eye could see. He levelled off at about five thousand feet and headed in the direction of a green cross, which glowed on his display and which marked out the position of Pike's Peak, California. He flew over the boundary of the giant crater. It extended right out to where Salt Lake City used to be.

He observed that the Great Salt Lake was completely dried up and the huge, brilliant-white expanse of the Great Salt Lake Desert was barely discernible due to it having been peppered by a layer of ejecta. Everything was black and charred for at least 500 miles radius from ground zero. He looked west and saw mostly blackness and charring right up to the Sierra Nevada Range, where he could see that the tops of the peaks were covered by snow. Embedded amongst the peaks was the green cross towards which he was flying.

5

He flew in from the east, about a thousand feet above the top of Pike's Peak. A broad smile appeared on his face when he saw a group of survivors standing right where his friend, Thebe, instructed them to be, exactly 109 years before, to the day. As he approached close enough, he counted them. To his disbelief, there were seventeen of them. He shook his head with delight at how successful this time shift turned out to be. Their time shifter saved another sixteen of them.

'This could set a record,' he thought to himself.

As it was the afternoon, with the sun being well to the west of the Peak, he decided to hover his ship about 50 feet to the east of them. That way they could look at him without having to look into the sun. He still wore his levitation suit from his previous assignment. He opened a panel on the upper surface of his ship and floated out through it. He then floated down toward them. They all stared at him with their mouths agape. He floated in and landed amongst them. He pulled off his goggles and balaclava, allowing them to hang behind his neck, smiled a handsome smile, and asked in a calm, kind voice,

'Is everyone OK?'

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Chapter Sixty-Three PIKE'S PEAK

1

It was the morning of *Saturday, September 23, 2023*. Clint Rodgers, aka Cowboy, who was the fittest, led the group of seventeen up the steep southern slope of Pike's Peak, which was located in the Sierra Nevada mountain range due east of San Francisco. Following him were his girlfriend, the actress Lauren Cole, Tommy Jones, the alien contactee and time shifter, Jonesy's wife Lori and their four girls, Carla, Clara, Catherine and Connie, Snake and his girlfriend, Trixie, Dirk DeRongo and his girlfriend, Inga, Ludwig and his wife, Ivana, Ace and his Italian girlfriend, Johanna, and trailing at the rear came Melvin, the cinematographer. They each carried a heavy backpack, which was full of survival gear, and wore tough, all-weather mountain clothes.

'Nine years today, be bound to your family on Pike's Peak, east of San Francisco.' That was what the alien lady told Jonesy as she flew next to him, as he flew circles above her space ship in his trike. That was nine years before, to the day. He managed to video her on his iPhone. A few days later, he showed the footage to Snake, his old school chum, who saw plenty of potential in it and hired Ludwig, a director, to organise a crew to film a documentary dealing with the event. They produced a total of eight documentaries in the following nine years. The documentaries were huge hits all over the world making Snake, Jonesy and the rest of the crew wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. As the project progressed from year to year, the individuals in the crew grew closer, becoming less of a crew and more of a family. And so it eventuated that they all decided that they would follow the alien lady's instructions and be on top of Pike's Peak on the 23rd of September, 2023, all together, all bound to each other with rope because one of the group, Ludwig, had a theory that Jonesy would be time shifted into the future and that he would pull anyone, or anything, that was bound to him, through time with him.

They huddled in a group on top of Pike's Peak as Jonesy tied them together via their wrists. Some of them glanced at the empty truck parked way down the slope on the trail. It had been their transport from their house in Pinecrest Lake, which was located five or so miles down the road.

'What time is it?' asked Trixie.

Snake looked at his watch and replied,

'Quarter past one, cupcakes, west coast time. Less than ten minutes to go.'

'I'm frightened, daddy,' said Connie, the youngest of Jonesy's girls.

'There's nothin to be frightened about, sweetheart, cause we got it all worked out.' He gathered his family into a tight bundle and hugged them all. 'Besides, your daddy is here now an he'd never let anythin bad happen to you, ever.'

They all grouped into a tight bundle, hugged each other and gazed skyward.

'There it is,' exclaimed DeRongo, 'there's the comet, right on time and right on target.'

They all stopped breathing as they observed the huge menace appear in the sky directly above and slightly to the east of them. Then, in the blink of an eye, like an edit in one of their documentaries, the comet disappeared and they suddenly found themselves buried waist-deep in pristine white snow.

'Holy Toledo,' exclaimed Snake, 'I don't remember it snowin.'

Ludwig burst out laughing in a state of total euphoria,

'It's happened!'

Everyone started laughing, cheering, high fiving and hugging each other.

'There you go girls,' said Jonesy in a reassuring voice, 'Told'ja we'd be OK.'

They dug themselves out of the snow and untied the rope that connected them. When everyone was untied and free of the snow, Snake came up to Jonesy, faced him, placed his hands on his shoulders, looked deeply into his eyes and declared,

'This comes from each an every one of us, Jonesy, thank you compadre, we all owe you our lives and are indebted to you for as long as we live.'

Jonesy, feeling somewhat embarrassed, replied,

'Swear an oath, Snake, you ain't usually one for so much bullshittin.'

Everyone laughed. Cowboy pointed down the hill and observed,

'Look, the truck is gone!'

Melvin pointed north-east. 'Look at the black cloud in the distance.'

Everyone looked in that direction.

'It looks like an active volcano,' said Ludwig. 'It appears to be hundreds of miles away.'

'It might be Yellowstone,' suggested Jonesy.

'Look at the way it rises and then bends due east in the jet stream. That would be at least 25,000 feet high. The smoke stack looks pretty wispy, though. I reckon that that volcano has done its worst and is in the process of shutting down.'

'Look over there,' said Trixie in a puzzled voice. She pointed due east. 'I thought I saw somethin flash in the sky.'

'Where, cupcakes?' responded Snake.

'There, right there,' she pointed again, 'there, in the sky.'

'Oh yeah,' exclaimed DeRongo, 'I see it! There it is! I think it's headed this way!'

'It's your aliens, Jonesy,' exclaimed Ludwig.

They all huddled together in a tight group, all completely mesmerised by the approaching flying object. As it approached closer, Jonesy declared,

'It's the same silver disk that has been visitin Green River over the years.'

The exquisite craft slowed and came to a levitating stop about 50 feet to the east of them. Its surface glinted in the afternoon sun as a panel opened on its upper hull. A human, dressed in a body-hugging, electronic suit, that completely covered him from head to toe, floated out of the opening in the space ship, flew down and landed in the midst of them. The alien pulled a pair of goggles off his eyes and a balaclava off his head and let them hang behind his neck. All the females skipped a heartbeat as he revealed his handsome face. He was tall, about 6'2", and broad across the shoulders. His skin was either dark or deeply-tanned and he wore his sun-bleached, brown hair shoulder length. Everyone was immediately struck by his self-assured demeanour. He smiled and enquired in a most manly tone, 'Is everyone OK?'

That set them all off. Seventeen voices fired off with every kind of question imaginable. It was impossible to make anyone out. He smiled and waited for them to calm down. He fully understood their excitement. Finally, unable to control himself anymore, he broke into a hearty belly laugh. Gradually, one by one, they all stopped jabbering. He looked warmly at all their faces and introduced himself.

'Hello, my name is Noah and I come from a planet in the Andromeda Galaxy, called Rama. Rama is almost identical to Earth. It is my sincere pleasure to meet you all.'

That set them all off again. Noah smiled and patiently waited for the kerfuffle to subside. Eventually Ludwig, who everyone considered to be the most eloquent in the group, asked the first question.

'Have we been time shifted?'

'Affirmative. It is the 23rd of September, 2123.'

That set them all babbling again. Noah couldn't help but laugh. After they all settled down again, Ludwig asked the next question.

'What happened to all the people?'

Noah looked at them all, shrugged his shoulders and replied,

'I only just got here myself. I haven't really had a chance to look around, except for the hellhole that remained after the comet hit. There was nothing alive in there. I suspect that everyone is gone, but I don't know.'

'Gone? You mean dead?' Jonesy asked.

'Pretty much, but life is full of surprises. I guess that we won't know for sure until after we've done some exploring.'

Lori, Jonesy's wife, asked Noah,

'Why was my husband chosen to be saved? Why not someone else?'

Noah looked surprised by the question. He thought for a moment, then replied with a question.

'How would you describe your husband in a couple of words?'

Lori thought about it and said, 'Kind and loving, and a little crazy.'

'There you go,' said Noah, 'and I believe that he has had some experience with LSD. That made him a most excellent candidate to interact with fully telepathic people such as the Rama.'

Jonesy grinned a cheeky grin,

'See, pumpkin, it weren't all bad like you thought.'

She looked at him like she was looking at a mischievous child. Noah observed,

'I see that you are all very well prepared.'

'Snake's the organiser,' said Cowboy.

'Snake? What a colourful name. Which one of you is Snake?' Noah held out his hand. Snake stepped forward and shook it.

'I'm Snake, an it's nice to actually meet you after all these years.'

'Ditto to that, Snake. How are you set for supplies?'

'We've got about two weeks' worth on our backs an there might be a container buried in the ground down the mountain in Pinecrest Lake, but I don't know if we'll be able to find it after all these years. We could go for a lot longer if we could find the container.'

'I see,' said Noah in a thoughtful voice. He paused, then continued, 'Firstly, I need to fly to Australia to hook up with other survivors, then I will return and join you for a short time. Give me three days. You may witness the occasional ship traversing the sky.' He looked at their weapons. 'I see that you are well armed. Er, it is my guess that there are, at best, around about a hundred-odd thousand Earth humans left on the planet at this time. That number will more than likely dwindle in the short term for a variety of reasons. Many of those reasons could not have been foreseen by anyone. All in all, there is certainly plenty of room for everyone and there should never be a need for any of you to compete with anyone for anything.'

'A hundred-odd thousand?' exclaimed Ludwig. 'There used to be eight billion.'

Noah shook his head and sighed,

'Yes, that was one nasty comet. So, you will all be all right for a few days?'

'I think so, Noah,' replied Snake.

'We'd better get down off this mountain before we start feeling the cold,' suggested DeRongo.

'Yes,' Noah agreed, 'you should try to get yourselves below the snowline before dark. I must go now, but I will find you in three days or maybe three and a half. Until we meet again then ...'

They watched him pull his balaclava and goggles over his head and launch into the sky like Superman. He re-entered his ship, the panel closed and the ship literally disappeared from view.

'That was incredible,' said DeRongo.

'We don't wanna spend a night in the snow if we can help it,' said Cowboy.

'You never said nothin about snow, Snake,' said Trixie.

'Well, I ain't no Nostradumbass, cupcakes. How was I supposed to know there was gonna be snow in the future?'

They partially ploughed through, partially slid down, the snowy mountainside. The heavy packs made the going more difficult.

'Everything looks different,' observed DeRongo. 'It's like were coming down a completely different mountain.'

'We seem to be higher, but who could be sure?' added Ludwig.

They slid down the slope dodging huge boulders along the way.

'There are no trees. Where are the trees?' Jonesy asked.

Melvin took a look down the slope through his binoculars. He was looking at the treeline.

'I can't make it out too clear, Jonesy, but there don't appear to be any old trees left standin down there. We still got about a thousand feet to go to get below the snowline.'

'I can't get over how everything looks different,' Jonesy replied.

The sky was a clear, deep blue. A light, westerly breeze waffled up the slope. It was approaching 3.00pm and the afternoon sun warmed the western side of the Sierra Nevada Range enough to generate a long, cumulus cloudstreet stretching southward for as far as the eye could see.

They could feel the air getting warmer as they descended down the mountain. They made their first camp right on the edge of the snowline. They barely had enough time to set up their tents before it became too dark to see. They cooked their freeze-dried meals on top of their small butane stoves and used LED lights for vision.

'At least we don't have to worry about water,' said Ludwig.

'How far do you reckon it is to Pinecrest, Jonesy?'

'About three miles as the crow flies, I reckon, Snake.'

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Chapter Sixty-Four MECCA

1

The sleek, timber sloop glided lazily across the calm ocean. There was barely enough strength in the westerly zephyr to fill her blood-red sails. It was a couple of hours after sunrise on *Sunday, September 24, 2023, East Australian Time*. To an albatross soaring above, Mecca looked like she was floating on an ocean of liquid fire.

Lloyd manned the tiller while Sophia and Alex sat next to him. Alex was playing with his iPod trying to select some appropriate music for the morning. Everyone on board wore their safety harnesses, which were clipped to the guardrail.

'Is everyone ready for a coffee?' asked Eva from within the cabin.

'Yes, please,' they all replied in unison.

'If I must be honest, Lloyd,' said Sophia in a whiny voice, 'I am beginning to get quite bored sitting out here going around in silly circles.'

'How could we forget your magazines?' said Alex.

'One more day, maybe two, then we'll sail back home,' said Lloyd reassuringly.

'It's starting to look like a huge anticlimax, isn't it, Lloydie?' said Eva.

'I welcome the anticlimax, darling.'

The digital clock next to the hatch flipped from 7.22am to 7.23am. Eva was bringing the coffees above decks on a tray when suddenly, faster than suddenly, in a heartbeat, the tray and the four mugs of coffee disappeared into thin air and the ocean changed from a glassy lake into a wild tempest. The sky changed from a clear blue to a dark, squally grey. The wind changed from a balmy, five-knot westerly to a fifty-knot, freezing-cold, south-easterly gale. In an instant they were in the midst of lashing rain and sea spray, and huge, white-capping swells. The icy gale overpowered the sails and slammed Mecca into a powerful knockdown. She heeled near to 90 degrees until the mast touched the ocean surface. Eva was violently pitched overboard. The other three managed to hang onto the guardrail. The boat naturally headed into the wind and the weight of the keel righted her. Covered in spray, and deafened by the roar of the wind, Lloyd screamed out his instructions.

'Grab the tiller, Alex, and keep her pointed into the wind.'

Alex grabbed the tiller with both hands as Lloyd scrambled to the port side of the cockpit. He hung his body over the rail and grabbed Eva's lifeline. He could see that she was not hurt. He began hauling her in when a huge wave hit him and washed him to the back of the cockpit. He ended up on top of Alex and Sophia tangled up amongst some ropes. He maintained his hold of Eva's lifeline however. He pulled himself up to his feet and began hauling on her lifeline again. Eva was fit and an excellent swimmer, but it was obvious to Lloyd that she was having difficulty in the turbulent water. After a few strong pulls on the line, he finally managed to pull her to the side of the boat. She grabbed the gunnel and held on for dear life. Lloyd tried to pull her up further, but didn't have enough strength. He called out to Alex,

'Give Sophia the tiller and come give me a hand with Eva!'

Alex placed Sophia's hands on the tiller and said,

'Just keep it straight into the wind, darling.'

Sophia looked at him with a look of total horror in her eyes and grabbed the tiller, something she had never done before in her life.

Alex clambered up to Lloyd. Together they leaned over the rail, grabbed the back of Eva's safety harness, and with a big heave, pulled her out of the water.

As soon as Eva was back in the boat, she quickly recovered and assessed the situation. She had plenty of rough-weather experience with Lloyd and she could see that Sophia was losing control of the tiller and was becoming visibly panicked. She yelled out,

'You boys pull down the sails and I'll take over the helm and look after Sophia.'

Mecca pitched and rolled violently in the turbulent water, making it extremely difficult and dangerous for the boys to handle the sails. First, they furled the headsail, leaving only a small portion of it exposed to act as a storm jib. They then proceeded to drop and tie-off the mainsail.

When the sails were secured, they scrambled back into the cockpit. Lloyd took the tiller from Eva and turned Mecca downwind. She accelerated down the next giant swell. The following swell white-capped at the top, picked up the dinghy, which was being towed behind Mecca and was full of supplies, and smashed it into the stern of the boat.

'We'll have to let the dinghy go,' yelled Lloyd. 'Untie it, Alex.'

Alex did as he was told and set the dinghy, with all of its extra survival supplies, adrift. Lloyd knew that to attempt to keep towing the dinghy would have almost certainly

assured that it would have smashed itself to pieces against Mecca's stern and more likely than not caused damage to the boat as well.

As they silently watched the dinghy surf past them down the following swell, Lloyd leaned against the tiller in a vain attempt to try to stop Mecca from broaching. He asked Eva, who was hanging on for dear life next to him,

'Eva, darling, what do you think about throwing out the sea anchor?'

Eva crawled through the hatch and retrieved the sea anchor from below decks. She tied it off to a cleat in the stern and slid it under the pushpit into the water. The rope holding the sea anchor twanged into tension and everyone noticed how the boat instantly slowed and became much more directionally stable. Eva returned to her spot in the cockpit. Everyone was drenched and freezing-cold because they were still wearing their lightweight, warm-weather clothing. Lloyd barked out more instructions.

'OK, we all have to change into our waterproofs. Eva, you go first and take Sophia with you. Get some dry clothes on, put on your storm gear, put your harnesses back on and then come back out here.'

The girls did as they were told.

'You're next, Alex.'

Alex went below and changed into appropriate apparel. When he returned, Lloyd told him to.

'Keep her headed directly downwind, Alex, while I get changed.'

When he returned, he grabbed the tiller, looked at the compass and assessed,

'As far as I can make it, we were 20 miles due east of Sydney Heads before this storm started. This gale is coming straight out of the south-east so there is no way that we can make it back to Sydney Harbour. Our best bet is The Hawkesbury. We'll set the heading to north-west as best we can and try to get in around Barrenjoey into some sheltered water.'

Every giant swell picked up Mecca's stern and accelerated her down its face like a surfboat. The sea anchor managed to keep her under ten knots and Lloyd's years of experience kept the bow pointed downwind. At every opportunity he attempted to sail in as westerly a direction as conditions would allow. He realised that he needed to get sight of land as soon as possible so that he could find Barrenjoey Headland and the entrance to the sheltered waters of Pittwater and The Hawkesbury River.

The driving rain and sea spray created a grey fog, reducing visibility to less than one mile, and then only when they were at the tops of the swells. When they were down in the troughs, they could see nothing.

Lloyd constantly monitored his direction, speed and time, attempting to dead reckon their position. He did this because his GPS was out. He wasn't sure whether it was his receiver that was down or whether it was the whole system. Either way, he now had to rely on his own instincts and an abundance of local knowledge. He calculated that Barrenjoey would have been about twenty-five miles to the north-west of them when the weather changed. He knew that it was imperative that they got into Pittwater because if they got blown past it, they would have to sail all the way up the coast to Port Stephens for safe shelter. Lloyd decided that that was too far and too risky because he harboured a concern that the storm was still on the build. So, he continued to head Mecca as close to due west as he could.

After about two hours of rough sailing, Alex pointed across the bow and screamed out,

'Look, Lloyd, there's a light up ahead!' They focussed onto a faint light that was intermittently emerging out of the murk. 'What is that? Is that land?'

'I don't think it can be land yet, Alex. We should still be about five miles out. That light is only about a mile ahead. It must be a vessel of some kind.'

'Make sure we don't hit it, sweetheart,' cautioned Eva.

They headed directly for the light. On a normally clear day they would have already had plain sight of the coastline. All they could see in the raging storm, however, was a wall of mist and pelting spray, and that was only when they were on top of a wave.

Lloyd was desperate to not sail past Barrenjoey Headland. All their immediate fortunes depended on them finding and sailing into the shelter of Pittwater. He continued to head as far to the west as conditions would allow. Occasionally a huge wave slammed into the port side of the sloop, causing Lloyd to have to steer more downwind. He knew that each time he did that, it increased their chances of being blown past the entrance of Pittwater.

'That light's not getting any closer, Lloyd.'

'It is strange, isn't it? It's as if it's heading in the same direction as we are.'

'They are probably trying to get into Pittwater just like us.'

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