



The Return

It arrived and
then became
mankind's
salvation, but why
were we saved ?

By
Derek P. Blake

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Authors note:

The author is British and lives in Cornwall in the UK Therefore this book is written in UK English.

Chapter 1

The Discovery

It was one of those balmy late summer evenings, the long light nights of June and July were past and the sultry heat of August was upon the land. Blake Northfield, and his wife Jo, were lazing on the decking outside their summerhouse overlooking the English Channel. There was little or no light pollution in the far west of Cornwall, so the sky was bright with stars, even distant stars burned with a fire never seen in the cities. Blake laid back on the sun-lounger a Martini in hand, and stared up into the night sky, “See that smudge of light over there,” he said to Jo, his wife of over twenty years.

“Hmm, what smudge Blake, is it something on your glasses,” she asked in jest.

“Funny,” said Blake, “look over there in the north-east about twenty degrees from the horizon, see it?”

“Where,” asked Jo with some frustration, she turned on her lounger to face behind her and looked up, “yes, I see it, I guess you're going to tell me all about it now, instead of letting me enjoy my drink and my book.”

“Good guess, yes I am,” laughed Blake, “do you know how far away that smudge is?”

“No but I am sure you will tell me,” said Jo, “what is it anyway?”

“It's actually a galaxy, like our Milky Way, with billions of stars.”

“And that's why it's so fuzzy, because of all those stars?”

“Well partly, it's also a long way away, guess how far,” invited Blake.

“Billions of miles?”

“Not even close, it's 2.2 million light years.”

“Means nothing to me dear, use miles or at a stretch kilometres.”

“OK, hold on to your hat, it's 14,696,575,500,000,000 that's 14.6 quintillion miles away.”

“Never heard of quintillion, did you just make that up,” asked Jo.

“No I didn't, look I'll write it down for you,” Blake found a piece of paper and a pen from his shirt pocket and wrote the numbers out.

“Seriously! Look if it's that far away how come we get visitors, UFOs etcetera?”

“There's no such thing as aliens, they only exist in Star Trek and other fantasies, those who believe in aliens visiting Earth just come under conspiracy theorists,” said Blake a little too forcefully, “physics is the same in the Andromeda Galaxy as it is here, one plus two still makes three, no matter what planet you're on.”

Blake and Jo had been married for coming up to twenty-one years, and were as devoted to each other now as when they had met at university. They had two sons both now at college, one son, Donald had turned out to be a near genius at mathematics, but was determined to become a medical doctor, whilst the other, Paul, was setting his sights on being a physics teacher. Blake was

a naturalised British, American, who had come to Britain, originally to study at Oxford in his chosen field of advanced electronic systems. When he had met Jo, who was studying Classics and Ancient Languages, everything changed for him. Blake had had no intension of staying in England, and was there just to get the name of 'Oxford' on his degree and Ph.D. but fate had other plans for him, he met Jo and fell deeply in love with her. They had married and moved to Cheshire, where he had obtained a post at Joderal Bank, the radio astronomy centre of Manchester University, where he developed a more sophisticated and accurate tracking system for the main dish; whilst Jo went to work for Manchester University itself as a researcher and occasional lecturer. With the advent of the Moon exploration, Blake obtained a job with Goonhilly Downs Earth Station, in Cornwall, as chief electronics engineer. The move was more about quality of life rather than any grand job move, their salaries were considerably, less but living in Cornwall more than made up for that. They had both become disenchanted with life in the Manchester suburbs, and what was called 'The Cheshire Set', comprising mainly upper-class snobs. Jo's commute into the city had become a bind and seemed to take longer each day. Blake, although based at the site near the tiny village of Goostry just outside of Knutsford, he also was required to make the journey into Manchester at least once a week. Blake did not like being in the limelight and his occasional requirement to lecture advanced engineering students was not his ideal of heaven on Earth.

So one day whilst reading the Telegraph Newspaper, Blake noticed a recruiting advert for Goonhilly Downs Station, who required a chief engineer. Blake knew of Goonhilly, of course, it had obtained fame by being the first Earth-station to receive the signals from the first telecom satellite, 'Telstar'. In the late two-thousand and tens, the station had been awarded the contract to handle all the communications between Earth and the Moon, now that the Moon was being considered a commercial venture. It wasn't the job that attracted him, nor the salary, it was the fact that he would be based in Cornwall. He and Jo had visited the county initially on their honeymoon, money had been an issue then and a camping holiday fitted the budget. They had fallen in love with the county and had visited there many times since, many times dreaming of moving there to live. Blake was appointed for the job and, now having a good bank balance, they managed to buy a beautiful house overlooking the sea, about four or five miles from his work-place. They were settled, and happy and it seemed that nothing on Earth could disrupt their happiness.

Jo had found a part time job with Exeter University, based at the Penryn campus, on the outskirts of Falmouth, lecturing once a week and had become renown for her ancient language research, taking on private commissions from museums across the world. She had gained some notoriety for the translation of the 'Religious' stone that had been discovered in the early

twenty-twenties, close to Basra, in Iraq. She had also been acclaimed for her work on, what was thought to be a contemporary Gospel, dated from the time of the disciples. Their two sons loved the area too, but spent most of their time at university, the eldest, Donald, Edinburgh medical School, and Paul, following his father in engineering, at Keele University in Staffordshire, with a view to teaching. The two spent every recess in Cornwall and both had romantic interests there, two lovely local and intelligent young ladies of whom both Jo and Blake entirely approved. They spent many hours every summer surfing the Atlantic rollers or walking the high sea-cliffs and beaches. On this night in August they were both out together with the 'girls', Blake suspected one of the local hostleries.

“Can I get back to my book now, please,” pleaded Jo.

“Philistine, there is more to life than Greek literature, you know.” Blake settled back and continued viewing the sky. He was pleased with the way he had set his garden up, and not a little proud; he had brought in a specialist in wooden decking and had built an observatory connected to the deck. The observatory looked south-east toward the English Channel and gave him an unobstructed view of the sky from the north around to the south-west, the observatory contained his pride and joy, in the form of a twelve inch, computer guided reflector telescope. Being in the business, Blake had built the control system from scratch and was almost as advanced as the systems he had installed in Cheshire.

He intended that night to spend an hour or two looking through the telescope, he thought about taking some photographic images of the Andromeda galaxy, if the clear sky held. The big problem here, just outside of the village of Coverack, was that sea mist, or sea-smoke as it was known to some, it often rose quickly and obliterated the sky. Although living in this idealistic Cornish fishing village, where fishing was still a major part of its economy, there were still disadvantages. The village was flooded with tourists during the summer season, so the narrow lanes and roads were often blocked by drivers who were not used to the narrow roads and streets. The tourists came in their BMWs and Audi cars and drove down the middle of the roads, afraid to get their precious auto-mobiles scratched by the trees and bushes that edged the lanes, known as 'hedging'.

Blake sank further back and sipped his Martini again, he had never managed to shrug off the American habit of these drinks, even though hardly anyone in the UK drank them. He had never taken to the local drinks of Cider and Bitter-beer either, although on a hot day a larger did quench the thirst. He closed his eyes as he let the liquid circulate his mouth and taste-buds, as he opened his eyes again he registered a flash of light in his peripheral vision. Blake's head snapped around thirty or so degrees and caught sight of, what seemed like a meteor flaring through the atmosphere. "Jo, look there's one of your alien ships coming to visit us," he said in jest. Jo Looked up and laughed, "Well let's hope it's not

coming here, I'm not dressed for visitors.”

Blake grabbed a pair of binoculars from the patio table and quickly found the object, “Strange, meteors don't usually last this long before they burn up. It must be a big one, even an asteroid.”

“Is there a difference,” asked Jo.

“There certainly is,” replied Blake, still watching through his binoculars, “meteors are relatively small, but asteroids can be huge, anything from the size of a car to a city.”

“And what size is this one,” asked Jo.

“Hellish big,” came Blake's answer, “Looking at this it could be extinction sized, Oh hell Jo this could be the big one. . . Although we should have some warning by this time, it's too close.”

Blake continued to watch the object, and then jumped up and dashed into his observatory, “What's the matter dear,” asked Jo as he disappeared into the converted summerhouse.

“There's something strange going on here, I think it's slowed down,” came his voice from the observatory.

Blake switched on the power to his telescope as he entered the dark space of the wooden structure and a low red glow filled the cave. The telescope also came to life with whirs and clicks, finally ending in a bleep. He went directly to a control panel where he switched the telescope to manual control, as above him the two leaves of the roof opened. The object could be seen in the sky to the south-west, and now seemed like just another very

bright star, about twice the magnitude of Venus. Looking at the monitor that allowed him to align the scope he brought the instrument around until the object was in the cross-hairs on the screen, then he moved his attention to the eyepiece. He brought the telescope into focus, and suddenly sat back in his chair with shock, with so much force that the chair nearly toppled over. After a few seconds Blake's eye went back to the telescope, as her triggered the HD video camera, which took images from the telescope. He sat there for several minutes muttering, "I don't believe this," or, "incredible".

"What's incredible baby," asked Jo, from the doorway.

"Come here and look at this," invited Blake. Jo made her way to where her husband was sitting, and he switched the HD feed to the monitor.

"What am I looking at?"

"That babe is what that thing up there is,"

"It looks like a space ship," said Jo, the shock registering in her cracked voice, "is it the space station?"

"No it's not ISS-2, I've seen that hundreds of times, and it definitely came in from space just now."

Blake fumbled in his shorts pocket and brought out his cell-phone, he pressed a preprogrammed button and held it to his ear. "Ronnie, it's Blake, have you got anything out of the ordinary on your scopes? Well can you take a look, to the south-west? Yea, I'll hold."

"Whose that," asked Jo.

"Ronnie at work, he's on monitoring duty tonight, you

met him last family day that Goonhilly ran, he's the one. . . Oh hi Ronnie, you have nothing, but I'm looking at it right now, I'm sending you the video and the 'Alt-Dec' to you now, it's visible to the naked eye and through my scope, can you check it out please and ring me back.” The pair continued to watch the object on the telescope's monitor as it slowly changed orientation. It was clearly not a natural object in any sense, it was bright and lit by the Sun far now to the west, from their vantage point it seemed to consist of a large sphere, surrounded by four tube-like appendages. The four tubes were all connected by two rings, each about a third of the way along the tubes, there was no light that could be seen at this time, but of course they had little sense of scale either. Blake changed the magnification by replacing a shorter eyepiece, then refocused the telescope, the resolution was not as good but it did show slightly more detail. Although they could not resolve them, there seemed to be some markings in the tubes, which may have been letters. The space between the tubes and the sphere was filled with a lattice of some kind and more surface detail could be discerned if one screwed the eyes up or used peripheral vision, to reduce the blur.

The two stared in amazement and silence at the image on the screen, and they both jumped as the cell-phone rang. “Hi Ronnie, what have you got,” said Blake, who listened for some minutes as his colleague updated him, finally Blake said, “OK, ring Doctor Anderson and tell him what you have just told me, send him my video and

see what he wants to do.” pause, “Yes please let me know what he says, speak to you soon, bye.”

“What did he say,” asked Jo.

“In brief, he couldn't find anything there, even though he had a visual, no radio emissions or image bounce at all on passive. Then he had an idea, we have this new prototype dish that we haven't started to evaluate as yet, it's meant to work like a kind of range finder, anyway it sends out full spectrum signals, from ultraviolet to infrared. He powered it up and got a hit deep in the ultraviolet side of the spectrum, and here's the astonishing bit, it's around five-hundred thousand miles out. I shudder to think about just how big that thing really is. Being over twice the distance of the Moon away it must be about half the size of the Moon. Anyway, Ronnie's going to get hold of Anderson and give him the data, then it's down to him what he does.”

Doctor Ralph Anderson had been the director of Goonhilly Earth Station since the late two-thousand and tens and had seen the station come into prominence by obtaining the contract as the communications hub for the ESA and the private consortiums that wanted to mine the Moon. Goonhilly Downs was the first station to pick-up the signals from the very first telecommunications satellite, 'Telstar'. It had also been used as a part of the British early-warning network during the cold-war, and a tracking station for early missile tests. Anderson had been relaxing with friends after a small dinner-party when his cell-phone rang, seeing who was calling, he

immediately prepared himself for trouble “Excuse me, I have to take this, work,” he told his guests. “Hello, Anderson here,” he said and then listened in silence. “OK Ronnie, leave it with me and I'll contact the ESA, tell Blake to expect a call from them, as he seems to have all the data at this point, bye.” He stood still for almost a minute, prompting a question from his wife as to what was wrong, “Just work my love, a little problem. He said almost absent-mindedly. Turning to their guests he said, “I'm sorry, I am going to have to leave you for a little while, please just canny on and enjoy yourselves,” and he left the lounge bound for his office. Ralph dropped into his winged swivel-chair and sat thinking for several minutes before he took any action. His home office was fully equipped with everything an office should have including a secure line to the ESA duty officer. Finally he picked up the receiver from the black telephone and dialled zero-nine, one three, to activate the secure scrambler that the ESA had insisted upon.

After several clicks and bleeps the call was answered by Jules Mason who was the duty officer for the night at the headquarters building in Paris, he gave his personal code and asked for the Centre for Earth Observation in Frascati, Italy. After close to half a minute a voice announced “Observation Centre, who's calling?”

“This is Doctor Ralph Anderson at Goonhilly Downs in Cornwall, England,” he then gave his personal identity code.

“This is Mario Vincensa speaking .How can I help you

doctor” the voice asked.

“One of my senior staff members, who happens to have a very sophisticated astronomy system at his home, has observed some sort of craft out beyond the Moon's orbit, but even so, it's visible to the naked eye. Our ranging equipment gives the range at around half a million miles, we have video of the object which, if you supply a number, we can send to you the video and all the data.”

“Are you sure this is a space-craft sir, I can see nothing on our local scopes, the range should cover at least that far out,” queried Mario.

“No, none of our dishes or LR Doppler Radar saw anything either, until one of my staff brought the Visible Light Ranging System on-line, with the coordinates our chief engineer gave us we were able to detect it,” answered the doctor.

“Are you available to hang on sir? I can bring the 'Galileo-ST' onto the coordinates,” offered Mario, “can you send the data to this number, 39-537-193877, it will come directly to me here.”

Doctor Anderson plugged the data stick into his computer and dialled the number Mario had given him, the computer showed a message that he was connected, he selected the file on the data-stick and hit the send button, seconds later the data-send had been completed. “I have it doctor,” Mario's voice informed him, “let me open the package,” he said. There followed several minutes of silence, before Mario voice again sounded, “Mama Mia! Is this video for real?”

“It would seem so, it was taken through a twelve . . . sorry a thirty-centimetre reflector with a HD CCD camera, by my chief engineer.”

“Okey-dokey, let me feed these coordinates into Galileo and see what we have,” the sound of keys being tapped could be heard in the background, “This may take a few minutes.”

“That's fine,” said Ralph, “Have the up-grades been installed yet?”

“Si, well most of them, we wait only for the new software, but the new lenses and receptors are onboard and working just fine. Here we go, eccellente!”

“What do you see Mario?”

“I see the ship like in your video, it's just hanging there, how did your man find it,” Mario asked.

“I am told he was sitting out and saw a flash, he thought it was a meteor or asteroid, but it didn't move, so he used his telescope, you have the rest in the package.”

“I will have to pass this up the line, we have a protocol for this eventuality,” explained Mario, “I have to contact my director and he will take over, and I am required to instruct you and your staff to stand down on this matter and to remind you of our non-disclosure agreement, so no media, sir. Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Buona notte!”

As Doctor Anderson broke the connection to the ESA, Mario Vinchensa grabbed another telephone, a blue one this time, that was connected directly to NASA HQ at 300 East Street SW, Washington DC. It was four in the

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