

Impending Return

# Impending Return

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-Not finished yet- An environment worker becomes trapped in Sierra Leone with no way out. Let me know what you think!

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## Chapter 1

To some, Freetown was just another Hellhole. But to Aaron Davis it was a business opportunity. He was sat up in his bed with what he liked to call "Airport Junk": trashy, cheap novels designed purely to keep the reader mildly interested in the plot for the duration of the flight, but Aaron hadn't really been that thrilled, and wasn't exactly biting his nails to the quick over whether Joanne was going to survive the dramatic open heart operation. His overnight bag lay discarded on the floor, and the contents were strewn across the carpet floor, as Aaron remembered half-heartedly attempting to pull out some clothes for the morning before collapsing on the cotton sheets.

After another hour of relaxing, he decided it was probably time to get up. He slowly edged his way to the end of the bed and shuffled to the bathroom. He roughly tugged the cord for the light and the fluorescent bulb hummed into action. Aaron's first reaction was that the man in the mirror looked a state. He was tall, with a strong, stubborn jawline, and he had deep blue eyes like chilled steel. His jet black hair was a tangled mess from turning in bed, and his eyes were bleary and unfocused. He quickly dashed to his room and gathered up the things he needed. He quickly brushed his teeth, and slipped on a loose shirt and cargo-pants. As he walked to the door, he caught a glimpse of the view, and stepped to the ledge.

Sierra Leone was a vast collection of shanty houses, slowly decaying in their old age. The city was bustling with people, and the sound of car horns rang out from every road. Aaron smiled and as he left, he picked up his laptop bag and plucked his name badge: A thin piece of laminated card, with a picture of himself, and the company logo emblazoned on it, from the bedside table and hung it around his neck. He pulled open the door and stepped into the corridor of the hotel.

The Paramount Hotel was considered one of the best in Freetown, apart from the suspicious Casino Hotels that lined the beach. It had a good location, good food, and good rooms, which is saying a lot for Freetown. As Aaron sat down with a coffee, he opened his laptop. Taking a sip, he typed in his password and opened his email. Seeing no new messages, he closed it and slid it back into the laptop bag. Aaron stood up and headed for the door. The receptionist saw him and nodded slightly in acknowledgement. Aaron smiled back and left through the door.

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Aaron decided to head through Victoria Park for work. It was a large, spherical park centred by a large water fountain that seemed very welcoming in the hot climate, and Aaron felt oddly cooled though he was nowhere near the fountain. The park was lined with lush, jade green trees waving gently in the wind. The air, Aaron noticed, was warm and stale, in contrast to England's chilled and slightly damp breeze. As he dropped his empty coffee cup in the bin, he spotted the ministry of defence building looming over him. Despite being a military building, it had a very menacing aura, as it protecting the country was the last thing involved inside. Shuddering, he walked onwards, the air suddenly seeming a lot colder. As he walked, he spotted the famed Cotton tree that represented freedom. Aaron couldn't help but let out a whistle, as he did when he was

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impressed. He left the park through the back entrance and spotted his companies building.

Aaron plodded through the slowly moving revolving door. Spotting the secretary, he showed her his badge. She smiled and pushed a button below the desk. A glass door swung open silently to her left. Aaron walked up a flight of wide steps, next to a large window. He swiped his badge across a reader and walked to his new office. The upper level was a square of modern offices, each with an exotic potted plant in the corner. The centre of the floor was open showing the busy ground floor, and it was lined with fogged glass railings.

"Mr Davis, your office is over here" Called a woman. Aaron turned and saw a local woman with a broad smile. He made his way across the room and stepped into the office.

The room was spacious, with a polished black desk stacked with inbox mail.

"This is great, thanks." Aaron said, sitting down. The woman beamed and closed the door as she left. He leant back in his swivel chair and pulled out his laptop. He stood up and headed to his desk downstairs.

Aaron worked for BioForce : A company devoted to the planet's welfare. The company had several departments, and Aaron worked in the Clean and sustainable water for third world countries. Aaron wasn't working in Freetown, but rather a small village to the east of Sierra Leone. He plucked up the first envelope. On the top of the inbox, and slit the top of the rough brown paper with his thumbnail. It was his first assignment. Aaron was a member of The Quenching Project : working with a mix of locals, and foreigners to provide the village with clean water. The Techies had worked on an apparently fool-proof irrigation system. And they were doing it completely free of charge. BioForce intended to gather larger companies to support them, though they were already a reasonably large company themselves. This, of course provided a lot of grief from competing companies, and those whose business would be endangered by them. The sheet of paper inside the envelope instructed him to head over to the site of the irrigation and oversee the installation of the irrigation system. He was to meet his transport downstairs, and may return to his accommodation at any time after the machine was installed. Aaron glanced at his watch: 9:49. He needed to be there at 10:00. He dropped his laptop bag by his desk, and closed the door, locking it behind him.

## Chapter 2

There was no doubt about it: the village needed help. The cluster of shelters was shanty at best: roofed with decaying thatch, with walls the colour of gravel. A thin layer of dirt traced the movements of its inhabitants: footprints in every direction; Most towards the thin, muddy brown stream of water that curled around the settlement in a horseshoe. The effects of the water were apparent; the settlers were gaunt, with hollow cheeks, and wiry limbs. Their chesnut eyes were sunken and deep set in their sockets, but all were fixed on the machine before them. Around the top of the river was a group of smartly dressed workers, constructing the irrigation system. Aaron didn't have a clue how it worked, but in theory, the water should flow out crystal clear. Aaron leaned against a thick fig tree. Its lush, emerald green canopy provided a welcome shade from the relentless assault from the sun. It was going to be a long day.

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The phone call cut through the mans sleep as he drifted back into reality. A thin blade of light illuminated part of his face as he brushed his hand across his neatly trimmed his beard. His other hand reached out to press the hands free button. He then clapped his hands twice, lighting up the room. In Sierra Leone, you could live in comfort, if you could afford it and knew the right people.

"What?" He said gruffly into the silence. He was British, with close cropped hair and a thin scar across the corner of his mouth, twitching it downwards ever so slightly in a mocking sneer.

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“Mister Marshall, it is good to hear from you again. We have another assignment for you, if you’re interested.” Said a heavily accented voice from the phone’s speaker. John Marshall propped himself up on his elbows.

“Uh-huh. I’m listening.” He said

“You are to go to a small village east of Freetown, and observe the movements of a man known as Aaron Davis.” I am uploading a photo onto your mobile phone now.” John plucked up the device from the bedside table. A photo of a man appeared; it looked to be taken from a CCTV camera from a ceiling. He was an Englishman, like himself, with dark hair, but the rest was blurred.

“My apologies for the bad picture quality, but I’m sure a man of your, ahem, *talents* should have no trouble finding a man this distinct.”

“Not a problem. Payment?” He inquired, raising an eyebrow knowing it would have no effect.

“You will be paid when your assignment is complete if you wish, but if you report to our building, we have a job proposal I would like to discuss.” He said, with a hint of nervousness in his voice. John smiled.

“All right. Send me the details.” He agreed.

“Excellent. I’m sending them to you now. Good luck, mister Marshall.” John stood up, letting the covers drop back onto the bed. He quickly showered, and pulled on some cargo-pants and a loose, khaki coloured shirt. Then, he reached up and pressed a small button hidden behind some coats he’d never actually worn. Their only purpose was to disguise the switch. The back panel of the mahogany wardrobe slid across on well-oiled hinges, revealing the room behind. It was brightly lit, as tungsten beams in the ceiling hummed into action. At the far end of the room was a stand. It was about six feet tall, and rectangular. Behind reinforced glass, was a suit of heavily modified S.W.A.T. armour: A Kevlar and carbon fibre chest-plate, moulded perfectly to his body. Bracers, boots, and greaves made of the same material. It was light and compact enough to be worn under his clothes, but thick enough to protect him from most wounds. There was also a helmet, full face with a wide range of optics. He didn’t bother with the armour, but instead went over the weapons rack: an assortment of armaments. He started his own private arms company a while ago, intending to supply the SAS, but ended up dealing with private parties. When he started to get too involved in the black market, and gang leaders, he disbanded the company, and kept a large amount of its wares. He lifted a small pistol from its casing, and tucked it into a shoulder holster. When he finished, he left the room, re-sealing it as he went. He pulled on a battered leather jacket, and closed the door.

## Chapter 3

Destan Baris Sat back in his chair, taking a small sip of the luke-warm beer. He grimaced slightly, and placed the beverage down. He was a local, dark skinned and in his early thirties. His eyes were like deep pools if tar as they scanned the people around him. All of them worked for him, heads of every department in his empire. He manufactured a vast array of wares: real estate, technology, weapons, but his main control was in sustainable resources. All of the people around him were nervous, beads of perspiration formed on their brows. Despite the fans spinning lazily above, all they seemed to be doing was stir the dry, scorching air around the room. It was harshly lit, although modern. The Conference table stretched the entire length of the room: an onyx black pane of glass, lined with black leather seats. At the head, a projector screen slid silently from a hidden mechanism somewhere in the ceiling. Destan cleared his throat, the other men around the table saw this as a signal to shut up, and did so immediately.

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“Gentlemen, as of this year, we now control over 65% of the area’s water. This brought a scattering of applause. The remainder is either polluted, or in such small quantities that it is not worth controlling.” He paused, emphasising his last point. “However.” He began, “We have confirmed reports of an organisation known as BioForce that plan to integrate a machine into a small settlement not far from here, that will provide clean water for that which is polluted. This has led us to believe that this settlement will be the first of many. Thus, several of our *loyal* customers.” He chuckled. “Will begin to rely on this water.” The slide changed behind him, displaying a chart with a rapidly declining red line. “This is our estimated sales in renewable water for the next year. As I’m sure you can see, this is a terrible loss, and something needs to be done about it. The applied science department has been working on a device that, when used correctly, will plant a virus, that evolves so quickly it will be able to pass unharmed through the irrigation system.” He sat back in his chair.

“So we’re going to *kill* our customers?” Inquired a young man from the far end of the table.

“No.” Destan replied curtly. “This virus is completely harmless to humans, but will cause devastating effects on the agriculture in the settlement. I propose that we place this device on the machine, and the effects of the virus will be pinned on it.” A few members around the table smiled slightly at the concept.

“Surely we will have some complications in this plan.” Said another man.

“Of course.” Destan said. “Thanks to mister Marshall over there.” He nodded towards John, who leaned against the glass panelled wall of the room. “We are aware of three overseers of the project. Two of which are staying right here in our lovely city.”

“What’s gonna happen to them?” John asked.

“I believe we should arrange for them to have a little *accident* sometime this week.

“And the police?” John challenged. A man at the back of the table scoffed.

“The police? We practically have the local service in our back pocket!” He laughed.

“It’s settled then.” Destan said, clapping his hands together. “Thank you gentlemen.” They all stood up, and a few shook hands and exchanged feeble compliments with each other. Destan flicked a switch under the table, and the screen slid back up.

## Chapter 4

Thomas grinned as the small trickle of clean water spouted from the irrigation machine. Silence shrouded the settlement like a blanket. No-one dared speak as the trickle gradually built up to a miniature torrent. Suddenly, a great uproar swept through the settlement, cutting through the silence like a cleaver through clingfilm. Aaron, to his left, scooped up a mugfull of water and handed it to a small girl. She sipped, and beamed at Aaron and himself. Aaron chatted with a few locals for a while and then ducked down as he got into the car with Tommy.

“It worked!” He exclaimed. Tommy couldn’t help but laugh along with him. When they got back to Sierra Leone the road to the Paramount was blocked. Tommy cursed and suggested they head out for a drink to celebrate instead. Aaron agreed, and they headed for the beach. Tommy gestured with his hand like a cheap magician.

“Shall we?” He asked.

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John pressed the switch hidden in the wardrobe, not waiting for the false back panel to slide fully open before stepping into the achromatic room hidden behind. He strode over to the case displaying his body armour. Stamped on the shoulder pad was a pearly white skull, framed by two oars. Beneath the insignia, the word "Ferryman" was stamped in crimson. He quickly donned the armour, shivering slightly at the cold Kevlar and carbon fibre as it brushed his skin. He pulled the mask on. It was custom made; a thin layer of woven mesh that completely covered his features. His eyes were pinpricks of pale light looming out of the shadows the mask provided. It was equipped with a radio, a small, stubby antenna protruded at an angle from his ear, tucked into the material of the mask. Over the armour he wore a midnight black trench coat. It seemed to absorb all light in its vicinity, and it would help keep him from arousing suspicion.

He paced over to the weapons rack. And selected a personal favourite of his: The Maelstrom. It was elegant, a slender bolt action sniper rifle capable of firing over two miles. Beside it was a bandoleer of ammo, and some clips. He took one clip. They held four bullets each, but two would be enough.

He wasn't planning on missing.

He decided to walk to the designated spot. Baris had arranged for them to take a detour back to the hotel. He would make the shots from the roof of one of the houses. As he made his way down the labyrinth of alleys, he finally found a suitable house, taller than most, with a water cooler to disguise his silhouette. It also provided a clean shot down the alley they were to head down. He extended the bipod, and rested the forks on the ledge of the building. Now he would have to sit and wait.

Tommy stumbled slightly as he tripped over his own feet for what seemed the millionth time. The street lights had begun to flicker on, bathing the street in an orange hue.

"I won't want to be you in the morning." Aaron chuckled. Tommy grunted in way of answer. The street was quiet, the only sound was the low hum of the street lamps, and their not-so-rhythmic footsteps. Some shanty houses loomed over them menacingly. Was it just the poor structure of the buildings, or were they leaning in?

The gunshot took Aaron by surprise, it cracked like a whip, echoing through the street. Aaron dived towards a skip piled with rubble, His eyes darting back and forth. He saw Tommy lying in the floor, spread eagle. A splatter of crimson blood sprayed the wall behind where he had been standing, and a pool of the liquid was forming up around his head, already mixing with the previously bone dry dirt to form a thin paste. His eyes were glazed over and lifeless. Aaron's anger and confusion was replaced with fear. He risked a quick glance over the skip. Buildings. Cars. No gunman. He ducked back again. He had to get away, and tell the police. If he didn't, he would end up just like Tommy. But before he could plan his next move, a pair of hands closed around him and pulled him into the shadows.

## Chapter 5

Aaron landed hard on a cold, wood-panelled floor, in an instant he was up, but his assailant was not facing him. He waited for the man to make a move.

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“You are already making a name for yourself, aren’t you, hm?” He said quietly from the corner. As he spoke, he moved around the room, drawing the moth-eaten curtains, and drawing a heavy iron beam across the door, he flicked the light switches on the wall, and the unshaded bulbs overhead switched off and plunged the room into blind darkness. The man spoke from behind Aaron. “We are not safe here; The Ferryman will be looking for you in this area.” The voice didn’t betray his nationality; it had no trace of accent whatsoever, and Aaron had just as much trouble seeing his face in the dark as when the light was on. He roughly kicked aside a tattered rug, to reveal a wooden trapdoor underneath it. He threw it open, a vacuum sucked the dust out of the air, as though the room was breathing in. The man nudged Aaron towards it.

“I don’t even know who you are, how do I know this isn’t a trap? I can’t trust you.”

The man paused, Aaron could almost hear him think, the silence was so pure.

“Well, I did just save your arse from a crazed assassin! I guess you could call that trust.” He chuckled, before shoving Aaron down the trapdoor into the tunnel. He landed roughly on his hands, the rough stone beneath him cut his palms. His saviour was close behind, dropping down, and closing the trapdoor almost simultaneously. He flicked another switch. The lights hummed slightly, and buzzed into action, illuminating a tunnel, made of stone brick, that stretched into the distance. Aaron put out a hand to steady himself, and it brushed against the grimy brickwork, he recoiled slightly, even that gesture made the man behind him laugh. He turned. For the first time, he could properly see his face.

He was in his early thirties, with deep blue eyes, and long hair. He had a short, neatly trimmed beard, and he looked like he hadn’t slept in a while. Although his expression looked grim, his eyes were alight with excitement. He sensed Aaron was more than curious.

“If you have questions, ask away, we’ve got a long walk ahead of us.” The man said.

“I never caught your name.” Aaron said, squinting as the lights made an assault on his pupils.

“Nathan.” He said, taking the lead. “I was a part of another company hoping to restore this place to something close to liveable.” He said bitterly.

“Until?” Aaron asked, sensing there was more.

“Until! The same thing happened to me as has happened to you.” He replied curtly.

“And what, exactly, has happened to me?” Aaron pressed.

“It’s the usually back story. They kill one, pin it on the other, in my case it was a woman named Marie. I’ve been living in the shadows for two years now.”

“Back story for what? And for who?” Nathan turned slightly.

“How much do you know about Baris Enterprises?” He said. Aaron rolled his eyes.

“Only that they’ve been our main competition in the renewable resources market for the past six years. And that they’ve been dealing under the table with every scumbag you can put a name to.” Nathan laughed, the sharp sound rang out and echoed through the tunnel.

“A fair assessment.” He replied, his voice full of humour. “They sabotaged our company, framing us as frauds and murderers. Without the corner pieces, such as myself, it fell apart like a house of cards.”

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â But how come I havenâ t heard of this on the news? I know we arenâ t the first company to try and establish some form of order here, but that is way over the usual stories.â

â Ah, but thatâ s all they are. Stories. How did the last company go down?â

â Well, I heard they ran out of budget, and then they got into some major financial troubles.â Aaron said. Nathan chuckled again. Even in the dim light, he could clearly see the grim smile on his face.

â Is that how it turned outâ ? Well, Iâ m sure youâ ll be intrigued to know that what actually happened is that they eliminated several amongst our organisation, and then pinned the blame on several others. Destan Baris has this country in a strangle hold. He has complete control of the local authorities, and he certainly has his way with the media.â I have luckily been able to avoid being seen. I couldnâ t leave the country; all of my credit cards were tracked, as was my passport. I have been able to survive through stealing scraps.â Aaron was still confused.

â So when did you discover this place?â He asked gesturing to their surroundings with his hands.

â Oh, Iâ ve always known this was here, after all, I helped build it.â

â Huh?â

â This tunnel system was the last attempt at clean irrigation. When the company fell apart, it was abandoned. I now use it as a handy way of getting around. Its served me well enough, nobody else knows itâ s here.â

â How far does it go?â Aaron inquired, stumbling over a rock again.

â All over the city, most people have an entrance outside their houses somewhere. Luckily, Iâ ve marked the important ones with paint.â Speaking of whichâ ?â He pointed to a spot of luminous paint, sprayed in a crude leaf shape, the paint streaking down the wall. Aaron glanced up, to reveal another trapdoor identical to the one at the safe house. Nathan jumped up, and grasped the lip of the opening, with his free hand; he batted the wooden door open. He hauled himself up. He offered a hand to Aaron, who accepted it, and ascended from the tunnel into the darkness above.



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