

# TOTALITY

*Keeping it cool.*

BY C. L. HOLLAND

Two days ago it had been “we don’t negotiate with terrorists”, but it was difficult not to negotiate with people who’d stolen the Sun.

In the corner, the TV droned quietly. Most channels weren’t broadcasting, but the BBC kept the news running, interspersed with nonsensical cartoons. The breaking-news banner announced that the prime minister, along with other world leaders, had gone to the mothership to negotiate with the Glaosch Imperium, who had turned up to ‘invite’ Earth to join their empire.

They’d reacted to our (mostly) polite refusal by parking a spaceship the size of the Moon between us and the Sun. Our following, more explosive, refusal had been shrugged off like we were mosquitoes.

“I can’t believe you’re actually going,” Ryan said. “You know what they’re doing? Herding us into easily managed groups, is what. You should come with me to the bunker.”

I put down my water bottle a little too firmly.

“What else are we supposed to do? The National Grid can’t cope with the demand of this constant darkness, and the demand for electricity and gas is only going to increase as it gets colder. You want people dying in their homes because they don’t want to put the heating on? We get enough of that when there aren’t aliens trying to freeze our asses off. People are hurt and scared. They need a doctor.”

Ryan sighed and tugged a hand through his hair. “Fine. I get it. Just promise me if it comes to it, you’ll get out and find me.”

“I promise.”

“And don’t bring anyone with you. The bunker’s set up for eight, we won’t be able to let anyone else in.” He pulled me into a hug. “See you, sis.”

As I finished packing I wondered how my younger brother’s weird hobby of filling our parents’ shed with bottled water, candles and tinned food had turned into part-ownership of a nuclear-fallout shelter.

The village hall was packed with camp beds and air beds,



most occupied by huddled families under mounds of blankets. There was only so much the ancient heaters could do against the plummeting temperature outside. The darkness already smelt of too many bodies and overworked electrics. I made my way to the pool of light coming from the kitchen to report for duty.

It turned out there wasn’t much for me to do. People were quiet, subdued, panic long since burnt out. I passed out plasters and prescribed sleeping tablets and an emergency inhaler, which the village pharmacist dispensed from a suitcase.

Mostly we just watched the news. And the cartoons.

The content was bland and repetitive, obviously designed to stop people panicking again. There was nothing about what would happen to us if the Glaosch didn’t move their spaceship. I knew, because Ryan had told me. Before long, most of the plant life would be dead. Animals would die of the cold if starvation didn’t take them first. Humans might hang on longer, but since it would be minus 100 degrees in a year, it wouldn’t be much longer.

I checked my watch. It said ten past one but I honestly wasn’t sure if that was a.m. or p.m. Or what day it was. The teachers in the crowd were pretty good at keeping routine for the children, but mostly it was just a blur.

There was a wave of shushing and I looked

up to see the prime minister on the television, looking even more grey than usual. She was outside Downing Street in the same outfit she’d been wearing when she left.

“After a week of difficult negotiations,” she said, “it has been agreed that Planet Earth, henceforth known as Terra, will become a member of the Glaosch Imperium.”

There was a collective cry — grief, relief? I couldn’t tell. Beside me someone sobbed. “It’s over. It’s finally over.”

*You don’t know how right you are*, I thought. Ryan had seen it coming.

“They don’t have to invade us,” he’d said. “All they have to do is wait.”

The subtitles stuttered out the PM’s instructions. “Many of you are gathered safely in school halls and community centres. We ask that you remain there so you can

be processed. If you are at home, please stay there; we will find you.”

I checked my pocket for my keys and slipped my phone onto the table — Ryan had been very clear about not bringing it with me, or writing down the bunker’s location. No one paid any attention as I drifted towards the exit. I grabbed the pharmacy suitcase on the way. It seemed unlikely anyone else would need it now.

Outside, the air felt expectant. I looked up at the sky, feeling a wave of dizziness at the blackness that spread over it like a blanket. No Moon, no stars. *They must be right above us.*

My car was parked out on the road, on double yellow lines, but no one cared about things like that any more. It started first time for a change, as if it knew this was the one that mattered. I threw my satnav out the window. As I drove, the sky got lighter, daylight creeping in like Ryan after curfew, and before long it was like nothing had happened. I fumbled sunglasses from the glove box, even though the Sun was already slipping towards the horizon.

I shivered, and drove into a tomorrow that belonged to the Glaosch Empire. ■

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