WHEN THE MOUNTAINS FELL

SAVE THE MULTIVERSE BOOK 2

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BRYAN DAVIS

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Author's Note

This story visits disasters like the ones at Aberfan, Wales, October, 21, 1966 and Armero, Colombia, November 13, 1985. I changed the names of the people involved and a few details of the events. The courage of the real villagers remains.

CHAPTER 1

Gecko Glitch

Eddie sat next to Gilbert at the dining room table, both staring at a spreadsheet on the screen of an open laptop. Across a thick gray cloth that covered the table, small screwdrivers lay strewn around Gecko—a handheld phone-like device. Samantha sat at the head of the table, reading a history textbook about Great Britain.

"I think it's done." Eddie pointed at the bottom row. "That dataset total looks perfect."

"Positively, precisely perfect," Gilbert said as he ran a hand over his bald head. "Gecko is definitely reading data from the other Earth."

Samantha closed the history book. "I hope you're right about the portal data coming from Great Britain." She switched to a British accent. "I've been studying the Atlantic Archipelago for hours."

Eddie pointed at Gecko. "Like I told you, all the facts in that book are in Gecko, and its artificial intelligence can help us apply the facts to whatever we're doing, so you don't have to study."




History of
Great Britain
History of Great Britain

"What if Gecko's battery croaks?"

"It recharges using solar. It'll be fine."

Samantha tapped the side of her head. "I want instant recall, rain or shine or locked in a dark dungeon with only stale corn chips to eat, the spicy kind that even the rabbit-sized rats gag on. Gecko would run out of juice in a dungeon like that."

"In a dungeon like that, we would croak before the battery does, so no worries."

"Still, you never know. What I learned in this book might come in handy. AI is good at spewing facts, but that doesn't mean it'll always know how to apply the facts from person to person. It has brains but not heart. Those two don't always mix."

"For example?"

With her hands folded on the closed book, Samantha looked Eddie in the eye. "Rogation days. In medieval England, the priest led the people around the parish. They prayed, asking God to protect the fields and the river and the houses. Gecko might know that, but he can't possibly understand the faith behind the facts, that walking in prayer can be an act of faith."

Eddie gazed into her steady eyes. He had no counter to her claim, and she knew it. "Yeah. You got me. Thanks for setting me straight."

"You're welcome. Thanks for hearing me out."

"Now that that's settled," Gilbert said as he touched a control button on Gecko's side. "Back to your earlier question, Samantha. The radio signal decoder in this device picked up activity that matches signals from Great Britain in the nineteen sixties. Since the negative

energy coming through has been spiking, I think you two should leave as soon as possible if you hope to prevent a catastrophe there."

"All right. You both convinced me. No use taking a heavy book with us." She picked up a backpack from the floor. "At least I won't need a foreign language book. Almost everyone there speaks English."

"Gecko has a translator," Eddie said as he picked up the device and put it into his backpack on the floor. "We'd have to go to another planet to find a language it doesn't know."

"We *are* going to another planet. A different Earth. But fair enough." Samantha rose and put the backpack on. "Nothing's keeping us here. We already said goodbye to Mom before she left."

"Oh, yes," Gilbert said as he also rose. "She texted that she forgot her detoxification medicine. I'm supposed to take it to her physical therapy session in ten minutes. I don't want to be late."

"Then we'll all leave at the same time." Eddie stood, pulled his flashlight from his backpack, and turned it on. The light was brighter than the last time he used it. "Samantha, did you check your flashlight?"

"Yep. I put fresh batteries in yours and mine. Yours were nearly dead."

"Good thinking." He shut his flashlight off, stowed it in the outer pocket, and put the backpack on. "Gilbert, be sure to keep monitoring us with Gecko Two."

Gilbert patted his pocket. "Yes, I keep it with me always. And, Eddie, I put a small pouch filled with

currency in your backpack. It's not much. Money that can be used in Britain in the sixties was hard to come by. I also put earbuds in the same pocket. They will sync with Gecko automatically."

"Thanks. I'm sure both will help." Eddie walked across the room to Spunky and read the instruments on the front panel below its grandfather-clock face. "Everything's good to go. Locked in on the portal destination you found."

"Wait." Gilbert walked over and touched a dial on Spunky. "I almost forgot to tell you. While I was checking Spunky to make sure he was in working order, I found that turning this dial plays a recording that my younger counterpart in another world made. He explains everything about how Spunky works, what all the meter readings mean, how to change them based on other instrument readings, etcetera. It is quite thorough, as should be expected from a scientist like myself who invented Spunky, and I learned a lot. But I didn't hear anything that you need to know for your upcoming journey. Still, I think you should listen to it when you return."

"Sure," Eddie said with a nod. "Samantha and I will listen to it together."

Samantha snorted. "Right. As if I would understand the language of Gizmo Gadgets." She opened Spunky's back panel. "Like they say in England, cheerio. But I like Captain Crunch better. Or Frosted Flakes. That's a language I understand. *Cereal Killer*."

Gilbert waved. "Yes. Cheerio, cheers, and … well … checkmate to the seed of catastrophe."

"See you, Gilbert." Eddie joined Samantha, and the two ducked into Spunky's passenger area at the back, fairly small for two people, though they once fit their mother inside with them. Eddie took a deep breath and whispered to Samantha, "No fear, right?"

"No fear." She smiled weakly. "Well, not much. I packed Eleanor's opera glasses in my backpack. Having those with me helps, but I wish I still had Maggie's crucifix. It felt good to hold it, like hanging on to a life preserver when you're about to jump into a deep ocean with pods of killer whales everywhere."

"I get that. But God's with us, no matter where we go. Right?"

"Right." She nodded toward the trigger button. "Let's do this."

Eddie pressed the button. The usual bright light flashed, then faded, leaving them in darkness and silence except for a low hum coming from somewhere outside. "No light that I can see."

"And we're not bobbing like we're floating in the ocean." Samantha inhaled. "But what's that smell?"

Eddie drew in a breath through his nose. "Something oily." He withdrew his flashlight from his backpack and turned it on. "Let's see what's up."

He opened Spunky's back panel and stepped out. Queasiness invaded his stomach, and prickles ran along his neck and back, similar to the negative-energy effect.

He shifted the flashlight beam slowly, making it knife through swirling black dust. The beam fell across a towering mound of coal and a wooden-handled shovel

resting against it. Nearby, a boxy metal device stood on the floor with protruding pipes and an open door at the front, apparently a boiler waiting to be fed some coal. A sign above the boiler door said "No Smoking or Naked Flames." A metal sign screwed into the wall near one of the valves read, "Danger: High pressure. Isolate Valve Before Opening."

"A boiler room," Eddie whispered. "I guess that would be normal in the nineteen sixties. And it means we're probably in a basement of some kind."

"I *knew* we'd end up in a dungeon." Samantha sneezed as she stepped out of Spunky to join him. "And my nose doesn't like all this coal dust."

Eddie continued the beam's sweep until it landed on an upward-leading staircase. "Here we go."

"We'd better do something about Spunky before we leave." Samantha turned her flashlight on and locked it on a tarp next to the mound of coal. "Perfect. We'll cover Spunky and slide him against the wall that's farthest from the boiler. Whoever works here will see Spunky, but with the tarp over him, he'll think someone stored Spunky here on purpose. No worries."

"Let's hope."

After working together to cover Spunky with the tarp, they slid him against the wall opposite the boiler. Now coated with coal dust, they brushed off their clothes then crept up the stairs, opened the door at the top, and walked into a hallway.

The tapping of rain on the roof and on glass in a nearby room greeted their ears, heavy and consistent,


No Smoking
or
Naked Flames

allowing them to talk without being heard by anyone who might be nearby. "Time to explore," Eddie said.

Their flashlight beams crisscrossed each other as they searched their surroundings. "Looks like a school." Eddie aimed his beam at an interior door. "That's probably a classroom."

Samantha shone her light on a sign next to the door—Classroom 4. "Let's take a peek."

Eddie opened the door and walked in, Samantha at his heels. Inside, at least thirty small wooden lift-top desks sat on the floor in perfectly aligned rows, each with a glass cup in a small round cutout at the corner. Eddie aimed his beam at a cup. Covered by a metal lid, it appeared to have dark liquid inside. "An inkwell?"

Samantha's beam joined his. "Probably. I can't imagine what else it could be." She moved her beam to books and a small wooden ruler on the desktop. "All set for the next class period."

Eddie walked up an aisle between two columns of desks toward a blackboard on a wall at the front of the room. A message on the board in cursive script read, "Thursday, 20 October 1966."

"Well, we know *when* we are," Eddie said as he looked at a teacher's desk near the board. "Now we need to find out *where* we are."

Samantha opened a book on top of one of the desks. "Something's written here." She set her flashlight beam on the inner page and squinted as she read out loud. "*Class Four, Pantglas Junior School. Mr. Clark's class*."

She closed the book. "So that's *where* we are. Pantglas Junior School."

"Good info." Eddie shrugged his backpack down. "That's enough info to ask Gecko what the coming catastrophe is all about."

Samantha shuddered. "And check the negative energy reading. I'm starting to feel the eels for reals in my gut."

Eddie withdrew Gecko from the backpack and checked the reading, a red numeral in the top right-hand corner. "Twenty-eight. That's high. No wonder you're feeling it."

She lifted her brow. "You're not?"

"I've been feeling it ever since we got here." He focused on Gecko and spoke clearly as rain continued pelting the windows. "What catastrophe happened in Great Britain at Pantglas Junior School in October of nineteen sixty-six?"

Gecko stayed silent.

Eddie blinked at the screen. No text showed up either. "That's weird."

"Maybe give him a date range. October twentieth onward."

"Or the *nineteenth* onward," Eddie said. "Maybe the teacher wrote the twentieth to prepare for tomorrow's class." He focused on Gecko again and set his mouth closer. "What catastrophe happened in Great Britain at Pantglas Junior School on or after October nineteenth in nineteen sixty-six?"

Again Gecko stayed silent.

"Something's definitely wrong. Gecko's never been at a loss for words."

Gecko's screen filled with a stream of jumbled letters and numbers.

"Now it's spitting out nonsense."

Samantha looked on. "Negative energy's giving Gecko a headache?"

"Maybe. If the meter's accurate, negative energy is up to thirty now. Maybe the local seed of catastrophe won't let us take a shortcut to figure out what it's up to." Eddie turned a dial on the front. "Let's see if radio mode is functioning."

Static hissed through the speaker, followed by unfamiliar music. When the song finished, a smooth male voice spoke in a crooning manner. "We're cruising into the day's final hour on this nineteenth day of October here on your sweet-swinging Radio Caroline South. This is your host keeping you company on this dark and stormy night. We've got rain drumming down hard out there across Britain, but we've got the warmth right here. Up next, a lesser-known song from The Beatles, appropriately titled Rain."

When the music started, Eddie turned the radio off. "I guess that means it's almost eleven o'clock."

"Yeah. I picked up on that. But we're not any closer to knowing when the disaster is coming or what it's going to be."

"Well, we could rest here and wait for morning." Eddie peered again at the negative energy reading, now at 31. "But this energy spike worries me. I don't want

to waste time. Let's go outside and see what this place looks like."

Samantha lifted her brow. "In the rain?"

"Yep. I brought a rain poncho. Didn't you?"

"I had to. Mom wouldn't let me go without one. And they're bright yellow for extra visibility."

"And our hiking boots are waterproof, so what's the problem?"

"Is that a serious question? Tromping around at nearly midnight at the brink of disaster in a foreign country on another Earth while it's raining cats and dogs out there? If anyone sees us, they'll think we've gone crazy."

Eddie put Gecko in his backpack. "Got a better idea?"

"Nope." She took her backpack off and unzipped the main pocket. "Let's get our neon suits on and do this thing."