

IAIN RICHMOND

# WHISTLERS



# WHISTLERS

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IAIN RICHMOND



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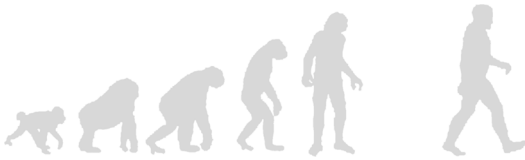
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2025: GAIA HYPOTHESIS (A  
WARNING) BY DR. KALAN BAURO



**N**ovember 2025—United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31)

A PALE, sickly form hid behind a towering curtain. Stringy arms appeared and vanished, the shimmering material fluttering with each flapping movement. “Are you sure we want to give Dr. Bauro a platform to spread this insanity? We now have space stations bristling with nuclear warheads and *this* is what we’re going to hear?”

Another form, stout, hair springing forth where high-styled fashion ended and wearing a suit worth more than most cars, answered, “The doctor is standing behind you. Why not direct your question to her?”

The German chancellor spun awkwardly as the scientist

from the Island Nation of Kiribati's name sounded over the speakers.

Dr. Bauro brushed aside the curtain and moved past them without a word. Standing behind a lectern almost her size, she arranged her papers and grabbed the controller for the presentation equipment. With a single click, the audience erupted after the first image burned into existence on the vast screen behind her.

*The Gaia Hypothesis: The earth is a single, self-maintaining organism. The earth has an immune system and Humanity bears all the traits of a deadly virus and thus, humanity will trigger an 'immune reaction.'*

Patiently, Dr. Bauro waited for the laughter to die down, only to be replaced with insults and threats. She stood straight, eyes calmly searching the mob for those who believed and were prepared to hear the rest. A scuffle broke out close to the stage. A few moments passed and security had the crowd under control.

"Based on my personal research, and that of most of the scientific community, all indications point to Gaia's immune reaction being initiated within the next six months." Dr. Bauro paused, taking in the stunned silence. *They're scared, she thought, behind the fear, the anger, was belief or the feeling something is coming. They are right to be afraid.*

"It will be a global response similar in magnitude to what destroyed the most 'successful' species of dinosaurs." She adjusted the microphone and continued, "As most in this auditorium know, I do not accept the asteroid theory as stated. The asteroid was simply bad luck for most of the seven-hundred species remaining. The dinosaur species we are unlikely to find a trace of are those that populated and consumed at a rate that threw the world out of balance. This will be Gaia's third 'Immune Reaction--'"



“The second?” bellowed a reporter from the media section off to the side of the main stage. “What was the *second* response, Doctor?”

Noting the obvious sarcasm in his voice, Dr. Bauro answered anyway. “The ‘Missing Link’ sitting in the evolutionary line between modern humans and our anthropoid progenitors—”

“That *link* was unearthed in South Africa years ago.”

“Can I finish?” Her dark eyes drilled into the deflating reporter. “Thank you. Every so often, links are discovered and pieced into our evolutionary trail, filling voids in the human fossil chain. These are not *missing links*, rather *connecting links* showing a steady evolution in a relatively undeviating delineation. But,” Dr. Bauro held up a finger, “we’ve never found the missing link that filled multiple millennia prior to the rise of modern humans... until now. This transitional link was the most successful of all anthropoids—”

“Where is this specimen you speak of?” voiced a scientist from Angola. “There must have been thousands of them. We should’ve found bones, tools, paintings... something. Now, suddenly, you say you have found this ‘Link?’ Just one?”

*An honest question, thought Dr. Bauro. Rude for cutting in, but sincere.*

“Millions. There must have been millions. We have uncovered one,” Bauro stated.

The auditorium erupted.

She raised both hands, mouthing the word ‘please’ as she motioned for quiet.

Hundreds of independent conversations fell to a whispered chorus across the auditorium, moving in waves from side to side until Dr. Bauro brought up the second image

with the small remote in her hand. This time the curving apparatus towering behind her produced a blurry three-dimensional sphere slowly rotating out and over the crowd, growing in clarity and size in the airspace above them. Gasps turned to rapt silence. Every soul in the vast assembly hall glued onto the scene above them.

“This sample was discovered three weeks ago in the Furtwängler Glacier on Mount Kilimanjaro. We are incredibly fortunate. You are about to travel back in time.” Dr. Bauro stepped away from the lectern, finished half a bottle of water and took a few deep breaths before returning to the microphone. She scanned the great hall. Every set of eyes she could see remained locked onto the icy sphere hanging five meters overhead.

A chill rippled across Bauro’s skin. The new holo-feed tech was generations beyond the old display unit. *The detail of the vast image rotating over the audience was stunning, she thought, and terrifying.*

Within the frozen globe knelt five smooth, human-like forms the color of shadow and coal. Each hunching over a splayed-out body. A matted mop of hair sprang from the top of a head, protruding from a mouth stretched wide like the unhinged jaw of a python. Another shadow on all fours and lower than the rest, dragged a long black tongue over a dark section of the ice beneath a severed leg. The rest of the shadows were in the process of tearing or swallowing.

Dr. Bauro held back a grimace and palmed the controller again. The sphere’s rotation froze and zoomed in on the mop of matted hair. She had spent an extra few hours adding this one action to her presentation. The space above the rapt crowd filled with matted hair. A gently sloping forehead with a heavier brow ended in the jaws of something never seen by modern humans until this moment.

“My theory is that these,” the doctor paused, “predators react similarly to how our bodies’ white blood cells respond to invading bacteria, germs or viruses. I believe they are Gaia’s immune systems specific, adaptive counter to that which is out of balance. To an invader. The proliferation of dinosaurs,” she pointed to the sphere, “the Missing Link,” her hand dropped to the edge of the lectern, “and soon, the modern hominid.”

Hushed whispers again filled the room.

“There are no bones.”

The deep tones emanating from the heavily muscled frame of the famed scientist from the Australian National University turned every head in his direction. Each word easily reached every corner of the hall.

“You are correct, Dr. Rangawhenua. Please,” Dr. Bauro extended an open hand toward the seated figure a few dozen rows from the stage, “your thoughts?”

The top mind in the field of Marine Biology stood, staring at the scene overhead. “Cartilage. They share the general shape of a human, but look at their legs. Each is curving, not bending over. Lack of joints? Each curve happens from a different point along its length. I see no wrinkles, even from the jaw area stretched around the skull. The opening is wider than the width of the creature’s head.” Dr. Rangawhenua folded his arms around his barrel of a chest. “Possibly a cartilage frame. Like a shark, except these creatures may not deposit calcium salts in the cartilage to strengthen it as a shark does. Without the deposits, their frames would remain strong and highly flexible.”

“Astute as always, Doctor.”

He flashed Bauro a blinding smile, nodded respectfully, and sat down.

Dr. Bauro adjusted the sphere and zoomed in on the

hands and feet of the shadowy form on all fours, with its serpentine tongue pressed to the ground. “Webbing between the toes and fingers. Yet, this ‘sample’ was carved out of a glacier near the summit of the tallest mountain on the African continent.”

Dr. Kalan Bauro from the small Republic of Kiribati continued her presentation without interruption.

## HUNTERS OF THE HYDROSPHERE



**F**ebbruary 2026—*Bangladesh, Mouths of the Ganges*  
 Research Station #BBOO1

DR. KALAN BAURO sat slumped in her chair, rapping delicate fingertips on the edge of a paper-thin keyboard. A worn chart of the Bay of Bengal lay half open, with partially filled mugs weighing down the ends. Coffee rings in various shades of brown and gold merged with the depth contours and marked the passage of time like scratches on a prison wall. Dozens of dots glowing in shades of yellow and orange lit the screen, precariously perched on the edge of the desk.

*Ninety days*, she thought. *Ninety days of monitoring thousands upon thousands of square kilometers of surface area on every body of water my team could find on maps, and many that were not.* “But that was only a fraction of the waterways,” she murmured, fingers still rolling like waves across the aluminum surface. It was the aquifers that required most of the tech. Deep, dark and filled with things wanting to be left alone. *Yes*, she thought, *if Gaia had a hiding place from humanity, buried beneath prying eyes was the perfect location.*

A dark orange dot flickered, then burned a fiery red. A sharp ping sounded throughout Research Station #BBOO1. Dr. Bauro shot upright, rubbing the sleep from her eyes as she leaned toward the screen showing the twenty-seven temperature buoys. Within seconds, the room filled with researchers scouring over incoming data. Another sensor turned from orange to red.

Her fingers flashed over her keyboard, “Confirm temperature increase with our satellites.”

“Average increase of one point eight degrees. It’s confirmed.” A voice sounded from another desk a few

meters behind Dr. Bauro. “NOAA is already sending an international alert.”

Twenty-seven sensor buoys flashed red.

“Shut off that alarm!” Dr. Bauer slid her chair to the right and brought up a high-definition satellite feed of the Bay of Bengal. A few strokes of the keyboard and she pushed the feed to the overhead screen, filling the far wall of the station’s primary workspace. “The surface is wrong.” She swallowed hard. “Zoom the SAT to limit. Begin thirty clicks up the Ganges Delta and pan toward the Bay.”

The room fell silent while the dedicated military-grade satellite responded and zoomed in. Bubbles broke across the surface of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers and roiled the once placid face of the Ganges Delta and Bay of Bengal.

“It’s boiling!” cried a young tech. “That’s impossi—”

“It’s not boiling. Get a hold of yourself.” Dr. Bauro stood. “The surface temp is only a few degrees higher. Those are air bubbles. Listen up everyone! I need you in your focus groups.” She turned as she spoke, making eye contact with each of the researchers as she rotated. “Gaia’s using parts of her hydrosphere. Scan your incoming data feeds and do it quickly.”

Nods came in waves.

“Let’s work through the basics.” Bauro looked at three researchers huddled around a computer to her left. “Vapor?” Bauro waited but was highly confident the response would be a ‘no.’

“No change in sensor readings,” sounded the lead researcher of that team.

“As we expected.” Bauro moved to the next group. “Ice?”

“No additional evidence, no change in the sensor readings,” stated a deep voice. “We found the lone sample in

glacial ice, but we still believe it was a rare natural freeze event that caught them by surprise.”

“Agreed.” Bauro turned to the largest group of researchers crowded around multiple workstations. “Liquid?” *And here it comes*, she thought, *waterways above and below ground. Gaia’s arteries.*

“Liquid surface?” Dr. Bauro repeated.

“I... I...” The leader of the team threw up her hands. “Everywhere. On everything.” Her face glowed from the rolling images and text moving across multiple screens. “Oceans, lakes, rivers, ponds, bogs, desert oasis, watering holes, village wells. My god.” The researcher turned her chair towards Dr. Bauro. “Bubbles. Reports streaming in from everywhere. Bubbles covering the surface. Cities, suburbs, country and wilderness. It’s really happening.”

“I believe it is,” Bauro stated. “Continue monitoring and pushing your data to Geneva. The United Nations will take it from there.”

Every researcher in the room remained still, wearing a similar look that Dr. Bauro understood. Her grandfather wore it in every photo he was in during WWII. The face of those that knew death was imminent. “It’s time to contact your loved ones, but make it fast. We still have work to do.” She sat down, slid a hand into a loose front-pocket and pulled out her phone, keeping it under her desk and out of sight. She kept her head up, but eyes down and sent two texts.

ITS BEGUN.TAKE HER TO THE  
SHELTER.LOCK THE HATCH & DONT  
OPEN IT FOR ANYONE. DONT COME OUT  
UNTIL YOUR SUPPLIES ARE GONE. I  
LOVE YOU NOW DESTROY YOUR PHONE.



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Hands shaking, Dr. Bauro scrolled with her thumbs until reaching the already prepared ‘SOS’ in her Contacts List.

GAIA IMMUNE REACTION  
TRIGGERED.SEND FINAL REPORTS.GET  
TO YOUR SHELTER.WAS AN HONOR  
GOOD LUCK.



27 FEBRUARY 2026—BRAZIL, *Copacabana Beach Field Station*  
#CBoog

DAVI DOS SANTOS waded through a sea of beautiful people. He pulled on the end of a Velcro strap, making sure his work phone was tight against his lean bicep. With each step, the water temperature dropped a fraction of a degree. *But Jesus, it was hot*, he thought and continued to move further from the beach.

February was warm, but thirty-eight was blistering and the heat radiating from the sand was close to unbearable. *It would've been insane if there weren't hundreds of thousands of locals and tourists crammed into the shallows*, he thought. Davi looked at his feet through the clear water. *It's also a rare 'clean-ocean' day at Copacabana, the neighborhoods taking advantage of it.*

“Excuse me.” Davi gently tapped a bronzed shoulder and smiled as he slid between a group, happily debating the latest controversial outcome of a Flamengo futebol match. He continued his sloshing, weaving march, making his way beyond the edge of the crowd.

“This’ll do.” Davi aimed the waterproof control pad

toward the lone temperature buoy anchored a hundred meters further out. While the control pad synced to the sensor, he turned his head toward the towering skyscraper hotels, apartments and restaurants that loomed high above the crescent-shaped sands of the world's most popular beach. *Stunning, yet sad*, he pondered as the gentle vibration of the control pad let him know the data transfer finished.

Wiping the moisture off the small screen, Davi scanned the information.

“Our part of the Atlantic’s hot today,” he mumbled. “What the hell?” He jerked, dropping the pad in the water. Vibrations pulsed across his bicep, his phone lit red while a siren blared from its tiny speakers. Bubbles broke across the surface of the ocean as Davi ripped the Velcro strap off and stared at the message from his boss, Dr. Kalan Bauro.

GAIA IMMUNE REACTION  
TRIGGERED.SEND FINAL REPORTS.GET  
TO YOUR SHELTER.WAS AN HONOR  
GOOD LUCK.

Piercing screams stabbed at his eardrums from behind. The phone splashed and came to rest next to the control pad at Davi’s feet. His mouth hung open, eyes wide and fixed on the dark shapes growing from the shallow bottom until the water churned a smokey gray. Pain shot up from where his legs used to be. Davi’s head sunk beneath the churning water, the stumps from his torso resting on the sandy bottom.

*Shadows within shadows*, was his final thought.

Davi dos Santos’ torso spun in the frothing darkness, headless, then disappeared along with two-hundred and fifty-seven thousand beautiful people.

## LAST OF THE BLACK WATCH



**D**ecember 2028—Two Years after Gaia's Immune Reaction, Scotland, Ardrossan Harbour, Ferry Terminal basement (former WWII bomb shelter)

LOGAN CAMPBELL'S eyes sprang open to complete darkness. He pulled off the wool blanket and swung his legs over the mattress.

Cool, damp concrete. Logan wiggled, then tapped his toes against the floor and reached back slowly until his hand met the concrete wall.

“Bunker,” he whispered with a long exhale. “Just a nightmare.”

He reached down to the exact spot he left the candle and lighter, even though he didn’t need them anymore. Logan knew every feature of the bunker, down to the pockmarks in the concrete. He could walk its entirety in the black without bumping a knee or stubbing a toe.

A chuckle broke loose. He did his best to clamp a hand over his mouth, but the memories of the sounds he made during the ‘trike incident’ of 2026 flooded his mind. Running into a shin-high mobile chunk of steel in pitch-dark had set him back for a day. Sami slept through it. Of course.

“Daddy,” a yawn followed, “Dadd—”

Logan squinted, focused on the other side of the room, and waited, hoping Sami fell back to sleep. He couldn’t see the dog, but knew Thistle was watching from the bed. The massive deerhound never left Sami’s side, which was one of the many reasons Logan loved the hound. Seconds passed and a gentle snore comforted his ears, followed by the shifting weight of Thistle bedding back down.

*Have at least a few hours,* he thought. Sami’s third birthday was coming up—or *had it just passed?*—and she already slept through the night. Logan pulled on worn woolen trousers, socks, and a jumper with far more holes than was functional and headed toward the storage room. He stopped in the hallway outside the bedroom. “God, I miss you, Kalan. You’d be so proud of her. Sami’s just like you,” he said. The words stung.



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A STOUT CANDLE rested on top of a crate, illuminating the small storage room. The smokeless flame danced toward the ventilation exhaust grate. Logan sat on another crate, working through a list scribbled on a piece of cardboard. He glanced at the candle. The wax had burned down to the next notch since he entered the storage room. He uttered a number and motioned toward a meter-tall stack of used batteries. Logan pointed toward a brick-like wall of previously consumed packages of military field rations. Each sealed pouch now filled with 'compost' from the toilet and neatly stacked. Down the list he went, marking some items with a check, scratching a line through others. *I've done this a hundred times*, he thought, *but this time, it's pointless.*

"For fuck's sake." Logan stood up, shredded the worn list, dispersing the bits like confetti. "It's time." His eyes dropped to the small stack of remaining MREs. "Food's almost gone, water's low, only a few candles left." He grabbed the plate holding the candle and took a few steps to reach the far wall.

White hash marks in tight groupings of thirty covered the concrete.

"Eighteen. Shit. Eighteen months when the natural light source still worked." He looked up to the round translucent disk set in the concrete half a meter above his head. "How long since you went dark? A month, a year?" He didn't know how many days had passed since the last sun rose or set. The solar charger went dead the same day the light went dark. He hadn't known when to add another hash mark since.

Logan stared at the steel mechanism to his right. The rusty lock bridged the metal hatch and the concrete surrounding it.

"I can't do it. I fucking can't!" he pushed through gritted

teeth. Dragging his feet back across the cool floor, Logan stood in front of the armory door. Lean, chiseled muscle stood taut beneath his loose clothing. He'd shed two-stone since the MREs pile reached one-hundred meals. Running the long corridors, and cranking out hundreds of pushups, sit-ups and anything else he could use to provide his body with resistance. Even Sami loved to sit on his back and help daddy get stronger and faster.

*You can. You must.*

Kalan's voice always broke into his thoughts moments before he was about to slide into despair.

*I can. I will,* he thought and remembered the final TEXT Kalan sent. So long ago.

ITS BEGUN.TAKE HER TO THE  
SHELTER.LOCK THE HATCH & DONT  
OPEN IT FOR ANYONE. DONT COME OUT  
UNTIL YOUR SUPPLIES ARE GONE. I  
LOVE YOU NOW DESTROY YOUR PHONE.

Logan and Kalan had prepared for the moment the earth would defend herself. But never did he truly believe they'd need the bunker. God, was he ever wrong. As a former member of Scotland's Black Watch and a recently reformed mercenary, he'd seen the eradication of Gai'a's most sacred environments. Hell, he'd been part of her destruction in some ways, but what came from the sea that day was unlike any horror Logan had ever experienced.

Dying in the mouths of the 'Whistlers' would be horrific, but being shredded and consumed in seconds wasn't his greatest fear. He'd witnessed thousands of souls ripped apart and devoured as he fled with a year-old Sami pressed tight against his chest. The fear that gripped Logan's heart

## WHISTLERS

was the chance he would live long enough to see it happen to Sami.

He sucked in a snot-filled breath and wiped at his eyes, then input the five-digit code into the number pad. The bolt slid back and the round, half-meter thick hatch swung open. Ducking down with the candle outstretched, he stepped through the opening. Rifles, pistols, knives, compound bows, arrows... *keep it simple*, he thought, *light and simple*.

Logan studied the list he'd written on the wall. Scratched it with a piece of chalk over the first few days after their arrival, when the carnage was fresh.

### **SHADOWMEN (WHISTLERS)**

- NO FASTER THAN HUMANS
- MOUTH/SPLIT AT THE TOP OF THE HEAD
- MAKE A HIGH-PITCHED, BARELY AUDIBLE WHISTLING SOUND WHEN THEY MOVE, LOUDER WHEN RUNNING/CHASING (COULD BE A SCREAM?)
- DOGS CAN HEAR/DETECT THE WHISTLERS' NOISE LONG BEFORE HUMANS
- **\*\*DOGS ARE VITAL TO HUMAN SURVIVAL\*\***
- ONLY ATTACKED PEOPLE, MEN FIRST, ALWAYS FIRST
- NO VISIBLE EYES, NOSE, EARS, JUST THE OPENING ON TOP OF THE HEAD
- COLOR SEEMS TO SHIFT FROM DARK GRAY TO BLACK WHEN HUNTING/ATTACKING
- WEAPONS: HANDS, MOUTH?
- FEROCIOUS, STRONG, BUT SEEM TO DIE LIKE HUMANS, VULNERABLE BODIES
- NUMBERS MAY BE THE WHISTLERS' GREATEST STRENGTH. EVERYWHERE, ENDLESS STREAM

Folding his arms, Logan stared for a few more seconds.

“Fuck it. I’ll take the Mossberg.” He grabbed the sling on the twelve-gauge tactical shotgun with the pistol grip. Logan ran a calloused palm gently down the short barrel of the meticulously maintained, powerful weapon. “Going to be up close and personal. If you’re needed.” He patted the shotgun and slung it over his shoulder. Next, Logan grabbed ammo belts based on the number he thought he could wear with a three-year-old and a pack strapped to his back.

“Five at fifty rounds each,” he stated. “That’ll do, or it won’t matter.” He turned to leave, but caught the glint of his old friend—*Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife*—fitted tightly in a sheath among dozens of blades. He grabbed it, spun in between his fingers, then looped it onto his belt.

The candle had burned halfway to the next notch. Sami and Thistle would soon wake. Logan needed to pack the last of the MREs and the rest of their gear before Sami came looking for him. At almost three, she was better in the dark than he was and almost as comfortable in the black as Thistle.



“TISSOW!” Sami squealed as the deerhound lowered his shaggy snout. She stretched high above her head and hugged her best friend. “Wuv you, Tissow!”

Logan lit another candle and placed it high on a steel shelf. The kitchen glowed and, for a moment, he wondered if he might miss the concrete walls and dull metal furniture. He placed a froth filled jar containing the last of the powdered milk in the center of the table.

A detailed map of the Ardrossan Harbor Ferry Terminal covered half of the table. The harbor they had lived next to



for years now without seeing it since the day they arrived. A hand-drawn line serpented from their bunker to Clyde Marina. If all went well, an old wooden sailboat packed with supplies would await docked at the end of the main-float. Beneath that map lay a chart of the Firth of Clyde that lay beyond the marina. Twenty-one kilometers to cross the deepest coastal waters of the British Isles. Waters that only a few years ago birthed millions of predators—the Whistlers.

Sami's black curls appeared from below as she scaled the chair and came to rest on her ammo box booster seat. A bright yellow bowl with a spoon shaped like a dolphin sitting next to it, sat empty in front of her.

"Porge, Daddy?" She tilted her head, squinting her bright green eyes.

*She knows.* Logan exhaled, smiling, though he felt like screaming. *Sami has always known,* he thought, *just like her mother. And now she knows it's time to go.* "No porridge. Daddy's saved something for our last day here."

A gray snout rose from under the table-top. Thistle sat next to Sami. His noble face above her.

"Of course, Thistle." Logan looked at the hound. "Something for you as well."

He reached into the cabinet behind them and pulled out a mini-box of sugary cereal with a leprechaun on the front and the last Beef Stew MRE. He poured the box into Sami's bowl. She clapped and giggled as Logan added the milk. Thistle held his noble gaze, but the waterfall of drool flowing from the corners of his mouth said it all. Logan emptied the entire pack of stew into the hound's bowl. The moment Logan sat down, Thistle began attacking his meal.

He sat there, not wanting to miss a single marshmallow stuck to her cheek, or the milk-like water spilling from her smiling lips. Even Thistle was nothing short of beautiful.

They had given Logan a reason to live. To hope. And now to fight. His eyes moved to the backpack in the corner, the shotgun and the hundreds of rounds of ammo. *Five hundred meters from the bunker to the sailboat*, he thought, panic dripping into his veins. *Day? Night? Boat there or sunk? No idea what's beyond the exterior hatch. Millions of Whistlers waiting or worse—*

“Daddy!” Sami held out both arms, smiling from ear-to-ear with a few clover-shaped marshmallows stuck to her chin.

Logan fought back tears, slid off his seat, and knelt next to her. Before he realized it, Logan was hugging her like it was the last time. Thistle licked his bowl a final time and moved to join them, using his muzzle to pry and wiggle his massive body into the embrace.

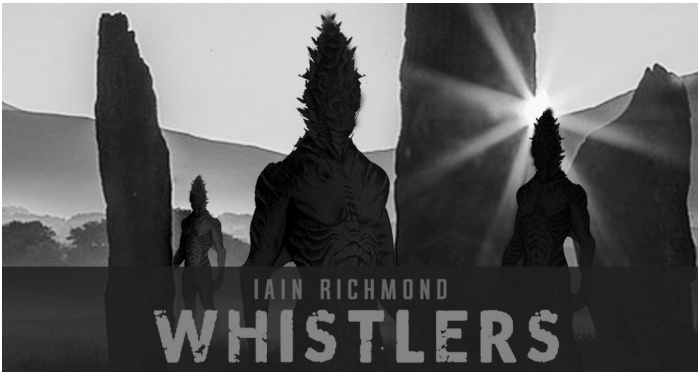
Logan lost himself in the moment until a question crept back into his mind. It was always waiting to slither into his thoughts the moment he felt at peace. In all the months represented by white hash marks on concrete, and all the time since the bunkers light fell into darkness, not a single knock had sounded on the bunker's exterior, metal door. The bunker was buried in the bowels of the Ferry Terminal, but hundreds if not thousands of people in the area knew of its location. Knew of its heavy plated hatches and thick concrete walls, floor and ceiling.

And not a single knock.

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