

towards the unMaking of Heaven

Happiness: A Planet

Book 2

by Sam Smith

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Sam Smith

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All the characters in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

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for **Dr Emilia M Galli**, Jessica's saviour.

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Foreword

What follows is a reconstruction of events that took place seven years and not sixty thousand million kilometres from this city.

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Chapter One

“Somebody stole our moon,” the Member for North Two held the orb. “That’s the length and breadth of it.”

His brief peroration pointedly delivered, the Member for North Two released the orb. It glided across the circular table to the member for South Six, sitting almost directly opposite.

The rules governing this Extraordinary Convention of the Senate were those given it by Space. No Member of the Senate might speak unless at least one hand rested on the orb. Nor, if the panel in front of any other Member of the Senate came alight, could he or she continue to speak beyond the minute visually counted down before him or her.

The mechanics of the Senate are the same as that for every other populated planet and for every populous station and city under Space’s jurisdiction. Members register their desire to speak on the panel before them, or cancel their desire to do so if someone else speaks their mind for them. The duration of the speech is governed by how many others have registered their desire to speak and by how much time has been allowed for the debate. So, even in the most heated of discussions, no matter how agitated the Senate Members may be, none speak out of turn, none interrupt, because all know that eventually, and with precise equity, the orb will come to them.

At this Senate Meeting the Member for South Six, as usual, appointed himself the voice of reason and calm.

“Let us examine the facts. The fact is that not one of us here can be sure when our moon disappeared. Not one of us, from what I’ve heard here, can remember exactly when we last saw it.” The panel before North Three, diametrically opposite, came alight. The sixty second countdown before the Member for South Six started.

“The only fact we can be certain of is that it has been missing for the last five days. Because it was five days ago when the Member for South Eight started asking others if anyone had seen the moon. Then, and only then, did we notice its absence. Then, and only then, did we

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notice that we had lost contact with XE2. The fact is, until contact is re-established, we can't know what has happened."

On its release the orb floated over to North Three.

"I don't wish to appear offensive," the Member for North Three said, "but the fact is that the Member for South Six doesn't appear to care. It matters, however, to me. If I don't get my crops off, bang goes my livelihood. If we never re-establish contact he can carry on as he is. Me? Space is my only market."

North followed by South the Senate Members were sitting in numerical order around the table. North One sitting beside South One, North Two beside South Two, and so on, until South Eight came to sit beside North One. And exactly half of those Senate Members were farmers. Which is only to be expected on any planet.

On any colonised planet Space divides the globe into sixteen equal segments, regardless of local topography, even where the dividing line cuts through a local city, even where it cuts through individual dwellings. The occupant of such a divided dwelling may then opt to vote in one segment or another. In the more populous segments the most articulate, the most energetic, are invariably elected. In the less populous areas it is generally the farmer with the greatest amount of land. Although the few other local citizenry of that segment probably have livelihoods dependent on that farmer, those citizenry are protected by the laws of Space, therefore their votes cannot be blatantly coerced. The farmer being elected is rather a natural outcome of the situation. Because the farmer, having most dealings with Space, is better able to represent the planet there. The farmer is also the most interested in having his views represented to Space and is, consequently, the keenest to see himself elected.

The Member for South Eight, who now held the orb, was just such a farmer.

"Actually the Member for South Six is incorrect when he says that we can only be sure that no-one has seen the moon in the last five days. It was three weeks ago when I noticed that it didn't rise. I didn't pay much attention for a couple of days, then it was cloudy for a couple more days. Then I realised that it wasn't there. And I didn't believe it. That's why I kept it to myself. No-one wants to appear a fool. But I knew, by that time, that we should have had a half moon. I checked my calendar and my dates. They agreed with me. And it was then, and only then, that I started asking around. It was five days ago that the convention of this Extraordinary Meeting was first mooted. Three days ago it was decided."

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Seventy two hours is the minimum time in which a Senate can be convened on a planet. Time for the Senate Members to rearrange their affairs, prepare their case, do some research into the subject under debate and physically travel to the Senate, in this case in the planet's equatorial capital. At first on colonised planets, because of the inconvenient overland distances, the Senates were held by televisual links. But these were found to be ineffective. At such removes the subtleties of conversation were lost, nuances and inflexions filtered out; the passive reactions of one's fellow Members passing unnoticed, the underlying mood going unremarked. And such dispersed Senates were prone to manipulation by determined lobbyists. Whereas having to physically congregate in the one place views and experiences could be exchanged away from the debating table, off the record. Consensus is thus often achieved prior to any debate; and the debate simply takes the form of putting on record the majority and opposing views. So, despite the inconvenience of attending the Senate, like the rest of the constitution given them by Space, planetary inhabitants accept it because, for the best of all reasons, like the slow movement of the orb leads to reasoned debate, it works.

The Member for North Four, a technician, now held the orb.

"I was one of the first to be contacted by the Member for South Eight." A nod across the table acknowledged their friendship. "I was compiling some reports for XE2. My constituents' crops have all gone. I'm expecting no ships until next year. So I included in my report an urgent request for any information concerning the absence of our moon. I should have received that information, by return transmission, two days ago at the latest. None came."

The orb moved across to North One, a trader. "Four days ago I had a ship at my place. It left an hour or so before this meeting was called. No reply on that?"

For direct question and answer the orb can be directed three times back and forth between interrogator and interlocutor.

"No," the Member for North Four replied, "And I've checked back over the last three weeks. All information we have received has come via ship. The ship in North One and a ship two weeks ago in North Five. All routine information. The next ship is due in two weeks in North Three."

The orb was now directed to North Three.

"Exactly. And if that ship doesn't come all my fruit will spoil. It's alright for you Southern Members, and for you timber farmers and technicians, but if I don't get that fruit off I'm finished here."

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The laws governing the action of the individuals on any planet being the same as those which pertain throughout the rest of civilisation, the Senate of a planet has few actual powers. It can raise revenue for planetary projects through taxation of its own inhabitants, but, even then, both taxes and projects are subject to Space veto, in this instance in the person of the Director of the Station known as XE2. If the station should disagree with that veto, there of course exist ever higher courts of appeal. But that is beside the point. The main function of any Senate is to represent the views of its constituents to Space. In the case of this Senate, the North Seven segment of the planet being entirely composed of ocean and icecap, and being therefore wholly uninhabited, that Member was elected by everyone on the planet to be their Senate Spokesman.

The Member for North Seven was rotund and red-faced. Physically the other Senate Members were as diverse as anywhere else in Space.

It was as Spokesman that the Member for North Seven now called the orb to him.

“I’d like to point out to the Member for North Three that it was a Southern Member who first brought our attention to the absence of our moon; and it has been a Northern technician who has attempted to find out what is happening Out There.”

The orb travelled back to North Three.

“I apologise unreservedly. It was my anxiety speaking. But I am the first to be affected by this. So what are we going to do?”

“All I want to know,” the Member for South Four held the orb, “is where is our moon? It must be somewhere. Moons don’t just disappear.”

A few Members glanced askance at the Member for South Four. The orb moved along to the Member for South Five.

The Member for South Five was not run-of-the-mill for Senate Members. A resident scientist, an anthropologist, his presence in the Senate had come about due to his campaigning for funds and permission for his research; and having once started campaigning, almost of its own volition, he had ended up in the Senate.

He hadn’t yet spoken at this Extraordinary Convention.

“I fully sympathise with the Member for North Three’s anxieties. However, if we could look at the wider implications, we will see that this concerns every single person on this planet. I agree with the Member for South Eight that the moon has been absent for about three weeks. As you all know I live on a river estuary.” Another oddity.

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“Three weeks ago we had neap tides. Those tides have gradually subsided altogether. I have checked. We now have no tides of any note anywhere around the globe. The absence of tides must affect the weather. At the moment it is too soon to say what any new weather pattern will be. Entirely subjective of course, but the weather on my estuary appears extremely unseasonable and erratic at the moment. A new stable pattern will take possibly years to emerge. Sea levels will change. As will the extent of the icecaps. Areas of land now under cultivation may become wholly unproductive. Some settlements may become uninhabitable. Land temperatures will change. Crops now viable in one area may no longer be so. Farm boundaries will have to be redrawn. Those are the probable long term effects; and they affect us all. Space will redraw those boundaries, therefore it is imperative that we re-establish contact with Space as soon as possible.”

“Boundaries redrawn!” the Member for North Two expostulated as soon as his fingers contacted the orb, “Moon stolen!” No-one knows when or where. No more tides! Weather stabilising! The point is farms will have to be moved. And we all know what that means. One long endless battle with the Department. Remember that drought? See what I mean.” He released the orb.

Like many other farmers the Member for North Two affected bad grammar to hide his, to him, unseemly intelligence.

The spokesman called the orb to him.

“While whatever caused our moon to disappear, and I have heard many suggestions — some bizarre, some plausible — the exact reason must, for the moment, remain a mystery. The probable results of that disappearance, however, have been admirably summed up by the Member for South Five. For the immediate benefit of the Member for North Three, and for the peace of mind of the rest of us, I propose that we send one of our ships immediately to XE2. That way we will know within four days what is happening. Are there any dissenters?”

The Member for North Three registered his desire to speak.

“I’d like to propose, as I stand to gain most from an early answer, that I send a ship to XE2. My son will be only too willing to go.”

The orb travelled back to the Spokesman.

“Then we are agreed?” No panels came alight. “I therefore declare this meeting closed.”

All waited until the orb had moved to the centre of the table and then, murmuring among themselves, the Senate Members one by one left their seats.

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End Of Sample

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