



ENTANGLEMENT

Andrew J Thomas

Entanglement

ɛnˈtʌŋɡ(ə)lm(ə)nt/

- 1 a. Relationship, Romance, Deeply involved, Entwined together.
b. A mysterious affinity or complex situation.
- a. According to modern physics, Entanglement is central to the
- 2 many-worlds theory of parallel universes.
- b. Entangled particles can stay connected over small and cosmic distances alike, so if particles can do it, why not people?

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It all started well enough

Fate was bored. Nothing funny had happened in days, and it needed a laugh. When the UK's most secret research station vanished though, it smiled. When odd things started happening to some moles and a brick, it chuckled. When it realised what was coming next, its laugh was heard across every world. It was going to be a *very* good week.

But what *was* coming next? Well, imagine you wake up in a parallel world where everything looks familiar, but no-one knows who you are. Worse still, you've no idea how you got there. Then you shift to another world, and another, and another, year after year, until eventually you find yourself in one where it's you who doesn't know anybody. No friends, no family, no-one. Could you cope? That was what a woman called TC was about to find out.

Then there were the cakes.



I'll get to all that though, as our story begins two years before. In GCHQ¹ no less, that ultra-secret government building which sits in plain sight, disguised as a giant, silver doughnut. In a basement room sat the Director General of MI5, the UK Secretary of State for Defence, and five eminent scientists. They were there to discuss the security implications of some recent findings at CERN². It was an unusual mix of people, all of whom had different agendas. Even so, they still reached a conclusion, and three months later, the DG also got the support of the head of the Royal Air Force. Three months after that, the DG and the Defence Secretary met again, only this time in 10 Downing Street. The Prime Minister was testing both their knowledge and their patience.

"And you're sure he's the right person for the job?" demanded the PM in a thin, nasal whine.

"Well, both groups like him," snapped the Defence Secretary.

"Both groups?"

"The scientists and the RA ..."

"Remind me what role the RAF plays?"

The Defence Secretary ground his teeth. He hated being interrupted, and he'd already taken the PM through this twice. He was about to respond when the DG interrupted in his calm, soothing voice.

"Group Captain Marston has a double first from Oxford in Meteorology and Computer

¹ Thought by many to refer to the building alone, GCHQ is actually the name of one of the UK's three Intelligence and Security Agencies, alongside MI5 and MI6. It just doesn't have spy films made about it.

² Birthplace of the World Wide Web, CERN (from *Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire*), is the Geneva-based organization that operates the Large Hadron Collider. Housed in a tunnel, 100 metres underground and 17 miles in circumference, that's the same size as one encircling the City of London, Hampstead, Vauxhall and Kensington. Or the whole of Manhattan from Battery Park to 69th Street.

Science, Prime Minister, which ...”

“So, what’s our cover story?”

“A weather research facility, Prime Minister, to study high altitude weather conditions. And as the RAF will have aircraft on site, having one of their people in charge is standard operational practice. He’s an excellent officer too. Trustworthy, well-liked, more than capable of doing the job ...”

“... and the fact that he looks like a movie star doesn’t hurt. Is that it?”

“It can’t do any harm, Prime Minister,” replied the DG with a nod. “After all, the names of my predecessors have been common knowledge since ‘92. And Crianloch³ would be open to even more scrutiny if its real purpose ever got out.”

“So, he’s the acceptable face of ... What do we call it anyway?”

“My office refers to it as *Spooky Affairs*, Prime Minister,” replied the DG with a wry smile.

“Well we need a better name than that.”

“I gather *Operation Carter* is the preferred name in the Civil Service.”

“Why Carter?”

“Some science fiction reference I think.”

“Hmf,” snorted the Defence Secretary.

“So, we’re agreed. Marston will head up what from the public perspective, is an ordinary weather station. But when we’re talking about other matters, Operation Carter it is.”



David Marston had joined the Royal Air Force after university, going straight to Cranwell officer training college, where he came first in his class. Then, when the top brass at RAF Wyton approached him, David leapt at the chance. He knew it by reputation as home of the *Joint Force Intelligence Group* and the *National Centre for Geospatial Intelligence*⁴, so it was an easy decision. Careers move on though, and now he had his first base-command post. OK so it was at Crianloch rather than Lossiemouth, as he’d told his family, but he could get around that.

At 32, he wasn’t the youngest person ever to hold the rank of Group Captain. But at 6’2” with blond hair, and eyes that matched the blue-grey of his uniform, he made a striking figure. What his challenges might be at Crianloch, he didn’t know, and not because he hadn’t been briefed, because he had, extensively. The thing was, the notion that the station itself might vanish had never been considered, and no-one had imagined a scenario that might change the entire world. Unfortunately, they should have, and sensing somehow that things were about to change, the planet waited. Not consciously like you do for a bus, but waited, nonetheless.

It was therefore ironic that when **it** happened, only a handful of people noticed, and none of them had a clue what it was, let alone what caused it. For one thing, they only saw their own parts of the puzzle. And although some parts were bigger than others, they were each so bizarre that only one person wondered if they might be connected. The trouble was, he wasn’t the sort many people listen to.

For now then, the world slept. Group Captain David Marston did too, slumped over his desk as he often did. His fiancée, on the other hand, was sleeping soundly in the hotel room

³ Pronounced *Creeyun-lock* with the emphasis on the *creeyun*.

⁴ If you check the RAF website, you’ll see this is all true, as Wyton doesn’t hide much.

she'd called home for the last few months. And her soon-to-be-new-best-friend slept surrounded by cats at home. The only person not sleeping was David's cousin Nigel, but that was normal for him, so the world kept spinning. Kept waiting.



So, picture the scene ... An unforgiving highland landscape made of granite and carved by glaciers in a time when woolly mammoths walked the Earth. A grassy glen now, with a small, playful stream gurgling through its centre, laughing and dancing as it splashed over the rocks. High above, barren peaks grumbled amongst themselves as they gazed down in disapproval of anything so frivolous. And well they might, for the stream seemed almost to sigh with pleasure as it finally disappeared into the lush, green bogs.

Appearances can be deceptive though, and like *The Great Grimpen Mire* in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, they were also the spots where many a small creature had lost its way ... permanently. As far as wildness goes, Dartmoor had nothing on Glen Crian though, and if Conan Doyle had ever visited, he might well have set his story there instead.

With eighteen-hour nights in winter and six months of rain a year, it was never going to be a major tourist destination. That said when you add in its mild, year-round temperatures⁵, and the fact that it's hidden from the nearest village by a series of hillocks, you have one thing ... The perfect site for the UK's most secret research station.

It didn't take long to put the press stories in place either, all leading with a central message about the station's low environmental impact. It would have a single, short runway, with everything else underground, and be so remote that the security guards would have more sheep to worry about than people. In fact, it's only claim to fame would be the hundreds of boffins⁶ working there, and what could possibly go wrong with that?

Over the next twenty months, Glen Crian was transformed from a tranquil highland valley into the site of a high-tech research facility. It lived up to its low-impact promise too, and if you flew over it, all you saw was the green tarmac of the runway, a couple of single-storey buildings and a fence. Not a high fence either and no razor wire in sight.

Mind you, as the Ministry of Defence now owned the entire glen, it's not like people could walk in without being noticed, as the valley floor was dotted with hundreds of hidden sensors. Consequently, anyone who came visiting set off an alarm in the underground control room, and if they kept walking, they were picked up on camera. It was deliberately low key ... up to the point that they were greeted by heavily armed members of the RAF. Purely as a courtesy, you understand.

As for air traffic control, gone was the usual, tall concrete tower. In its place, the job was done by dozens of networked cameras positioned around the valley sides, all with inbuilt infrared to handle night flights.

What wasn't made public, was the massive mining operation needed to construct the station's three underground levels. Nearest the surface were vast hangers such as on aircraft-

⁵ Admittedly, *mild* may be a bit of an overstatement, but with actual temperatures in the area ranging between 9 and 14°C (48 to 57°F) in September, it's not that bad.

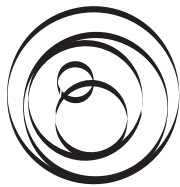
⁶ This slang dates from the 1940s and describes a brilliant scientist who's also rather eccentric or peculiar. Hair that looks like it's been plugged into a light socket is an optional extra.

carriers, and on the level below that, twenty-five parallel corridors, each running the full length of the station. Each half-a-mile long, with dozens of offices, laboratories and living quarters leading off on either side. Below that again sat a server-farm the size of a football pitch, and numerous other basement rooms even I can't tell you about.

As for people, naturally the station had its complement of RAF personnel and meteorologists, but that was only the beginning. Its real purpose lay with the dozens of computer scientists, astronomers and astrophysicists, all crunching petabytes⁷ of data from around the world.

Then on Friday, September 10th, everything went wrong.

Somewhen else ...



Data aside: reality is a funny old thing. I mean, it's always the same distance between London and New York, but it still feels nearer if you're going on holiday rather than on business. "Ah, but that's just different perspectives," you might say, and you'd be right. What happens though if you come across something so weird, your mind refuses to accept it, even if it's right in front of you? If it's a gigantic, salivating monster ripping the roof off your house, you probably run like hell. On the other hand, what if the person you've been secretly in love with for years suddenly notices you? In that case, I guess you either run towards them or faint with shock.

But what if the *something* is small? What if it's insignificant? What if it can't possibly matter, but it still bugs the hell out of you all the same? In that case, I reckon you worry. Not perhaps in a front-of-the-mind kind of way, but more like a coffee percolator. The bubbles are barely noticeable to begin with, but as they start to heat up, they get bigger and bigger.

So what was TC's reality like?

Well, no-one noticed her much as a child. Her parents loved her, and she had her fair share of friends, but she was nothing out of the ordinary. She didn't excel at sport, she was an average pupil, and although she took piano lessons, the music she played was at best, accurate. She had two pet rabbits called Bill and Ben, half a dog named Amber, and anyone she allowed into her room found the floor covered with clothes.

The walls were very much her too, which at six years old meant posters of unicorns. At ten that changed to ponies, and from twelve onwards it became a succession of boy bands ... with a few photos of kittens thrown in for good measure. She was loved, she was liked, and her best friend thought she was ace, but extraordinary? Not really.

At eighteen, all that changed.

⁷ On the off chance that you're even faintly interested, one petabyte of data is equal to one thousand million million (10¹⁵) bytes. To put it another way, 1PB would store 223,000 DVDs or almost three and a half years of 24/7 full HD recording of your cat.