

SCIENCE FICTION · PHILOSOPHICAL FICTION

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# THE FREQUENCY

*A Story of First Contact, Hidden Memory,  
and the Question We Were Never Meant to Ask*

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## I. THE ORDINARY MORNING

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The city did not warn me. It never does.

I was walking to work the way I always did — headphones in, coffee in hand, the familiar rhythm of pavement beneath my shoes carrying me forward like a current I had never once questioned. The morning was unremarkable in the way that most mornings are: pigeons crowding a bus shelter, a delivery truck idling at a red light, a woman arguing quietly into her phone outside a café. The usual theatre of the living.

Then the whispers began.

Not from one person, but from everywhere at once — a low, spreading murmur moving through the crowd like a wave through still water. I pulled out one earbud. A man to my left had stopped walking. A woman ahead of me had tilted her face upward. A child pointed, wordless.

I looked up.

It was silver. Perfectly, impossibly silver — the kind of silver that does not exist in nature, a surface so uniform it seemed less like metal and more like the idea of metal, rendered into form by something that had studied our world from very far away and reproduced only what it considered essential. It was round. And it was enormous.

Not enormous the way a skyscraper is enormous, which is to say vertically impressive but ultimately contained within your field of vision. This was enormous the way the sky itself is enormous — it had replaced the sky. From horizon to horizon, the craft hung above the city, blotting out the morning sun in a perfect, silent eclipse that cast us all in a diffuse, shadowless grey.

For a moment, nothing moved. The city held its breath.

Then everything broke at once.

People screamed. They ran. They collided with one another in blind corridors of panic, cascading into doorways, scrambling over bonnets of parked cars, shouting in a dozen languages the same single syllable of primal fear. The instinct was ancient and immediate: find shelter, find cover, find anything solid and place it between yourself and the unknown.

I did not run.

I am not certain why. Perhaps it was the shock — the kind of shock so absolute that it bypasses the nervous system entirely and leaves you simply present, stripped of every conditioned response. Perhaps it was something else. Some older part of me, some deeper architecture of knowing that recognised, in that immensity above, not a threat but a mirror.

I stood in the middle of the emptying street and looked up.

## II. THE BELL

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The sound arrived before I could form any further thought.

It was unlike any sound I had ever encountered, and yet the word that rose immediately, instinctively, to name it was ancient: a bell. A Buddhist temple bell, or perhaps a mokugyo — a wooden percussion instrument struck during sutra recitation, its voice simultaneously hollow and full, carrying within it both emptiness and vibration. But this was not one bell. It was every bell that had ever been struck, layered into a single resonance that moved not through the air but through matter itself.

The sound was a wave. I felt it pass through my sternum, my spine, the liquid architecture of my inner ear. It spread outward from the craft in concentric rings, visible somehow at the periphery of perception the way heat shimmer is visible — not a sight exactly, but a disturbance in the quality of light.

And then they fell.

Every person on the street dropped in the same instant, silently, without struggle, as though sleep had been administered not to the mind but to the body directly. I watched a man mid-stride simply cease — his legs folded beneath him in a motion that was almost graceful, almost like a bow. A woman who had been sprinting for a doorway stopped and lay down on the pavement with the composed stillness of someone who had simply decided they were tired.

The birds fell too. Pigeons mid-flight. A sparrow that had been sitting on a wire. A dog that had been barking without pause fell silent and lay on its side, chest rising and falling in the slow rhythm of deep unconsciousness.

It was at that moment that someone fell on top of me.

A man, heavy, his shoulder connecting with mine as he went down, dragging me partially beneath him. I hit the ground sideways, his weight pinning my left arm and a portion of my torso. I struggled — instinct, nothing more — trying to push him free. His face was peaceful. Slack-mouthed and impossibly still, the way faces are in surgery, in dreamless sleep, in the deepest states of surrender.

And then the second wave of the sound moved through me.

Not fully. The body above mine took some of it. I felt it enter through my legs, my unshielded right side, but by the time it reached my core it had been softened, interrupted, like a signal passing through interference. I felt the pull of it — the gorgeous, horizontal gravity of unconsciousness — but I did not fall entirely. I remained, barely, on the edge of waking.

I pushed the man free of me and lay on my back in the empty street, staring upward with eyes I could barely hold open. I was aware of myself the way you are aware of yourself during the first ten seconds of anaesthesia — present but receding, conscious of the consciousness leaving.

I fought it.

### III. THE VISITOR

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Through the narrowing slit of my vision I saw it approach.

It moved the way no human moves — not with the compensating sway of bipedal locomotion, not with the minor inefficiencies of evolved anatomy, but with a quality of motion that suggested the concept of walking had been arrived at through study rather than inheritance. It was upright. It was slender. Its head was large in proportion to its body in the way that a child's head is large — that evolutionary signature of intelligence, of the organ that outpaced the frame that carries it.

The cranium was bulbous and rounded, tapering to a narrow, almost delicate chin. The eyes were what I saw first and most completely: vast, black, almond-shaped, sweeping around to the sides of the head in a configuration that spoke of a visual field wider than our

own, an ancient adaptation for an environment I could not begin to imagine. There were no pupils. No irises. No whites. Just depth — the kind of unreadable depth you encounter in the eyes of very old creatures, or in the surface of very deep water.

It had no visible ears. Its nose was a suggestion — two slight impressions in the smooth, pale grey skin, enough for function, nothing more. The mouth was a thin horizontal line, neither smiling nor frowning, an aperture that seemed designed for something other than speech. The neck was slender to the point of fragility, the shoulders narrow, the entire form built along lines of reduction — as though everything unnecessary had been removed across a long, patient process of becoming.

It walked toward me through the field of sleeping bodies and it was not threatening. That is the fact I keep returning to. There was no malice in its movement, no predatory intention in the way it located me among the still forms on the pavement. It moved with the focused neutrality of a physician on rounds.

It knew I was awake.

I could tell in the way it adjusted — a slight recalibration of its approach, the angle of its attention shifting to account for the anomaly I represented. And I, lying on the pavement of an empty city street with the sky replaced by something I had no language for, felt not fear but the most acute curiosity I have ever experienced.

I wanted to speak. I wanted to ask — what do you know? What have you seen? How long have you existed and what have you learned in that time? Are you afraid of death, and if not, why not, and can you teach me?

But my mouth would not cooperate. The frequency still held my body even as it failed to entirely hold my mind.

It stood over me. It looked down through those extraordinary eyes — or perhaps looked is the wrong word, perhaps interfaced is closer — and it reached toward me with something I did not have time to examine. Not a weapon. Not a tool in any mechanical sense. Something more akin to an intention made briefly physical.

I told myself: remember. Whatever happens next, remember. This is the real world. This moment is real. The life I was living two hours ago — the coffee, the headphones, the commute — that is the dream. This is the reality underneath it.

I told myself this three times, which is the number of times, I have since come to believe, that a thing must be told to the self before it has a chance of surviving sleep.

Then I was gone.

#### IV. THE RETURN

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I was walking to work.

The coffee was in my hand. The headphones were in my ears. The city moved around me in its usual rhythms — pigeons, delivery trucks, the woman outside the café — and I walked forward in the current of it, unremarkable and unremarked upon.

For eleven steps I was simply a person walking to work on an ordinary morning.

Then something detonated in the centre of my mind.

Not an explosion — a retrieval. A door opening onto a room that should not have existed, filled with furniture I did not remember placing there. Silver. The sky, replaced. A sound like every bell ever struck resonating through the material of the world. Black eyes, sweeping and vast and old beyond any reckoning I could bring to bear. My own voice, inside my own skull: remember, remember, remember.

I stopped walking.

Around me, the city continued its business. Nobody looked up. Nobody whispered. The morning was exactly as it had been, which was exactly as it was every morning, which was exactly as they had arranged it to be.

The man who had fallen on top of me walked past. He was checking his phone. He was entirely ordinary. He had no idea that he had saved me — if saved is even the right word for what had happened, which I am still not certain it is.

I watched him walk away and I understood something that I did not have the framework to express then and am only beginning to find words for now.

We have been here before.

#### V. THE QUESTIONS WE WERE NEVER MEANT TO ASK

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The philosopher Plato described, in the Allegory of the Cave, a group of prisoners who have spent their entire lives chained in a cave, facing a wall. Behind them burns a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners pass objects whose shadows are cast on the wall before them. For the prisoners, these shadows are reality — the only reality they have ever known, the only reality they have any framework to conceive of.

What Plato understood, twenty-four centuries before the morning I am describing, is that the problem is not the cave. The problem is the certainty. The prisoners do not

merely live in the cave — they believe the cave is everything. They have been arranged to believe this. And if one of them were to turn around and see the fire, to understand that what they had taken for reality was merely its projection, the disorientation would be so profound that returning to the wall would be the only available comfort.

I turned around.

And here is what I found in the turning: not answers, but the right questions. Questions that hum at a frequency below ordinary thought, questions that the structure of daily life is perhaps specifically designed to prevent us from sitting still long enough to hear.

What if consciousness is not a product of the brain but a signal received by it? Neuroscience has mapped the correlates of experience — the regions that activate during memory, emotion, perception — but has never satisfactorily explained why there is something it is like to be us. Why the lights are on. Why, in a universe of objects processing information, some of those objects have an interior. This gap, which the philosopher David Chalmers named the Hard Problem of Consciousness, remains the central unsolved mystery of science. We do not know what we are.

What if memory is not storage but access? What if forgetting is not failure but interference — a signal deliberately disrupted to maintain the integrity of a programme? The man who fell on me had no memory of what he had experienced. I, shielded by his body from the full frequency, retained mine — imperfectly, in fragments, with the quality of a dream recalled at noon. But I retained it. Which means the memory was there. Which means the memory is always there.

What if the oldest religions — Hinduism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, the Abrahamic traditions in their more mystical expressions — were not inventions but transmissions? The concept of *maya* in Vedic philosophy: the world as illusion, as appearance, as the projection of something more fundamental. The Buddhist understanding of the self as a constructed narrative rather than a fixed entity. The Gnostic belief that the material world was created not by a supreme God but by a lesser being, a Demiurge, who fashioned a realm of limitation and forgetfulness to contain souls that belonged elsewhere. What if these were not metaphors? What if they were reports?

And what if the question that every religion, every philosophy, every mythology has circled from its beginning — where do we come from? — is not a theological question but a geographical one?



I have spent a long time since that morning trying to decide whether what I experienced was real or whether it was the product of a mind under stress, a moment of dissociation so complete that it generated its own coherent narrative. I cannot resolve this. Perhaps you cannot resolve it either. Perhaps the inability to resolve it is itself the most important piece of information I have.

What I know is this: I stood in a street in the middle of an ordinary morning and looked at something that should not have existed, and it looked back at me with eyes that held a depth of knowledge I will spend the rest of my life trying to approximate. And the question it left in me — not spoken, not transmitted in any language, but somehow present — was not a question about aliens or spacecraft or the mechanics of interstellar travel.

The question was: when will you remember who you are?

I think about the man whose unconscious body partially shielded me from a frequency designed to erase. I think about the fact that protection, on that morning, arrived not from strength or preparation or any deliberate act of resistance, but from proximity. From someone simply being there, however accidentally, however briefly, however without intention.

I think about the birds. The way they fell from the wire mid-song, and the way — I assume, I hope, I believe — they woke again and resumed singing, untroubled, as though nothing had happened. As though nothing ever happens.

I think about sleep. About how every night, without exception, consciousness leaves the body and goes somewhere we cannot follow or report from. About how we have normalised this so completely that we call it rest. About what it would mean if it wasn't.

And I think about the instruction I gave myself on the pavement of that empty city street, in the narrowing window before the frequency took me: this is real. The other is the dream.

I did not stay awake. I did not resist completely. The programme reasserted itself, as programmes do, and I walked eleven steps into an ordinary morning and was, for a moment, entirely ordinary.

But I remembered.

And the only philosophical question that has ever mattered — more than the existence of God, more than the nature of justice, more than the problem of evil or the

definition of beauty — is the simplest one, the one that children ask before they are taught to stop asking it:

*Why are we here?*

Not what are we doing here. Not what is the purpose of human civilisation or the correct organisation of society or the most efficient path to individual fulfilment. Those are the questions we replaced the real one with, because the real one is too large to live inside and still function.

Why are we here, on this particular planet, in these particular bodies, with this particular and extraordinary capacity for awareness that we have never once been able to explain?

The creature that stood over me on the pavement of that empty city knew the answer. I saw the knowledge of it in the depthless black of its eyes — not withheld, exactly, but untranslatable into any form my sleeping mind could hold.

Maybe that is the point of all of it. The whole long human project — the philosophy, the religion, the science, the art — is not a search for comfort or meaning or pleasure or power.

It is a search for the language in which the answer can finally be received.

We are waking up. Slowly, imperfectly, one morning at a time, one remembered dream at a time, one anomalous body shielding another from the frequency.

We are waking up.

*And someone, somewhere, is watching to see if we remember.*



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Claudia Rezai is a Kurdish–Iranian–Australian author and fashion designer whose work explores themes of love, identity, and the narratives we carry within us. Her writing weaves together philosophy, fashion, and deeply human emotion, creating a distinctive voice that bridges the personal and the universal. She is based in Australia.*

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