

The last ripple.

Moreton Ludlow gazed through the porthole of the International Space Station at the 'Earthrise' view, made famous by those Apollo missions, so many years ago.

Binary digits looped down his tablet. Parameters normal. The earth disappeared as the ISS circled the dark side of the moon. In the inky-blue darkness Moreton could now see comet Herschel-Welland streaking through the solar system on its bi-annual sojourn. He glanced at his tablet, wishing he could run some troublesome data past the other members of the crew; but they were currently in the Endurance Explorer, chasing the dirty snowball on a scientific mission of discovery.

Moreton zoomed ISS's telescope onto the pure driven white of the comets tail. He panned along to the primrose tinted body of the comet and located the pinprick of Endurance stood-off in the comet's lee. His fellow rocketeers acting like a Labrador chasing the first snow of winter.

Moreton stifled a schoolboy giggle; never eat yellow snow. In his mirth, he almost missed the puff of orange that blossomed and then evaporated into space vacuum. Was that? No! His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. On his tablet, the digits stopped tumbling. Someone had turned off the tap. Life-support down, no vital signs, in fact there was no sign of Endurance's very existence.

Houston beat him to the punchline. 'ISS, priority, we think you have a problem.'

'No shit Sherlock.' Moreton muttered under his breath. 'Houston, the data suggests that Endurance's nuclear reactor drive just blew. There was a spike. Now they're gone.'

The ISS chose that moment to lap behind the moon cutting all line-of-sight transmissions which allowed him time to consider the consequences. To take a moment.

Moreton's meditations were rudely interrupted by the ISS's alarm pulsing through his headphones. He ran the checklist. Oxygen tick, no leaks tick, life-support, power and settings within parameters. He punched buttons, twiddled dials, eyes jumping across the gauges. The ISS was fine, the problem now, the comet. Endurance's nuke moment had changed Herschel-Welland's trajectory onto a collision course. Bullseye Earth. Moreton's fingers went into overdrive, tapping out a melodic mental arithmetic. Counting chickens; they hatched a two-hour impact warning.

The ISS rounded the dark side of the moon to give Moreton the best seat in the house as the comet plunged into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. A Hiroshima seawater plume of biblical proportions mushroomed into Earth's atmosphere. Think the meteor that hit

the Yucatan peninsular and wiped out the dinosaurs and multiply that by thousands. Concentric circles rippled the pond. Spectacular waves surfed the depths. New York, Buenos Aires, Madrid and London conversely reaped the whirlwind of Everest sized tsunamis. Houston's transmissions stopped dead under the deluge. A boiling liquid expanding vapour fiery riptide circled the planet, the harbinger of devastation and despair.

An Earth sized dawning swelled through Moreton's galaxy. Gloom doom despondency.

Morton threw up. His breakfast swam in the zero-G.

Was he the last ripple of humanity?

Now the last person standing?