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Opening extract from
**Infinity Drake: the Sons of
Scarlatti**

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ONE

This is exactly what happened to Liz and Lionel when Kismet went missing in her GAP year...”

Finn’s grandma stood in front of the Departures gate, and fussed.

“Grandma! He’s in the building. He’ll be here any minute,” said Finn.

They were waiting for Uncle Al to turn up. He was supposed to be providing cover for Grandma while she took a well-earned break – flying to Oslo for a ‘knitting cruise’ around Scandinavia with another hundred or so grey-haired needlecraft enthusiasts.

Al had promised to show up at Grandma’s the night before.

Then Al had promised to meet them at the airport, first thing.



Then Al had promised – just now, by phone – to meet them at the Departures gate.

But Al... well, Al was Al, and nothing was certain, and Grandma's way of coping with the distress her son caused her, from babe in arms to now, thirty-two years later, was to fill the world with a breathless stream of anxious chatter.

"...Kismet their eldest with the tattoos they had to fly out to Kinshasa cost them five thousand pounds silly thing had lost her phone it was the not knowing if she was dead or alive you can't imagine what that does to a parent – *where is he?* – I looked after their cat same bladder problems as Tiger..."

"*Last call for passenger Violet Allenby, Oslo flight 103, proceed immediately to gate 15,*" announced the voice over the loudspeaker.

"...John very helpfully ran me into Woking young vet from New Zealand lovely girl wet food and herbal treatment..."

"Grandma! Please!"

"I can always catch the next one..."

"Noooo, Grandma!" Finn gyrated in frustration.

"Infinity!" she snapped. "*I am not moving an inch.*"

(Infinity. All Finn knew about his father – all he needed to know – was in his name. Who would name a child after a mathematical concept? "Exactly the sort of man you'd imagine," Finn's mother would say wistfully, claiming it had been all she could do to prevent him being named $E=mc^2$.)

"Al is *here!* I'll be *fine!*"

"He is not! One thing you can rely on is that you can never rely

on Al. He says he's 'in the building', but that could mean anything. It could mean an imaginary building; it could mean a building on another continent, on another planet..."

"Grandma, get on the plane!"

"I have a duty of care. You are a *child*..."

"I'm *almost a teenager*."

"...and if you *really* think, *if he thinks*, I'm going to abandon you to your fate in an airport full of germs, runaway trolleys and international terrorists..."

And then, thank goodness, from around the corner, looking like he'd just rolled out of bed, walked Al.

Six foot two and thin as a whip, part muscle, part bone, part wire, suede jacket and ancient cords worn to the point of oblivion, dark hair, darker eyes, designer glasses held together by tape, arm raised in surprised greeting as if he'd just wandered in and spotted them by chance.

"Alan! Where on earth have you been?"

"Ah...? I was in the middle of something." He thought this would do. "Why are you still here?"

Yap!

On a lead by Al's side bounced a delighted, knee-high mongrel (a kind of spaniel/hyperactive kangaroo cross, Finn always thought).

"What are you doing with Yo-yo? You can't bring dogs in here!"

"I saw him *tied him up outside*. He was *crying*."

Officials across the concourse were already beginning to take notice.



“Marvellous! Now we’ll all be arrested...” said Grandma.

“We’ve got to get her out of here,” said Finn to Al.

With that, Al scooped Grandma up like she was a toddler, gave her a kiss on the cheek and put her down again, pointing in the right direction.

“For goodness’ sake, I’m sixty-three!”

Finn wheeled her bag after her and together he and Al herded her through the Departures gate like a reluctant farm animal.

“Have you spoken to Mrs Jennings? She’s agreed to check Finn in and out of school.”

“Mrs Jennings and I speak all the time,” confirmed Al.

“Go, Grandma!”

“You’re lying!” she protested. “All the meals are in the freezer marked—”

“All the meals are in the freezer, all the knives and forks are in the drawers, there are doors and windows that allow access to the dwelling place...” interrupted Al.

“The keys!”

“...the keys to which are in Finn’s pocket, which is a cloth appendage sewn into his trousers about so high. Go on, Mother! I can reheat lasagne and hold a high moral line for a week!”

“That I doubt very much!”

She was being urged through now by a red-faced airline official.

“Love you, Grandma, have a great time!”

“You too, darling, but do be careful. Al? Alan?”

“I promise, he’ll be fine, go!”

As Grandma finally disappeared through passport control, Finn fell to his knees in relief, Yo-yo licking his face.

Al looked at Finn, puzzled, and said, “Did she say *school?*”

Fifteen minutes later, Grandma was in the air, and Finn and Al were gunning it out of Heathrow and on to the M25 in Al’s 1969 silver grey De Tomaso Mangusta, the most extraordinary car ever hand-built in Italy, loud and low, a monster V8 coupe with perfect styling capable of 221bhp. Yo-yo howled and loved it. Finn *adored* it. Grandma thought the car ridiculous and a prime example of Al’s financial irresponsibility.

“I’ve grown tired of pretty dresses and I can’t think of anything better to waste it on,” Al would tell her, something Finn knew was only partly true because more than once he’d found cheques from Al in Grandma’s handbag, and they seemed huge. For no matter how unconventionally Al behaved, people still seemed to want a piece of him – corporations in need of a technical fix, pharmaceutical companies looking to reconstitute molecules, governments stuck with insoluble nuclear waste. They all came to Al.

He ran a small lab in the heart of London and was a ‘sort of scientist’: an atomic chemist with a wandering mind who found it difficult to fit into any one category – in science or life.

He was the only person, or so he claimed, to have been fired from the staff of the Universities of Cambridge, England, *and* Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the *same term* (for challenging the Standard Model of particle physics via the Tau Neutrino Paradox and



for striking a right-wing economist with a steamed halibut during a buffet, respectively).

Al saw it as proof of moral fibre. Grandma saw it as proof of insanity and prayed it didn't run in the family. After bringing up two totally reckless children, she had resolved to wrap her only grandchild up in sixteen tonnes of cotton wool.

Finn already shared Al's bony, clumsy physique, but had sand-coloured hair that grew in several directions at once ("your father's"), and mad blue, deep-blue eyes ("your mother's") and now Grandma fretted that he'd inherited a tendency to have his "own views" about things too (rejecting all yellow food apart from custard, pointing out a teacher's "confrontational attitude" at a recent parents' evening and bringing up his "problems with religion" with a vicar, *during a funeral*).

Not that Finn wanted to upset anyone. He was just trying to stay one step ahead of boredom, which meant – as he pointed out on his Facebook profile – 'not being on the same planet as school'. He loved Grandma and made every effort not to cause her unnecessary suffering – avoiding dangerous sports, playground conflict and potentially lethal pastimes (while retaining the right to self-defence, of course. And who could resist making home-made fireworks? Or skateboarding into a neighbour's pool, or practising overhead kicks on concrete, or...).

When Finn was with Al though, there were no rules.

Other people's uncles played golf. Other people's uncles might give them ten pounds at Christmas. Al was happy to see every moment as an opportunity for discovery and entertainment and he

never said no. Even Finn realised this might be crazy, but it made being with him a very exciting place to be.

“I’m training him up,” Al would say whenever Grandma complained.

“What for?!” she would demand, terrified (for she knew he sometimes operated out of a secret world). Life, Finn supposed, trusting Al’s training absolutely, for, if his uncle’s head was in the clouds, his heart was always in the right place. Yes, he was erratic and unreliable, yes, he might have “a difficult relationship with stuff” (which included parking, losing things and an inability to tidy up), but he bridged the gap between everyday life and the way life ought to be – impulsive and instructive and full of things that blew up.

He dropped in every couple of weekends, sometimes staying for a week during the holidays, and he’d stayed the whole summer after Mum had died.

“You pack a bag?” Al snapped at him.

“Yep!”

“Got your passport, checked the date?”

“Yep!”

Yap! added Yo-yo.

“Get all the gear ready?”

“In the garage, all lined up.”

“Weapons? You know they still have wolves?”

“M60 with grenade launch side-barrel.”

“Hah! This is not Xbox, this is life or death – sunblock?”

“Sunblock, shades, tent, clothing, waterproofs, Swiss Army knife,



Mars bar, torch, lighter, hand-held GPS – I’ve even got a blow-up pillow.”

“*Trust yourself,*” had been one of his mother’s Big Three Rules. “*You can’t always rely on other people.*”

Finn’s stuff weighed 6.5 kilograms packed into a natty dry bag. He was ready for anything.

“I bet you didn’t remember we were going till this morning! I bet you haven’t even taken a shower!” Finn teased Al.

Al pretended to be appalled.

“Hey! I’ve got credit cards, a restaurant guide and half a tube of Pringles. Now let’s load up and let rip.”

**DAY ONE 07:33 (BST). Hook Hall,
Surrey, UK**

A convoy of six cars pulled up silently outside Hook Hall.

They were expected. Little was said.

In one vehicle was Commander James Clayton-King (Harrow, Oxford, RN, MoD, SIS, G&T Chair.), known simply as King. Not the jolly King of nursery rhymes, but the cruel, commanding type. Pale skin, powerful jaw, bone-deep intelligence. He wasn’t as menacing as his hooded eyes suggested, but he liked it suggested.

Two Security Service officers hopped out, one held open the door. From the cars behind, more senior figures emerged in similar fashion,

including General Mount of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, three aides accompanying him.

They were led through the complex until they reached the Central Field Analysis Chamber (CFAC), a cathedral-sized, concrete-lined warehouse where researchers could recreate and control any climate or environment imaginable, from lunar desert to lush rainforest, and proceed to blow or blast or poison the jelly beans out of it simply to see what happened. In essence it was a giant test tube and one of only three such spaces in the world.¹

They climbed a steel gantry to a reinforced glass and concrete control gallery that flanked the space. Others had already arrived: an eclectic mix of soldiers, scientists, engineers and thinkers.

A group of bespectacled experts from a research institute on Salisbury Plain clustered self-consciously. They looked like men who hadn't slept.

There were handshakes and nods, but no high fives. Tea and coffee were offered and refused. A selection of biscuits lay untouched.

The Global Non-governmental Threat Response Committee (popularly reduced to 'the G&T') was formed in October 2002 to respond to extraordinary threats to global security and the fabric of Western civilisation. It had fourteen expert members and a decision-making core of five including Commander King as its chairman. They had only been forced to meet three times over the last decade²,

¹ The others being: Shenyang, China, and Brookhaven, USA.

² Following incidents of nuclear disaster in Japan, chemical blackmail in Iraq and terrorism aboard the International Space Station.



and they knew whatever they were here for it would be serious.

Deadly serious.

A technician reported: “Ready when you are, sir.”

“Good. Seal the room,” said Commander King.

He waited as doors were locked and blinds whirred down.

“Now... You may be wondering why you’ve been called here.”

His voice was deep and used to command – controlled, no-nonsense and yet also theatrical.

“Well. One of our scientists is missing. And it *seems* he has released – this...”

The technician hit a key and up on the screen, in enormous scale, appeared an image...

DAY ONE 07:41 (BST). Willard's
Copse, Berkshire, UK

Kill kill kill kill kill kill kill kill...