

BOOK TWO OF THE WORLDS APART SERIES

How can you commit to
a world you don't believe in?

HAVOC

DJ STONEHAM

Excerpt from Session 5: The Well of Amok

Upside down underwater, Sye's body had been one step ahead of him for he found his lungs were full of air. This was a mixed blessing for the added buoyancy also served to slow his descent. He opened his eyes but either the water was black or there was a total lack of light. He could see nothing at all.

The only sensation Sye registered was the cold water against his skin as well as a ringing sound as the pressure changed in his ears. As he sank slowly down, Sye tried to bring his arms up in front of him, in order to swim, but the well was too narrow for that. His arms could move only a little way away from his body, certainly not enough to propel him down. Sye kicked with his feet and descended a bit faster, forcing a few air bubbles to race past his face, back up the way he had come.

Sye's speed of descent slowed. He kicked again but he only sank a short distance. A moment later, he came to a complete standstill. He was submerged, suspended in water upside down in a deep black well. In panic, he tried again to bring his arms up in front of him but the tunnel had narrowed further, to the extent that the stone walls now pinned his arms to his sides. All he could do was push against the slimy stone with his feet and hands in order to move himself down a fraction at a time.

His lungs had begun to ache through lack of oxygen. He scraped frantically at the stone walls with his fingertips and pushed with his toes. To his dismay, he felt the walls of the well graze against his elbows, which allowed hardly any progress. The tunnel was still narrowing and Sye was almost out of air. The Well of Amok may have rid him of Kadjud poison but it was now drowning him.

*Alice was sitting by the riverside
While I was in my own dreamworld, drowning in self-pity.
I saw her dig a huge hole at the base of a tree
While my thoughts followed swim-suit.
I sang musical memories, like the colours of my mind. Or was it windmills?
Now I knew how she felt, going down that rabbit hole.*

*So many interesting things but nothing to hold on to.
So many exciting people slipping through my fingers,
Before I could see inside them.
You wouldn't think it could be so cold in such a cramped space.
So exciting! So asphyxiating!
The rock walls are made of brick and weed.
And I cannot tell at what speed
I am travelling.
The only thing I can be sure of is my downward direction.
And upward erection.*

Havoc

The pounding in Sye's ears told him that the air in his lungs had come to an end. His fingertips and toes were pushing him along the tunnel at a painstakingly slow pace. Not far or fast enough. It was far too late to try and reverse up the well feet first. As desperation gave way to resignation, Sye used the last seconds of consciousness to scrape his body half a brick's length deeper down the well.

His last thought was about the presence of a strong current in the water, against his face. As the tunnel had narrowed, so the current naturally quickened. Its roar now drowned out the sound of his own drowning. Time for one final push before death, he told himself. Time for tunnel vision said a voice in his head. Sye fought to open his eyes and discovered that drowning helped him do just that. Was there a faint light ahead in the water? If only he could focus on that. As he blacked out, the rush of water against his face ceased.



Sye came to, upside down, firmly wedged in the narrow gullet of the well. He was unable to move. The front part of his face was out of the fast-flowing water. The back half of his head as well as his body, arms and legs were still submerged. His arms were pinned firmly to his sides. The most impossible thing about all this was that the water began from nowhere – it flowed from a single point in the tunnel, from just in front of his ears.

Sye spluttered and coughed. Despite his state of panic, he tried to regulate the amount of air he inhaled, in order to normalise his breathing. His lungs hurt and he vomited water, which fell down into the well below him. He gasped like a beached fish. He knew the only way to stop heaving was to ride out the painful first moments and to resist going into shock. Whatever happened, he couldn't afford to float even the tiniest distance back up the tunnel. Otherwise, his mouth would be underwater again. Or overwater, depending on how you looked at it. He dug his nails into the wall to prevent the current from dragging him back up. His ears were still in the freezing cold water and the roar of the current was deafening. Bit by bit, he was able to calm himself and breathe normally. All that remained of his near-drowning experience was a splitting headache, but that was thankfully nothing to do with the Kadjul poison.

The torrent of water that raged behind his head, splashed and wetted his face but thankfully none of it blocked his airways. He gulped in air and although far from comfortable, he was nevertheless alive. He vowed to get out of the Well of Amok as soon as he could and in any way possible. Nothing could be worth this torture, not even saving the world. How much are you prepared to endure to save Andeledes and your child? asked a voice in his head.

The walls of the well were made of hard but slippery bricks. They clamped Sye's body like a vice. He tried to flex and contract his muscles so as to gradually slide forward another brick's length down the well, but his body was too weak. So, he tried tunnel vision again. He succeeded in moving himself a brick's length farther down. It was better than nothing. He was now submerged in the rushing water, only from the shoulders down. He craned his neck a fraction to get a glimpse of the phenomenon above him. The water's source began in mid-air, as if a viscous skein stretched across the tunnel. Ahead of him, the tunnel was completely dry - a smooth sandstone surface, dimly lit, although the source of the light wasn't visible.

After resting, Sye used tunnel vision to edge himself little by little out of the water and into the dry section of the tunnel, which immediately began to bend from a vertical passage into a horizontal one. The tunnel also became slightly wider. This meant that although Sye was still unable to move his arms more than a fraction away from his sides, gravity helped him slide downwards around the bend.

He squirmed and writhed until his brain told him that he was in a horizontal position. As his naked body dried and blood circulation returned to his limbs, Sye was able to enjoy the delicious warmth given off by his subterranean tomb.

A straight stretch of tunnel continued as far as the dull light allowed Sye to see. A sudden thought made his spirits sink - was he now too exhausted to reach the other end, tunnel vision or not? So he rested and to his surprise slept a short time.

He awoke to an acute sense of claustrophobia. The air was thick and difficult to breathe. He began to wriggle down the narrow warren. A sense of dread gripped him from time to time, as firmly as the tunnel itself. It was only by closing his eyes and imagining he was in the hot, open desert of the Western Plains that he overcame it and his breathing steadied.

He twisted and rolled and wriggled as beads of sweat grew in number along his brow. His skin became scratched and grazed all over. Like a giant worm, he advanced slowly, inch by inch, going nowhere fast. He rested frequently, often gasping in the stale air until his pulse settled. He tried tunnel vision again and found he could now advance the length of his own body. However, this too seemed to take a huge amount of his energy. Through a combination of tunnel vision, wriggling and long rests, he made progress.



Sye judged that he had been rolling and writhing for the better part of a day and had covered little more ground than a worm would. Part of him wanted to check his legs to make sure Havoc had not changed him into one, but the confines of the well made even that impossible. He rested his bruised and battered body and drifted into a semi-slumber.

Havoc

The sheets were tucked firmly under the mattress, the way nurses made beds. Exploring the dim and silent world under the covers was how I always began Sunday mornings. This was followed by a cooked breakfast. If we were lucky, we were taken on a hike in the countryside. If we were not so lucky, it was Sunday church. The only fun there was trying to pocket the collection money without getting caught.

Sye blinked the dream from his eyes, along with the sweat. He wondered how dreams could feel so real and if they meant anything. The details, the emotions and the people – everything felt real, even though he didn't understand what they were about. Though short, his dreams were becoming so lifelike that they seemed more like memories than a product of his imagination. But they couldn't be. Even if there were other worlds and he was from one of them, as Havoc had told him, he had spent his whole life in this one. He hadn't had time to collect memories from anywhere else.

Sye's tortuous crawl continued. In total contrast to the well's cold water, the sandy tunnel was hot and dry, uncomfortably so. What was similar to being underwater was the fact that the air seemed to contain little oxygen. It was so clammy that he almost began to miss the cool, wet water of the upper section of the well. Although his throat was dry, his body glistened with sweat. His finger-ring, which could quench thirst in the driest of places, was of course gone - left behind with his other possessions. Even if he had been wearing it, he would have been unable to use it with his arms pinned to his sides.

Had Salm come this way? Had she suffered this torment? It was unlikely, as Havoc had said that the well was different for each who entered. Perhaps it was no coincidence that the diameter of the tunnel seemed to fit his exact proportions.

Thoughts of Salm led Sye to recall yet again the agonising moments when she had kidnapped his wife. Sye now knew that she (and presumably his child) were alive. Both Havoc and the Wayfarmer had seen Salm and his wife walking in the desert. That thought kept him going. Havoc was right - his personal goal of rescue and revenge was a stronger motivator than fulfilling Goth's task and going to a home, of which he had no recollection.

Without warning, the tunnel dipped down into water. Sye's heart sank for he was faced with the fear of again being submerged without knowing if or when he would emerge. It took him a while to summon up the courage to carry on and edge forward. He had no choice.

Havoc