

THE LAST BOAT OUT takes on events and circumstances that have always existed but never with such far-reaching impact. Readers will undoubtedly sympathize with those who fall by the wayside and also those who rise to the occasion.

THE LAST BOAT OUT

By Jo Singel

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Jo Singel

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This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

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CHARACTERS

JULIA

Founder, The Enlighten Initiative
Leader

THE MUSE

Julia's Confidant with whom she
corresponds

ANDREA

Julia's long-standing colleague
Possesses artificial intelligence superpowers
scientifically implanted prior to birth

ALFRED

Shaman Spirit Guide who communicates telepathically
with Julia and Andrea providing insights and wisdom

JEANNETTE

Julia's Niece and Theo's friend
Works for The Enlighten Initiative

THEO

Technologist

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

“Merge a tough, stressful environment with new, novel, unexpected threats and who knows what this unnatural soup is going to create.”

Julia

JULIA'S JOURNAL

Dear Muse,

It's been busy setting up the new game. Of course, it doesn't help that we are now hitting what may become our predicted second wave. Eleven zip codes have been identified as hot spots and are facing an eventual full shutdown of all but essential services to their communities. Will it spread to Gotham? That remains to be seen. Meanwhile, it is autumn, sun shining, indoor dining opened up 25%, outdoor dining getting more lavish and a wary trickle of the workforce and business executives entering near empty office buildings.

You have been occupied by a few returning residents and a work schedule that leaves you weary. As expected, you were wonderful during my scare with

the threatening group of drug heads who demanded to know what I was doing and where I was going. Imagine, in the doorway to my residence. Where did they think I was going? I was sent into a tailspin of past lives spent with abusers, including my mother who used all manner of punishment, whether justified or not, to control any imperfect behaviors. Violence has followed me from a first husband wife beater to the many random acts of surprise attacks from lunatic men both on the streets and at work.

I surmise that after months of lockdown, rioting, protesting in the streets, rising crime, emptying neighborhoods, random killings and other threats such as catching the Virus, that my own stress levels have reached pandemic proportion. I can feel it.

Anything can either set me off into panic, despair, dread and a sense of hopelessness. The times I have muttered to myself, “I can’t do this anymore” have been legion. Everyone is reacting differently, each in their own timeframe while others are getting surprise attacks of mysterious illnesses involving bruising, veins protruding, and hormonal changes.

Gotham has never been nor will be bucolic. Merge a tough, stressful environment with new, novel, unexpected threats and who knows what this unnatural soup is going to create.

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I see it with friends and family members who “are not acting like themselves” and are often unreliable and erratic in their behaviors, are either working 16 hour days or distracting themselves in any way they can.

And we thought we were going to easily implement our leadership experiences online and to large numbers of people. While our erstwhile Shaman guide placed this responsibility squarely on my shoulders, I hardly see where any of it would make a difference, even if we were to pull the team together to make it happen.

I suppose by now, my Muse, you are more than sensing my frustration and reluctance to move forward as we had all intended.

Expressing my frustration and confusion may alarm those who see me as the tower of strength. However, do not misinterpret my openness and actions. I remain totally committed to the task at hand, implementing the Enlighten Initiative. And my pledge is consistent with my long term objectives regarding higher consciousness.

October 6

Muse,

My niece and her boyfriend will be visiting for a few days. I haven't had guests at the apartment since early in the year and now I have run out of excuses for my no visitors rule. But the tourists are arriving from overseas and other states so isolation and privacy are becoming luxuries of a past that many of us resented and clamored for its ending. How interesting it is, don't you think? Take away freedoms and what seemed like a burden to bear becomes the new norm and we adjust to it. Like babies, we get trained and adopt new behaviors.

What is old is new again and I am finding that the cocoon I created for myself suits me just fine. Nonetheless, niece and boyfriend will visit and I will accept the company, as intrusive as I find it at the moment.

And, on the other hand, I am wary of spending time with the niece. She has had a history of behavioral issues, truancy in schools and running away from home. All appears to be well right now and she is creating a new life for herself with the boyfriend. He is a few years older than she is and comes from a family that's been in the funeral home business for decades. Old Philadelphia family with questionable ties to organized crime that have never been fully proven.

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So you see, Muse, your Julia may not be so anti-social as would first seem. We may have some problems ahead of us, and your steadfast presence and calm demeanor will mean a great deal to me in the coming times ahead.

Things are not comfy cozy in Gotham. Now we have a new threat coming from an unsuspecting place as issues with various freedoms are being pitted against laws that aim to protect the greatest good. The rights of the many and the sacrifice for the few? What's next? It looks like our vision and intention with our Enlighten Initiative program may not have taken into account just how fractured our world has become. It is indeed "a can of worms" as my Father would say. We are more fragile than we thought or we were not paying attention to the ever widening cracks in what we assumed was the land of the free and home of the brave.

Are we brave mask wearers? Or, is bravery defying a law that says to cover up your mouth and block your nose from fully breathing? Inhale and exhale your own air through a piece of cloth is, in a sense, taking away the freedom of full expression for the sake of another human being, or many human beings. Interesting times indeed. It is visceral to me. What was hidden inside is now exposed and visible. Who dares to see and be a witness to the dark places? Is it bravery to

look and visit with the place for a while or walk carefully around it so as not to disturb it any further? Or to walk toward it and into it?

I sense your choice would be to observe it, not get too close to it and back off from it. I am the opposite. That may change as time reveals more of the truth. Or, the very meaning of what we call truth may become questionable as the future is being written in the sand by the ocean. Every day a new tide makes visible what we have carelessly discarded and overwhelms what had been natural and beautiful. Seashells, seaweed and the remains of crab carcasses and the stray man-o-wars washing up on the beach.

What do we need to see and understand, Muse?

October 7

Muse,

I got word that the couple will be arriving tomorrow. I'm not mentally prepared for this visit and continue to have trepidation and not because of the Virus. Can I trust their being here among my belongings, writings and personal information? I have no past experience that would suggest these feelings are based upon evidence that their motivation is anything

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other than a place to stay while they visit Gotham for a few days.

I'll deal with it. There are no other options now, given I so carelessly agreed to host them in my home. Why do I feel like I'm letting the wolf in the hen house? Not so much her, but him, the next in-line to head up a long established funeral home, where it so happens my grandmother's wake was held. I wasn't born yet when she died. There was a coroner's inquest that kept her on ice for two weeks in her home around the Thanksgiving holiday. People from Queens paid their respects there and not until those individuals were satisfied with their business with her was she then transported to the funeral home. Case was closed and death established as "natural causes". I've seen the report. My reaction was one word, "Fake".

There is a piece of my history you don't know. I take a great deal of pride in my own machismo attitude. Call it the Sicilian in me. We were raised to not cry and if you were afraid of anything and let an elder know about it, you were surely to be punished by being forced to confront that fear head on until it no longer frightened you. Old habits and ways die hard.

For me, being vulnerable is to allow myself to be afraid. What I've now established for myself is that my instincts are on high alert and, although there is no

specific evidence of willful harm or threat, I feel a sense of foreboding that I have not experienced since those evenings lying in dread of catching the Virus and being on a ventilator. Now we know. Julia isn't afraid, she is on alert and so be it.

Muse,

Everything continues to change and evolve. At this point, those I thought I could count upon to move the Enlighten Initiative forward are being called to attend to the more urgent activities in their lives. The slate is being wiped clean of the old paradigm leaders while the unknowns continue to remain unknown. I don't know what will be next. I'm sitting on my own sense of urgency but am quite alone now and doing my best to not push what is not being sought. As you shared with me, this isn't something that can or should be pushed. And yet, I would argue, how does anything really get done? By waiting? Yes, I know, how can this work ever be pushed? My own feelings of helplessness are pushing through any common sense or intelligence. It's not even patience that is required. No, it's bravery. Don't push. Allow. I can see the river. There is nothing on it at the moment. It's not static but flowing and there are no obstructions. There is a rhythm and a pace and it

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doesn't want to be disturbed. Not just yet, that is. It isn't a matter of time or will there be a timely moment. It is taking its course and direction from a source we cannot see right now. The only sensible thing to do is to observe it. It will change us, we will not change it. All right, I get it now. To disturb it would be a disaster. To shift from being a hunter to something completely above it. A bird with only a divine purpose, a singular focus of being in the moment with all things and everything at once. Dipping into a swiftly flowing river would not be advisable and the bird naturally knows this. Getting swept away in the underlying current is not wise. Only the occasional step onto terra firma with a clear line of sight as to the next safe perch. Safety is essential. A solo flight, a scout with easy access taking it one moment at a time. The river is flowing, the sky is cloudy. Flying without radar can be exciting as well as dangerous but what isn't? Aren't there always hunters and the hunted? The predator and the prey? Who are we in this story, dear Muse?

Muse,

One of the activities that has been sustaining my soul these past weeks are regular visits to one of the world's most renowned museums. Until now I had no

appreciation for modern art, tending to prefer the Impressionists and the old Masters of the 14th and 15th centuries. Now, I've left all of that behind and prefer the artists of the last century, those who had passionate causes, broke barriers of what is considered art and disassembled the nature of our humanness, society and how we behave.

It is no surprise that I would be pulled into the past to receive inspiration and a surprising compassion from those who left behind a legacy that we can interact with, reinterpret and build upon for our own times. As of this moment, I am not forcing myself to draw comparisons or come to any conclusions.

The most important point from yesterday, however, were the numbers of people who had little, if any, regard for others as we are encouraged to keep 6 feet of social distance, wear masks and wash our hands numerous times.

And here we are in Gotham and the greater New York City area where 800 people a day on average died of the Virus just a few months ago. With lifting restrictions, tourists and day-trippers are once again flocking to any cultural institution that is open and behaving as if there were no Virus without a cure. They are back in the theme park that is Gotham. Sidewalks and parks filling up with the very same people who

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traveled here in the earlier part of the year carrying the Virus with them. And, like ignorant guests, are walking around without a care or empathy for those of us who are living, surviving and either choosing to remain here or have no other choices available to them.

Is there any hope for humanity to evolve consciousness or, at a basic and most simplistic level, be mindful of their environment and communities who are challenged on a daily basis with basic survival needs?

Since childhood, I have seen further into the future than anyone I knew. What I am witnessing today is disturbing. Have we learned nothing? Will we continue in a downward spiral of unconsciousness? Where will we land next and should we sit back and entertain ourselves until such time arrives?

The Museum is filled with images reflecting not just the previous centuries but our current and future ones. The art is mirroring and looking back at us who are frozen in time. We are lacking the wisdom to see what is facing us. We stare and move from one frame to another, in lock step, taking photos and selfies to share where we have been but nothing of what we have learned, need to teach or create a better future.

Humanity is returning to visit Gotham, a museum of the past, while closing from view those who continue

to suffer and will continue to do so if nothing changes. If our simple behaviors of respect for one another in basic common sense cannot be impacted, what chance do we have?

I am reminded of the months after 9/11 as we were still reeling from the event and the devastation it caused to see the tour buses arrive with jovial tourists taking photos and walking around as though they were in a theme park and we were the animals in the zoo.

I say, wake up world and get some respect for yourself. Andrea and Alfred are no doubt noticing I am not the same Julia now that we have entered a new phase of existing in a fragmented and uncertain present reality.

My thoughts have increasingly gone toward creating a way out of this mess of a world. I've had a lifelong fascination with Noah's Ark and survival games where there is a small lifeboat and people need to decide who will be saved and who will not. Who we help survive and why is of increasing interest. Not a day goes by that I don't think hard and long as to who would be on the boat and who I would vote to leave behind. That was the entire point of our leadership activities. And now, the games have become a more transparent reality. It doesn't appear we learned our lessons. Paradise is indeed lost. The question now is,

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how can it be regained or reimagined and who will be invited to build that desired future. As of right now, we are in survival mode and that rarely has a future. Survival's only goal is to save as much of the past as possible while only dealing in the present reality. It is time to move forward and leave the Museum to the wanderers. One last look and I am complete with it. It served its purpose. I don't need to see more to be convinced about where we are right now.

Muse,

I took a hiatus from writing these past few days and I don't claim to feel good about it. Since writing the first book I've been caught up in conversations about the content and others feelings regarding it. What I have been learning, hearing and sensing has surprised me in a concerning and, if I were being completely truthful, alarming way.

As I listened and spoke with others, I kept getting the sense that people want to pack away everything that doesn't immediately concern them and their families. The Virus is fast becoming an event with an end date. There is conversation about a vaccine that will make everything normal again and we can move on with our

vacations, moving plans, new wardrobes perhaps and anything that is “new”.

They are coming to deal with IT like it's another recession and they will adjust their budget or get a part-time job or be more austere with their entertainment activities. Whether it's the upcoming Presidential election, social unrest, poverty, injustice, inequality, hunger and all that can be ignored, compartmentalized and put on a shelf in the garage, attic or closet until the next upheaval, the next unknown threat or riot in a city or town.

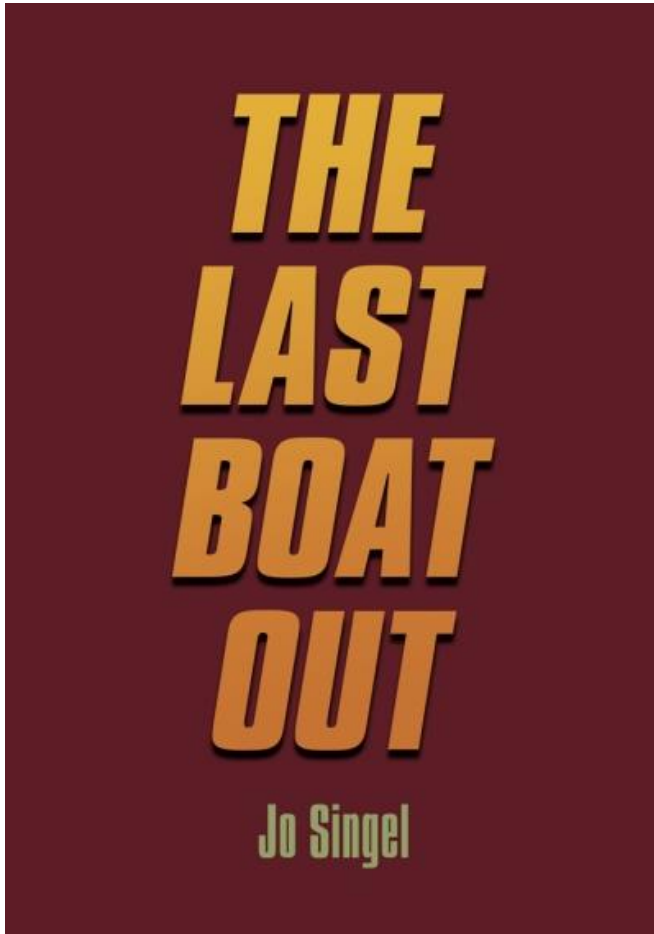
I ask, what have we learned? Forget books, movies, social media, political pundits, church Ministers, and others. How little we hear of those who are helping to shift the masses from the old, worthless, dehumanizing paradigms that have created new masters of the universe and billions of masked slaves beholden to a power they are too helpless, uneducated, starved, sick and depressed to confront and defy. Their only choice is to “deal” with it and focus on what is their daily existence.

And what of significance has moved the needle beyond the posting of more videos seeking those who are to blame for causing, creating, spreading IT? What is different now after massive protests, occupations, shutdowns, lockdowns, deaths, new drug addictions,

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increased criminal activity in the cities, increased domestic violence, children going without proper schooling, nutrition, the ill not getting surgeries, medical care and the elderly dying in nursing homes in untold numbers. Tell me. What has changed? Other than everyone is “dealing with IT”. People are getting back to work. What. If. Anything. Is. Different?

October 10



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