

# RESURGENCE

THE ETERNAL COLONY™

JASON PIGGOTT



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For Luke, Hannah, Ellie, Evie, Esmae, Chloe, Thomas, Lilly &  
Tyler  
Don't dream big; become the dream.

### **Acknowledgments**

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but I still thank you.



# CHAPTER I

“Will you quit your yapping? We’ve work to do.”

Meg was Henry’s no-nonsense border collie, but there she was, nose to the dirt, barking like a damn bloodhound. No doubt chasing a field mouse, but he lacked the energy to care, as he often did these days. The heat was getting to him too as he toiled waist-deep in an outbreak of nettles and overgrown brambles smothering the water trough. It needed clearing before he could relocate his sheep to this more secure pasture, as several lambs had disappeared this week, and he couldn’t afford to lose anymore.

He wiped his brow, raised the fork high, then drove it down into the sun-baked Wiltshire ground.

A thunderous growl rolled through the farmland—deep, relentless, yet the sky remained crystal clear. Then Henry felt it through his boots, and his body shook as if his bones had dissolved, leaving behind only the spongy marrow. He gripped the fork to steady himself as the earth spasmed and bucked. The ancient oak trees groaned and creaked like the doors at his cottage, while their branches swayed, sending down a shower of green leaves, twigs, and premature acorns. He couldn’t do anything but wait in frustration at the inconvenience.

In mere seconds, everything went still and mute, except the distant drone of the A303 traffic, which carried on, oblivious. The yellow wagtails didn’t resume their singing, and even the crows seemed too afraid to caw, as their heads swivelled around in confusion. The twin oaks—the farm’s namesake—sat rooted in bold defiance. They had stood for several generations of his family and would remain long after he was gone.

He tried to step forward, but his legs buckled, sending him sprawling. “Ow!” Meg rushed to his side, licking his face until he

pushed her away. “I’m all right, girl, I’m all right.” The pang of guilt poked at his gut in his dismissing Meg’s warning. He should have listened. She never steered him wrong.

Henry retrieved the fork, when another roar broke the silence—deep, muffled by distance, and almost feline. He grabbed the rusty water trough and planted his feet, but this time, nothing happened. No ground shaking underfoot, and the only sound came from the startled crows, squawking as they took to the skies in angry protest. Meg’s ears pricked, scanning, while she stared out beyond the adjacent field. “Must be an aftershock.” Still, the weight in his chest refused to lift.

Water trough cleared, he whistled for Meg to guide the flock into their new field.

As he made his way home, a breeze swept across the fields, lifting some of the mugginess, and cooled his baked skin. Golden yellow and orange hues marked the sun’s descent in the west, while a cooler palette of pastel blues and purples painted the evening sky, promising another relentless slog tomorrow. Grasshoppers concealed in the long grass sent out their mating calls. While sparrows preparing to settle for the night chattered and chattered in the bramble bushes surrounding the old cottage. Broken farm machinery and equipment lay discarded, decaying in the elements. Mother Nature’s punishing sentence served on the struggling business—and on him. No amount of resources could redeem the losses. The price was too steep to claim it back from the great British weather. Before heading inside, he caught the telltale earthy hint of petrichor in the atmosphere. “Rain’s coming.”

As he prepared supper in his usual routine; his joints and muscles vied to punish him for their day’s labour. The TV blared out the local news from the living room, which risked derailing his meticulous regime. “Where’s that blasted TV remote?”

*“This is Natasha Philips, reporting on what appears to be an unprecedented string of minor earthquakes. Fear and concern grip the rural community of Amesbury. Reports of seismic activity have reached as far as Salisbury. Experts have confirmed that today’s occurrence is the strongest yet. Windows rattled and—”*

“A fart in the wind, nothing more,” he said to the telly.  
 Meg gave a groan, and he shot her a glare. “Who asked you?”  
 He fetched her stainless-steel bowl and set it beside his wife’s  
 favourite wooden chopping board, the one she kept only for show.  
 The newsreader now prattled on about the cursed road.

*—government faces yet more pressure today over its cancellation of the ill-fated A303 bypass. The National Highway’s two billion pound project has undergone many proposals and developmental stages since the nineties. The latest scrapped plans involved a two-mile duel-tunnel that would eliminate a significant portion of the A303 from sight of Stonehenge and the surrounding World Heritage landscape. Earlier, the councillor for Wiltshire delivered a petition to Downing Street calling for the government to reconsider its decision. While protesters marched through the streets of London to—*”

“Bloody protesters.”

The current highway was a clogged artery. Inadequate considering the sheer volume of traffic abusing it daily. Tailbacks often stretched for miles, a slow-moving serpent, emitting poisonous fumes in its wake. At this rate, he’d be long gone before they laid a foot of new tarmac. It wouldn’t surprise him if the quakes were the government’s doing. They had spent years test-drilling to prepare for the bypass. Whenever he caught them trespassing on his land, he threatened to fetch his shotgun. They soon hurried off, leaving him chuckling.

Distracted, he nicked his finger as he diced a pre-cooked chicken breast. This regurgitated news wasn’t new, he told himself, as he sucked his bleeding finger. He used the knife to scrape the chicken chunks into the bowl, then noticed a red blot, so flipped the chopping board over and pushed it to the side. He added a mug of biscuits and covered it with thick gravy before taking the meal to his companion and depositing it at her feet.

She licked her jowls in anticipation, but waited with discipline. “Tuck in, girl,” he said. She wasted no time lapping up the contents.

On cue, a ping announced his supper was ready, and on top of the microwave he found the TV remote, right where he’d left it.

He sank into his worn-out armchair and ate his lasagne meal straight from the warped plastic tray. Meg woofed down her food

and then curled up at his feet. The news degenerated into its usual mundane tripe. An interview was being conducted with Timothy Miller, the owner of a nearby farm.

*—so you don't know how your pair of prize-winning pigs vanished?"*

*"That is correct, Natasha. We've been working hard to prepare for the pumpkin festival in October. Tickets go on sale tomorrow. Our surveillance footage showed no signs of suspicious activity. Bella and April don't wonder very—"*

"He ain't no farmer," said Henry, but couldn't dismiss the fact that he also had missing livestock. Meg peered up with wistful eyes, but declined to comment.

The businessman had purchased the estate some summers ago, turning it into a rare-breed tourist attraction. Complete with tractor rides and playgrounds. He had annoyed Henry when he offered to purchase some of his acreage. Even if he had nothing but dust in his pockets, he'd never sell that clown an inch of land.

The soft patter of rain rattled the thin window panes, but he found comfort in the rhythm and allowed his heavy eyelids a well-deserved rest. News, he didn't care about any of it; he cared little about anything anymore. Somewhere during the predictable weather forecast, he nodded off.

He awoke to Meg barking for his attention. This time, he wouldn't ignore her. She continued yapping and rushed to the kitchen door. His hearing was nowhere near as sharp as hers, so he didn't bother trying.

Equipment theft was a persistent battle in the agriculture industry. Even though he owned very little of value, he refused to sit back and let anyone steal his crap. He threw on his gilet jacket, flat cap, and boots, then snatched his shotgun from the cabinet. Stashed a handful of shells in his pocket and headed outside.

Despite the day's scorching heat, the temperature had plummeted. The southwest breeze dispersed any residue of sleepiness. The rain had come and gone, leaving the dirt soft underfoot, but the puddle depressions remained empty.



Now he could hear what troubled her. The night air carried the bleating cries of his sheep. He hurried to his 4x4. Meg hopped in, and they sped toward the meadows.

“Must be poachers.”

Meg offered a soft whine, perched on the passenger seat, ears pricked, ready for action. Henry skidded to a halt on the dirt trail alongside the five-bar gate. No sooner had he opened his door, and before he could grab his shotgun, Meg scrambled through a narrow gap in the ‘not so secure’ fence.

The flock huddled in the enclosure’s distant corner. He tugged his torch from his inside pocket, and swept it over land, sheep, and fence line. With no sign of what was causing their distress, he set off to investigate.

A feral roar came from within the dark thicket of hawthorn trees adjoining the field. The same sound he’d heard earlier—after the quake—but this time closer. Much closer.

He paused.

Meg slowed to a tentative prow, scanning the area, paying extra attention to the silhouetted shrubbery in the moonlight.

The snarl cut through the air again.

Henry proceeded, even though fear crept into his veins. His wavering torchlight failed to pierce the veiled undergrowth between the hawthorns. His mind churned, struggling to place the sound, but every conclusion seemed illogical. It didn’t resonate like a lion’s. A jaguar, perhaps? Or a puma? Well, the evening news neglected to inform him about an escaped big cat. What else could it be?

“It ain’t poachers, that’s for sure,” he muttered.

The spooked ewes shuffled, forming a protective shield for their young.

Then it came.

A blurred mass sprang from the gloom and landed amid the flock—scattering it in all directions and leaving behind a dark mound with a hapless lamb pinned to the ground. Its bleating cries spilled into the night.

Without hesitation, Meg dashed towards the creature.

It took Henry a moment to shake off disbelief before acting. He raised his shotgun and, with torch still in hand, steadied the quivering barrel before squeezing the trigger.

The blast rang out, and the beast howled in pain.

As he neared the downed animal, some features became clearer. Its size equalled an African lion, but nothing else resembled any of the big cats that he knew of. A rugged brown coat of wiry fur with flecks of tan covered its body, while its belly and legs were a silvery grey.

His hope of a clean kill died as it rose to its feet. Meg darted left and right, yapping meters from its face. The beast tracked her, hackles raised, and then it let out a spine-chilling roar.

Realisation and sheer bewilderment froze his blood and added kilos to his boots. A set of elongated canines protruded from its upper jaw. He was staring at a sabre-toothed tiger.

He no longer felt safe. Would the prehistoric nightmare consider him a threat or potential food? The turmoil overloaded his brain. This couldn't be happening. It's impossible. Was it possible the doctors were accurate in their evaluation and his condition was deteriorating faster than he would admit? No, everything else made sense. He remembered falling asleep in his armchair, his lasagne, and the news. These creatures hadn't walked the earth in thousands of years, right?

How the blazes had one shown up on his farm?

The shaggy tiger scooped the slain lamb in its jaws and backed away, eyes fixated on Meg. Henry stood dumbfounded, his gun and the shell waiting in the chamber, forgotten. He corrected his error and aimed.

Whether it sensed imminent danger or pure chance, the beast fled over the fence and into the shadowy woodland, too fast for him to track.

Meg bolted in pursuit.

He called out and then whistled the return command, but she didn't respond. Even the ewes had settled down with their young. "Call yourself a sheepdog?" With no choice, he hurried after them.

He emerged from the tree line and waded into an expanse of flowering rapeseed plants swaying in the gentle wind. Like a torpedo, the mysterious beast's rump tore a pathway through the ocean of yellow. Hidden below the surface and locked on its tail was the ripple of Meg.

His whistles fell on deaf ears. That blasted dog knew better than to run through rapeseed fields. If she wasn't careful, she would also learn not to chase cats, especially big ones.

The sabre-tooth exited the crop and cleared the boundary fence. Meg whipped under it a fraction after. A snarled cry shattered the silence, preceded by a piercing yelp. "Meg!" Nothing.

Henry picked up his pace while still whistling and cursing. After struggling over the wooden fence, he paused, expecting the worst, but found only the slaughtered lamb. Poor thing would have fetched over a hundred pounds at the market.

He faced a field of young corn, a metre in height, making it impossible to spot either animal in the gloom.

Henry was relieved to hear Meg calling him in the distance and followed her voice to a small island of uncultivated land near the field's edge. It boasted a trio of broad beech trees, which had seeded a scattering of saplings. He was careful not to trip over the clumps of tall grass and embedded rocks. As he fought through the thick brambles, he wished he'd brought gloves.

He spotted her barking at a large mound of earth, its rocky surface abundant with vegetation. But where was the feline predator? Fear tightened his chest, suffocating like bindweed. The leaves rustling above masked his progress as he crept through the undergrowth.

"Meg, get here."

He attempted to convey authority without drawing unwelcome attention. She ignored him and continued snarling at the mound. He had almost reached her when she vanished from sight.

Flabbergasted by both her disappearance and her behaviour, he abandoned caution and raced to the spot she had been. He found an opening—wide, but low ceilinged, and larger than a badger sett entrance. Dropping to his knees, he shone the torch into what appeared to be a cave. How deep the narrow passage went, he couldn't tell, but the limited torchlight revealed no sign of Meg nor the sabre-tooth.

He brushed at the soil and gravel, revealing flattened, yellowed grass. Fresh, maybe a week old, coinciding with the earthquakes. Coincidence?

Now, his girl was missing. What was she thinking? How could he run the farm alone? He stayed for several hours waiting, hoping

for her to emerge. Every few minutes, he called or whistled out to her, but only his echo returned from the darkness.

Henry gazed up at the twilight sky as a sense of loss consumed his soul from the inside out. He was half tempted to follow her, but he had responsibilities, and it would be foolish without proper provisions.

“Oh, Meg.”

The adrenaline was gone, and all his familiar aches and pains resumed, but they paled compared to the germinating seed in his chest. Over the years, everyone ended up leaving him. With reluctance, he headed home. The birds were already singing their morning songs as he arrived home. The farm would soon require his presence. This time not accompanied by his girl.

## CHAPTER 2

Relaxed in the passenger seat, Ellen focused on her compact mirror and, with precision, swept her lashes with mascara.

She jerked forward as the car hit another pothole so hard that her half-eaten breakfast bar tumbled off her lap and disappeared into the footwell. She snapped the mirror shut and tossed it into her handbag. “Are you doing that on purpose?” she asked.

“It’s not my fault. What do you expect from a dirt road?” said Billy.

He threw a cheery smile, but that was his predominant expression around her. “Besides, why worry about looks? He sounds eccentric.”

Ellen didn’t bother reasoning. He wouldn’t understand. Instead, she shot him a contemptuous scowl, which he failed to clock.

As the farm came into view, she agreed with him on one point. The farmer’s claim sounded batshit crazy. “This is a waste of time. After we finish here, you owe me another breakfast.”

“Sure, why not.”

She couldn’t tell whether he was being sincere or sarcastic.

The sun-bleached fences leading up to the cottage slanted at every imaginable angle. A testament to Mother Nature’s hard work, and the farmer’s restraint to intervene.

This wasn’t the story she expected to be covering after years of studying. She dreamed of becoming a renowned fashion journalist, but here she was, an unknown reporter for *The Amesbury Post*. A modest local newspaper that refused to keep up with the times, it didn’t even have a social media presence. They assigned her mundane stories of no interest to anyone.

Billy’s enthusiasm was abundant, even for the most boring tasks. Robert Thomason, the company’s editor and owner, had taken him

on as an apprentice, despite his lack of formal qualifications. Ellen couldn't deny that his photography was remarkable. He captured the perfect image to fit the narrative. He was always upbeat and cracking jokes. She wondered if he was on something. Maybe she should ask him? Maybe she needed some too? Nobody should be this cheerful, not on their wages. Besides, he had every reason to be unhappy.

She wasn't proud, digging through the paper's archives to better know her work colleagues. A simple search of his surname turned up several front-page headlines from five years ago. Despite the events publicised, it felt intrusive reading about his family's tragic loss.

As they drew up beside the dilapidated farmhouse, she caught Billy checking his afro in the rearview mirror. "Now, who's concerned with their looks?"

He flashed her a killer smile, then chuckled as he slid out of the driver's seat.

A man approached them from the adjacent barn. His eyes were droopy, and silvery unkempt hair stuck out from his flat cap. Unlike her and Billy, appearances did not bother him.

Ellen hoisted her handbag over her shoulder and placed one confident foot forward, then staggered as her heel lost traction on the rough ground. Billy's snigger evaporated with the intensity of her glare. The farmer either ignored her blunder or didn't care.

She extended a hand. "Hello, Henry Billington? I'm Ellen from the newspaper and Billy, our photographer."

He declined her offered hand and instead gestured for them to enter. She wiped her feet on the doormat, then noticed the carpeting. Its colour matched the dirt road. This explained the whereabouts of the potholes' contents. The decor pre-dated her parents, and black dusty cobwebs resembling eerie Christmas decorations hung in every corner.

Their initial information included a missing dog. She could smell it, along with a musty odour. It reminded her of her granddad's home before his recent passing. Ellen pushed the uncomfortable reminder aside and focused on the job. Mr Billington gestured towards a sofa buried under mountains of

newspapers and magazines. She moved a teetering pile of TV guides to make room for them to sit, then perched on the edge.

Billy was smart. He remained on his feet and ambled around the open-plan lounge, dining area and kitchen as if viewing the property as a potential buyer.

Desperate to get off the sofa and leave, Ellen skipped the pleasantries and angled straight to the point of their visit.

“So, Mr Billington, you’re claiming a beast preyed on your flock and chased away your dog?”

“No! I’m saying a sabre-toothed tiger slaughtered a lamb before fleeing. Meg, my sheepdog, pursued it into a cave.” His armchair creaked as he sat.

“They’re called sabre-toothed cats or Smilodons. They’re not referred to as tigers anymore,” said Billy, who was studying the tarnished silver-framed photos on the wall.

Her jumbled thoughts were distracting. “You’re suggesting a sabre-toothed tiger—I mean cat—attacked your sheep and was driven away by your dog, is that correct?”

“You can call me Henry. And yes, that’s what I’m saying.”

She blew out her breath. “You realise they have been extinct for thousands of generations? So, whatever you think you spotted last night wasn’t a prehistoric beast.”

He gripped the armrests of the chair and raised his voice. “I know what I saw, and it should be extinct, but I tell you just as I told the police—who didn’t believe me—there was one on my farm.”

Billy rejoined them, bearing a framed family photo. “When did your wife leave you?”

Henry turned red, shot up, and pointed at the photo. “Put that back, and it’s none of your business.”

Ellen likewise stood. Any excuse to vacate the uncomfortable sofa. “I understand these questions might be uncomfortable and appear unrelated, but it helps us build a descriptive report with historic information.”

His shoulders sagged, and he relented. “Last week marked twenty years since she woke at dawn and decided a farmer’s life wasn’t for her.”

It appeared Billy had done the prior digging and continued with personal questions. “I went to school with James. Is he still living in London, selling properties? What’s John up to these days?”

Ellen presumed Billy knew the answers.

“Yes, James is doing well marketing real estate in Notting Hill. John works at a fancy hotel in Oxford as an executive chef.” Henry sank back into his chair. “And now Meg is gone too.”

Ellen couldn’t tell if the dust or dog hair—clinging to every surface—was causing the prickling sensation in her nose, distracting her. She needed his complete statement fast, and then fresh air.

Ten minutes later, she had an account of events and a detailed description of the beast.

Then Billy probed at another angle. “Can you confirm doctors have diagnosed you with dementia?”

Henry’s facial features boiled magma red, and he burst out of his chair. “No, you bloody well can’t. If you don’t believe me, get the hell off my farm.”

How and where he got his information, she didn’t know. At that moment, he compounded Henry’s anger by taking a photo.

“Get that blasted camera out of my face, boy.” With raised fists, he advanced on him.

Ellen stood and cursed as her handbag knocked a stack of papers, causing an avalanche to fall to the floor. As she gathered them up, her nose couldn’t take anymore, and she launched into a sneezing fit. She needed to defuse the tension. She would not impress Thomason with her handful of vague notes.

“Henry, can you take us to where you encountered this beast?” she asked. It might offer clues to prove or disprove his story and give them breathing space.

The sun lumbered through its daily commute as it ascended high above, reducing the morning clouds to little more than wisps in the warm air. Henry’s rage diminished too, as he led the way across his farm. She hoped Billy didn’t antagonise him, because he’d brought along his shotgun.

Ellen repeated her questions and had to admit his answers didn’t change. He pointed out where the alleged beast made its



kill, but she found nothing of interest or anything to confirm his claim. With no further leads, this interview was going nowhere until an idea struck. "So, Henry, can you show us this cave? If you remember the way?"

"Of course I can ruddy remember. I haven't lost my mind." He directed his last words at Billy, who kept himself busy capturing pictures of grazing sheep and the surrounding countryside.

They trekked through a yellow field of flowering plants that threatened to set her nose off again. Billy motioned for her to hang back and asked, "What are we doing? We're wasting time."

Ellen shrugged. "We find a cave; it strengthens his claim. If not, we paint it as a crazy man's tale. Either outcome, we get a solid story."

Billy helped boost her over a fence and into another field. Henry halted. A reddish-brown and white woolly jumper lay discarded in the tall grass.

"Here's my proof?" He tapped the mound with his boot. Then she recognised the slain lamb, just as he claimed. Congealed blood crusted the lamb's woollen coat, and its head bent at an abnormal angle.

Billy squatted and examined the body, revealing two puncture holes around its neck. Once he finished taking photos, he stood and wiped his hands on his jeans. "This proves nothing. A dog could have inflicted these wounds."

The old man didn't respond. Ellen turned to find him heading through the cornfield for a patch of wasteland.

She tripped and scraped her way through the overgrowth, to be presented with an unremarkable cave. She expected something more magnificent, not a gap so tight that even an adult pig would struggle to fit through.

Henry knelt, pulled a torch from his pocket, and shone it into the dark void. This corroborated his statement, but proved inadequate unless the sabre-tooth made an appearance.

"Meg!" Henry's bellow startled her. If that didn't attract the big cat, nothing would.

Henry called out again, and Ellen strained her ears. His voice travelled deeper than the torchlight. He repeated the call for another ten minutes, but became despondent as time passed. After

a while, resigned and weary, he gave up and stood. Billy shook his head, and with reluctance she agreed, they were done.

The sun reached its peak and radiated its golden rays in triumph. It burned the skin on her neck as they headed for the cottage.

She couldn't help but empathise with Henry's emotional struggles, but they had learned everything they could. "I hope Meg comes home to you soon." The gesture sounded hollow and sat like a 'get well soon' card to someone who had broken half their bones in a skiing accident.

As they drove from the farm, Ellen noticed a rip on the sleeve of her blouse and her scuffed shoes, but she enjoyed the assignment more than expected. Henry was eccentric and detached from society. His story sounded plausible, except for the prehistoric feline, but she could find no motive for him to concoct a far-fetched tale, and his details were explicit.

Billy brought her mind back to the car. "You believe him? Don't you?"

Was she that easy to read? "I know he's not just missing his dog; he's lost his only friend. The sabre-tooth part? I'm desperate to believe. How will we convince Thomason and the readers?" she asked.

"I figure, if we want to keep our jobs and protect our credibility, we're going to have to go the crazy old man route," said Billy.

It clashed with her morals, but without solid evidence, she had limited options.



Later that day, Henry stared at the wall clock and then at the empty bowl at his feet. Supper time, and she'd be hungry. He sagged into his armchair and rested his eyes, remaining motionless for hours, drifting in and out of unconsciousness, letting his thought wander. Throughout his life, he poured time and energy into the farm, neglecting his family. In his solitude, he released years of bitterness and resentment. To his surprise, the minute hand had only travelled half a circle.

Meg. She might be disobedient, but she had defended the herd and him. No, she hadn't abandoned him, and he sure as hell would not abandon her.

With a new resolve, he focused on what he required to search for his friend and bring her home, or die trying.

Henry dug out one of his son's old rucksacks and started stuffing it. A loaf of bread, a packet of dog biscuits for Meg, and his stainless-steel flask, which he filled with water. He rummaged in several kitchen drawers until he found his grandfather's gold-plated compass. Next, he packed torch batteries in side pockets, a first aid kit, and any useful items. Upstairs, he retrieved his handgun from under the mattress, and his medication from the bathroom. He emptied his gun cabinet of ammunition and a fishing knife, which was a gift from his wife that he never got around to using.

His hands were shaking, not through fear, but with adrenaline and excitement.

He collected a shovel and pickaxe from an outbuilding, and slung a length of rope over his shoulder. Better to be prepared.

With one last look at his farm, he set off to find his friend. A golden sliver of sunlight was still visible as it sank below the horizon.

Henry found himself at the cave sooner than expected. He shovelled the loose soil and small rocks away from the entrance, then set it next to the pickaxe.

He squeezed into the unknown with torch and backpack in hand, prepared for the difficult crawl.

"I'm coming, Meg."