

# Meteorite Strike

By AG Taylor

## Extract from Chapter 1

“This is it!” Daniel yelled as the cabin levelled out, as if the pilot had managed to raise the nose of the plane. The engines roared even louder, drowning out all other sound in the cabin.

An impact juddered through the entire plane, causing Sarah to jump in her seat and then come back down again so violently she bit her lip. It was as if the plane had hit something and then bounced back up in the air. She wiped her mouth, tasting blood, and looked round at Robert. He had his head between his knees but his whole body was shaking. She reached over and put an arm round his shoulders.

The plane hit the ground again, harder this time, and kept moving for a few seconds. *We'll be okay*, Sarah found herself thinking. She remembered pictures of the desert in Australia, so flat and empty. Probably not that much different from landing at an airport, just a few more bushes and rocks to look out for. Right?

From beneath the floor of the cabin came the terrible sound of metal tearing and then another impact. On the left side of the plane something exploded with an almighty booming sound. At the edge of her vision, Sarah saw fire leap up at the window.

Suddenly the whole cabin seemed to spin round to the right, as if the plane was now sliding along sideways rather than forwards. The sound of the engines had lessened and Sarah could hear the cries of the other passengers once again. The walls and floor were shaking so violently, she wondered if the whole cabin was going to split apart and spill them out into the desert.

Then, just as suddenly as the ordeal had begun, it ended.

With a heavy thud, the plane came to a halt, rolled a little to the right and then settled back at a slight angle. The interior fell silent for a moment as people unfolded themselves and looked around, amazed they were in one piece. Sarah looked up the aisle and saw Nicole hastily unbuckling herself from her seat. The woman moved to the exit door and started operating the emergency release handles.

Sarah unclipped her own belt and turned to Robert, who was looking back at her with tear-stained eyes.

“Is it over?” he asked, voice very small.

Sarah nodded and ran a hand through his hair, just like she'd seen Mum do the time he fell off his bike and cut open his knee.

“We're going to be okay,” she told him.

All around, people were struggling out of their seats and rushing into the aisles, heading for the doors. A bottleneck quickly formed, with people at the back pushing and shouting as they desperately tried to get to the exits. *So much for an orderly evacuation*, thought Sarah. She started to move as well, grabbing Robert's hand, but Daniel shook his head at her.

"Wait, Sarah!" he called. "You'll get trampled by these idiots."

Sure enough, so many people were trying to pile into the aisle at once that they were starting to fall over the top of each other in their haste. Some of them were nursing wounded arms and heads from the crash. They stepped on one another in the confusion. Robert gripped Sarah's arm tighter.

Sarah looked back to where Nicole was heaving open the emergency door, while another attendant tried to hold people back for a moment. And that's when it happened...

The door swung open and a cloud of choking red dust flooded into the cabin, driving people back down the aisles. Outside a storm was raging and now it invaded the plane. Too late, Sarah raised a hand to her face and got a mouthful of the sandy dust as the cloud enveloped her seat. She bent forward, coughing and rubbing her eyes.

Seconds before, people had been desperately rushing towards the doors, but now they struggled back, away from the dust storm that was tearing through the cabin. *We must have landed in the cloud*, Sarah thought to herself as she shielded Robert's face and looked round at the panicking passengers through watery eyes.

"Come on," a voice ordered. She looked up to see Daniel standing beside her seat, a handkerchief held over his nose and mouth to stop the dust. From his shoulder bag he produced a T-shirt that he ripped into two pieces and handed to her.

"Hold this over your face."

She took the material gratefully and gave the other piece to Robert.

"We can't go out there," she protested as Daniel started pulling her to her feet. "We're in the cloud!"

"We can't stay here," he said, looking round as someone pushed past him roughly. People were piling up at the back of the plane now, trying to get as far from the open door as possible.

"We can't breathe out there!" Sarah argued, pulling away violently.

Daniel bent his face close to her ear, so Robert couldn't hear.

"This plane is going to explode. The engine is on fire. Do you understand?"