

Waiting on a Cue to Turn and Run

by J.D. Cook

1

There was something strange in the air that dusk as James looked out his window expecting to see the same old city skyline, but what he got was something wholly unexpected. A trail of fire filled the sky. It continued to grow as it headed towards the outlying woods. James watched in awe, as the wheels of his brain formulated an idea. He picked up his phone, and quickly dialed. Instead of a ring he got a popular song called, “The Resident Evil.”

“Hello,” answered James’ friend Michelle.

“Hey what are you doing right now?” asked James hurriedly.

“Getting ready for a nap,” said Michelle with a slight annoyance in her voice.

“Well meet me outside your house in ten,” said James.

“Why?” asked Michelle; her annoyance replaced with intrigue.

“I can’t tell you yet,” said James knowing how to play it so she would have to come.

“Tell me,” demanded Michelle.

“You’ll just have to come with me, and find out,” said James.

“Fine; I’ll see you in ten,” the sound of her breathing ceased, and James hung up his end as well.

Ten minutes, and twenty three seconds later James stood at Michelle’s front door. Too nervous to knock he stood there, and waited. Five minutes later she popped out of her door looking as good to James as ever.

“Now what is this about?” asked Michelle.

“Just come on,” said James heading off her porch to the woods across the street.

It took some more time then expected, but James found the impact point by following a smoke trail that he could just make out. Unfortunately there was nothing, but the smallest and virtually unnoticeable dip in the ground left.

“Finally we stopped,” said Michelle.

“Oh,” said James disappointed.

“What is it?” asked Michelle with the annoyance returning to her voice.

“Well I saw a meteor, or something going towards the woods, and I figured I’d show you, but apparently it mostly burned up in the atmosphere,” said James looking around for something better to show Michelle.

“Jeez; you stopped me from taking a nap for this,” said Michelle turning around, and starting back towards her home. James stood for a moment, but he didn’t want to let Michelle walk home alone so after one quick crouch to investigate the dip a bit better he sped off to catch up to her.

The next day in school no one seemed to be the least bit interested in the fact that James had seen a meteorite; no one except for James’ best friend Charlie.

“You just happened to look out your window as a meteorite was flying through the sky?” asked Charlie.

“Yeah,” said James grabbing a milk carton from the large pile, and heading for the lunch lady at the check out.

“Number,” asked the lunch lady.

“59493,” said James before heading towards his group of friends at his lunch table. Charlie jogged to catch up with him, and accidentally bumped into a girl dressed in black.

“Sorry,” said Charlie picking her books up.

“No problem,” said the girl scurrying off towards her table. Charlie paused a moment to watch her walk away, and when he turned back towards his table he hit another girl.

“Watch it,” said the girl; who was dressed extremely normal even for high school.

“Sorry,” said Charlie as she sped off.

“Anyway, man; that’s got to be the luckiest thing I’ve ever heard!” as he was saying that Charlie sat next to James.

“Yeah well I just wish Michelle was as impressed,” said James biting into his sandwich.

“You’ve been after her since the seventh grade when are you going to forget about her?” asked Charlie as he stole a missing friend’s French fries.

“I don’t know it’s not like I don’t try,” said James looking over towards where Michelle usually sat. “It’s weird that she’s not here; I saw her last night, and she was fine,” said James with a hint of worry in his voice.

“She probably awoke on the wrong side of the bed, and decided not to come,” said Charlie gobbling up the stolen French fries.

“Nah she’s not the type to skip uselessly,” said James as two more friends joined the table.

One surveyed his plate, “Where’s my fries?”

2

As James walked home he couldn't help, but notice more people than usual coughing. As he walked in the front door he made a note of it to his mother.

"It's probably just that time of the season," his mother said washing the dishes repeatedly. "How's Michelle doing?"

"Good," shouted James as he bolted up the stairs unwilling to talk social life with his mother.

The next few days passed much the same, and after James had waited the necessary three days, to disqualify himself from being a stalker, he decided to call Michelle who was still absent from school.

"Hello?" answered Michelle's mother.

"Is Michelle there?" asked James in his most gentleman like voice.

"I'm afraid she's sick, and sleeping honey, but she should be in school again next week; hopefully."

"Well thanks for your time; goodbye," said James making sure to wait for her reply before he clicked the end button on his phone.

* *

Friday came, and James was less than excited for the football game. Without the chance of seeing Michelle it seemed a moot point.

"C'mon I need a wingman," said Charlie as he sat in James' computer chair. Charlie stood up, and pulled a sword from James' small collection swinging it around recklessly. James was extremely proud of his sword collection because hardly any other teenagers could say they collected swords. It made James different, and he liked being different.

"I'd really rather just stay home, and play video games tonight," James said as he turned his Playstation on. Charlie put James' sword back, and turned it off.

"You play that enough now lets go!" demanded Charlie.

"Fine - but you owe me!" said James grabbing his jacket, and turning off the lights. The pair descended the stairs.

"So when will your mom be back?" asked Charlie heading for the door.

"Monday; business trip," said James locking the door, and stepping out.

"She must really trust you," said Charlie stepping onto the sidewalk, and starting towards the football field.

At the game both kids noticed an unusual absence of people. It wasn't just the player's parents or the visiting team section either. It was the teenagers that usually circled the field one hundred times paying less attention to the actual game than a cricket hopping on the road. Besides James, and Charlie there couldn't have been more than thirty people at the game. Even the head coach of their football team was missing. The pair called the quits at halftime glancing at the lopsided score; they were being crushed.

On the walk home James was glad to have brought his warmest leather jacket. He had bought it with his Grandfather while visiting Boston a couple of years back.

“So are you going to stay at my house tonight?” asked James.

“No; I think I’m going to check in at my parents so they know I’m alive,” laughed Charlie, “plus my brother Ronny might call tonight.”

“How’s he doing in the military?” asked James remembering Charlie’s brother from his freshmen year of high school; when he had stopped a senior from beating the snot out of him.

“Well this is where I take the road less traveled,” said Charlie said waving goodbye to James as he took a different road. The dark October night grew colder as James walked home. The walk was simple straight up the town’s main road, but it seemed like something lurked in every shadow. James was freaking himself out when a squirrel darted in front of him. James halted, and then laughed at his own imagination, but when the squirrel didn’t move James started to walk around it. That’s when it jumped at him, and locked its teeth on his leather jacket. He could feel the pressure, but the teeth were halted by the strong leather.

“What the hell?” laughed James grabbing it by the tail, and yanking it off him quickly. When it hit the ground it immediately regained its balance, and charged him again. This time he was scared, and he ran. He got to his house in record time, and once he was safe on his couch he laughed hysterically.

“A killer squirrel,” he said as he turned on the T.V. The local station sprang to life on his screen, and he quickly used the guide function to look for something better, but before he changed it he couldn’t help, but notice that the normal anchor woman looked extremely sick.

* * *

Sleep had come easy after six straight hours of the newest survival horror video game on his Playstation. That’s why he was so surprised when he awoke before dawn. He looked around his room for a cause to his awakening, but soon rolled back over, and prepared for some more sleep. From downstairs the echo of footsteps came. Thousands of fearful scenarios’s flooded James’ brain as he threw back his covers, and picked up a sword from his small collection. Now unfortunately he wasn’t thinking about what a great find the sword in his hand had been. He was wondering if he would be turning the blade red in a few seconds.

He slowly opened his door, and surveyed the upstairs hallway. It looked clear, and he stepped out of his room flipping the light switch on in the hallway.

“If there’s anyone down there; the police are coming so you better go!” said James as masculine as possible. A gargled word came in response, and a thrashing of something could be heard as James lifted the sword.

“They’ll be here any minute,” said James. He moved towards the stairway, and looked down it. He was able to see the landing, but that was it. A woman stepped into the light, and yelled a hoarse sound at him causing James to jump.

“Just get the hell out of my house!” shouted James trembling. She took the first step, and then the second slowly.

“The Police are coming!” yelled James making sure he had a tight grip on the sword.

As the woman took the third step her speed changed drastically. She bolted towards James. He was hit hard in the stomach. She climbed on top of him, and hit him repeatedly. The sword flew into the nearby bathroom, and James fought to keep her from impacting his head with her fists. She wouldn't relent as James struggled to get away from her. She continued to shout things that made no sense, and he suddenly felt his fear replaced with pure adrenaline. He used it to toss her off of him, and jump into his room; slamming the door behind him, and putting his back against it. The woman in the hallway was pounding on the door hard, but after only a few moments she seemed to stop, and James stood up. He slid his dresser in front of the door as quickly as he could before grabbing the phone. James dialed 9-1-1, but it just rang. After calling repeatedly he tried his mom, but was again met with no answer, or voice mail. He sat down on his bed, and thought of who could help him. His dad was in another state; Uncle was on vacation in the Bahamas, but his grandfather was just off the mountain where James lived in the Valley.

He punched in the numbers before he finished his thought. He was met with an answering machine.

“Hi this is Margaret and Roger. We're not home right now leave a message, and we'll get back to you.” as the phone beeped James prepared for a loud shout because he knew his grandparents were home; they had work at seven, and glancing at the clock confirmed it was still very early; four nineteen on the dot in fact.

“GRANDPA; GRANDMA!” shouted James with all his vocal power. He continued to yell for the next minute before the answering machine beeped again. He hung up the phone, and before he could call again it rang.

“Hello!” answered James excited to get a call from anyone who might help him.

“Dude,” said Charlie's voice through the phone.

“You'll never believe what the hell's going on here!” shouted James.

“My mom's dead,” said Charlie.

“A woman's in my,” Charlie's words took a moment to sink in on James cutting him off mid speech.

“What? How?” asked James.

“I don't know,” said Charlie “I woke up to screams, and then when I came down stairs I found her,” Charlie broke into cries of pain. The phone went dead abruptly when Charlie stopped weeping.

“Charlie? Charlie!” shouted James again. James' sword penetrated the door, and missed him by a tenth of an inch. He jumped back in fright dropping the phone. The sword was withdrawn, and came through again in a different spot. The process was repeated as James established where he couldn't stand in the room. He then set about getting what he could to enforce his barricade on the door. All the while his sword kept piercing it. In a rather genius contraption; James laid his book case down against the dresser, and his wall. It was almost a perfect fit to stop anyone from pushing his door

open. He then piled the heaviest objects in his room on top of the dresser before sitting in the corner opposite his door.

* * * *

Outside the sun slowly worked its way up into the sky. In the light James could make out his neighbors house. It had its windows smashed in. Across the street he could see the front door of the Redfield's home also smashed in. The phone began to beep loudly alerting him to the fact that he had left it on. He quickly hit end, and no sooner had he closed his eyes then was he asleep.

Gunshots rang in James' ear as he opened his eyes. His room was lit by the mid morning sun. He glanced at the clock, and realized he had only been asleep for about twenty minutes. James stood up, and looked out the window again. A car was smashed into the Redfield's home now. James thought about the odds of Charlie's mother dying, The Redfield's being vandalized, and his own house being broken into on the same day. There had to be something that connected all the events.

"Was this all just a random series of unfortunate events or something more sinister?" thought James silently. He decided to check his computer for answers grabbing his monitor, and tower off the pile of furniture that made up his barricade. He quickly plugged everything in, and waited as the computer started up. He took this time to look at his door; pierced by dozens of sword holes. He could see nothing in the hallway, but he couldn't see enough of the hall to be sure. James sat down again, and clicked on the E for internet explorer. Yahoo popped up, and James scanned the main headlines as he typed in the cities newspapers website. A headline caught his eye on Yahoo as he was doing this; Pa town breaks record for 9-1-1 calls.

He double clicked the link as fast as he could. The article read, "After 9 P.M. last night the town of Albanoville Pa, was flooded with 9-1-1 calls ranging from rabid animals to break ins. Authorities worked quickly, but were soon overwhelmed. The State Police were met with the same outcome, and the state riot unit is currently in the town," at the bottom of the article it read, "Report will be updated as situation changes, citizens urged to stay in homes."

James was stunned that things had become so bad so suddenly. He again took a look outside. He searched the distance for some signs of sirens, but the city seemed silent for the moment. Then his door cracked. James swung around, and picked up another blade from his sword collection.

The door rattled again, "Dude let me in!" said Charlie. James quickly moved to lift the book case, and push the dresser out of the way. "Why did you have the door barricaded?" asked Charlie.

"I told you some crazy woman broke into my house," said James stepping into the hall, and looking for some sign of her. "What are you doing here anyway? Why aren't you with your mom?"

"9-1-1 wouldn't answer, some crazy dude broke into my house; I didn't know what to do; so I high tailed it here," said Charlie in a rush.

"Alright, but I'm not having much luck here either," said James sitting on his bed.

“Have you tried your mom?” asked Charlie.

“No answer,” said James.

“What about your grandpa?”

“No answer,” said James again, “You want to try someone?”

“Sure,” said Charlie picking up the phone. He dialed, and waited for an answer.

“Hello?” asked the person on the other side of the phone.

“Ronny?” asked Charlie.

“Yeah, what’s up bro?”

“Uh,” said Charlie as he thought about what he would have to tell his brother.

“Well man? You better have a good reason for calling this early.”

“Mom’s,” he couldn’t bare the word again.

“You better not tell me she’s dead,” laughed Ronny, but when no reply came he stopped abruptly. “How?” asked his brother.

“I don’t know,” said Charlie as he fought to contain himself again.

“Don’t worry I’ll be there soon; what hospital are you at?”

“I’m not at a hospital I’m at James’.”

“Why are you there?” asked Ronny as he masked his own depression.

“The town’s gone crazy!” said Charlie.

“What do you mean?”

“People are breaking into others homes, and just wrecking the place.”

“Is it a riot?” asked Ronny.

“I don’t know,” replied Charlie.

“Alright I’ll be there in a few hours.”

“Ok bro,” said Charlie.

“Stay put, and stay safe,” said Ronny commandingly.

“Alright I’ll talk to you when you get here,” said Charlie as a beep confirmed his brother hanging the phone up.

“My brother’s on his way,” said Charlie to James.

“Doesn’t he serve on a military base in Maryland?” asked James.

“When he says something he means it,” declared Charlie passionately.

“Alright,” said James. “How about in the mean time we get something to eat?”

“Good idea,” said Charlie wiping his tears away.

“Follow me, and take that,” said James pointing to the third and final sword of his collection. James stepped into the hallway, and walked to the bathroom; opening the door, and raising his sword quickly; expecting an attack, but nothing was in there. Then he walked to his mother’s room on the other side of the hall, and did the same. Again no one was hiding inside.

“Looks good,” said James looking down the stairs, “Don’t suppose you want to go first?”

“I’m the one who ran across town to get here,” said Charlie.

“Point taken,” said James descending the stairs in front of Charlie. When he reached the landing he quickly looked both ways and was relieved to see nothing out of the ordinary except a broken window in the dinning room.

“Well that explains how that crazy woman got in,” said James, “but how did you get in?”

“Cellar door was unlocked,” said Charlie.

“Did you leave it open when you came in?” asked James worried.

“I can’t remember,” said Charlie.

“You go make sure the cellar door is shut, and I’ll figure out how to block this broken window.” said James stepping into the dining room, and surveying it. A large table took up the center of the room, and six chairs surrounded it. A desk was situated in the corner. It was his mother’s office space when she was home.

Charlie crept into the living room opposite the dining room which lay on the left side of the landing for the stairs. Charlie walked to the second of two doors in the living room. It led to the basement. The other led outside. A nice red couch cornered the wall that didn’t lead to a landing, or door, and the T.V. sat on a hutch opposite the door to outside. Charlie had came up the cellar steps a minute ago, and didn’t hesitate to open the door into the living room, but now he could barely breath as he thought about who might have followed him here.

James lifted the dining table up, and set it against the shattered window. He couldn’t think of what else to do right now. He had virtually no experience with tools, and creating a wood panel to cover a broken window certainly wasn’t in the little experience he did have. He shrugged, and moved into the kitchen.

“You’re done already?” asked James finding Charlie standing in the kitchen drinking some water.

“Yeah; didn’t you see me walk through the dining room behind you?”

“No,” said James surprised. Sirens blared suddenly past the house.

“Maybe the cops can help us,” said James excited, “c’mon,” said James running into the living room, and throwing the door open. Outside it was drastically colder, and the smell of gas, and smoke filled the air. James saw the cop car half pulled around the corner. Without thought he started to run, Ignorant of his bare feet, and shorts with a tee shirt. As James got closer he let hope fill him as the car stayed where it was. James came to a halt at the car’s end. Then he turned the corner only to find the front end destroyed by another car. The two had collided, and the police officers in the front of their car were both lying bloody on the hood. In the other car a woman lay on an airbag. Suddenly James’ surroundings caught up with him. He was staring at the town’s main drag, and all he saw was destruction. Almost every house was plundered; the doors broken in and windows broken out. Fires painted the street a few blocks down, and a truck lay on its side blocking the street at James’ vanishing point.

His attention returned to the woman laying on her air bag. James knew it wasn’t right to leave a fellow human being in the state she was in, but he couldn’t think of what to do. He was no doctor after all. Then Charlie caught up with him.

“We have to get back in side,” said Charlie grabbing James’ arm.

“That woman could still be alive,” said James stepping towards the car.

“What are we going to do if we help her? You know how to sow stitches now?”

“We can’t just leave her,” shouted James.

“The people that are rioting could be here any second,” said Charlie.

“I’m helping her,” said James walking to her door.

“JAMES BEHIND YOU!” said Charlie. James turned on his heel too fast, and fell to the ground. He was staring at a skunk.

“Dude!” said James getting up, “You nearly gave me a heart attack!” As James got to his feet the skunk bared its teeth that had turned a scarlet red which shone brightly in the sun. It only took James a moment to realize that this skunk was just like the squirrel the night before. It was lowering itself to jump when James took the first move, and hit it with his sword. It was a strong hit, and the skunk was knocked through a loop. It staggered around for a moment not sure of what had happened to it before it started to walk away.

James set his sword down, opened the door, and reached over to her seat belt popping it out of its lock. He slowly wiggled her out from between the seat, and air bag.

“C’mon this will work faster if you help,” said James. Charlie stayed put debating whether or not to move in his head. A loud gun shot echoed, and Charlie bolted to help James. They carried the woman into James’ house in a matter of minutes. They set her down on the couch. James put his ear over her mouth.

“She’s breathing, and I don’t see any sign of major injury,” said James.

“What about internal bleeding, or something like that?” asked Charlie.

“I have no clue,” said James. Charlie shut the front door, and locked it.

“I don’t think we should stay down here,” said Charlie.

“Your right the upstairs is safer,” agreed James, “help me get her up there.” They lifted the woman, and carried her up to James’ room. Charlie threw some blankets down, and a pillow to create a little bed for her. The phone began to ring suddenly. James jumped for it before the second ring arrived.

“Hello?” asked James with a desperate plea for some one to answer.

“James; are you ok?” asked his grandfathers voice.

“Yeah, but the town’s gone,” James was cut off.

“I know; it’s all over the news I’m coming up to get you,” said his grandfather. “I’ll be there in about twenty minutes give, or take.”

“Great we’ll be here,” said James.

“Whose with you?” asked his grandfather.

“Charlie, and some woman we found outside,” said James unsure of how the news would affect his grandfather.

“Ok I’ll be there in twenty.” The phone went dead, and James smiled.

“Looks like we’ll be out of here quicker then anticipated,” said James to Charlie.

“Why who was that?” asked Charlie surprised.

“My grandfather; he’ll be here in twenty minutes,” said James excited.

“Fantastic!” said Charlie, “but what about her?” he gestured to the woman in the corner.

“We’re going to bring her with us,” said James.

“Looks like she’s going back down stairs,” laughed Charlie. “Where’s your sword?” asked Charlie after a moment of laughter.

“I must have left it outside,” said James disappointed.

“Well I don’t think we should go back out there,” said Charlie.

“Me neither, did you get yours?”

“Yeah it’s down stairs by the couch,” said Charlie. A helicopter could be heard outside. The two friends moved to the window to look out at the chopper. It was jet black except for a large U.S. label across the side.

“The military?” asked Charlie.

“Could it be that serious already?” asked James. “It doesn’t matter now any way we’re out of here; lets get her back down stairs,” said James moving to the woman.

From outside came an echoing voice.

“Attention citizens of Albanoville! Your town have been quarantined by the Center for Disease Control in conjunction with the United States military.” A pause ensued, and the friends realized the voice echoed from the chopper hovering above the town. “Any citizens attempting to flee town will be stopped by lethal force; if necessary. If you stay in your homes, and do not attempt to flee town you will have the best chance of coming through this safe, and sound,” declared the voice trailing away.

“Great how is my grandfather supposed to get here now?” asked James.

“How is my brother supposed to get here?” chimed in Charlie. The two put their heads down in dismay.

“What do we do now?” asked James.

“I think we should stay put for now,” said Charlie, “isn’t that what the military said anyway.”

“Yeah, I guess, but we should at least move the food up here if we’re going to stay put.”

“Good idea,” said Charlie.

“We’re just lucky this happened on a weekend when my mom is away. The house is stocked with stuff that’s easy to make.” James started towards the kitchen. As he reached the landing with Charlie following he spotted a man outside the dinning room window through the bit left uncovered by the table.

“Get down,” whispered James. James dropped quickly, and Charlie dropped down right behind him. They watched as the man walked around slowly outside the window. After a minute or so he stepped out of view.

“I think he’s gone,” said Charlie.

“How do we know who’s with the rioters?” asked James coming quickly to a realization that had been on the edge of his mind since whole crazy mess became clear.

“I don’t know I guess if you watched them from a distance for a while it might tell you something,” said Charlie.

“I guess we’ll just have to avoid people at all costs,” said James.

“What if the woman upstairs is with the rioters?” asked Charlie standing up. James saw the man walk back into view, and catch a glimpse of Charlie.

“Get back,” James was cut off as the man sent himself full force into the glass, and table. The glass cut the man to ribbons, but his momentum pushed him into the dinning

room, and sent the table toppling off its side. Charlie sped off up the stairs, and James got up as fast as he could, but not before the man had dove at him. James fell off the short landing step into the living room trying to avoid the attack. James fear was infused with adrenaline like he had never felt before. This wasn't the kind you get during a big sports game, or during sex. It was pure survival that fueled James now. He used the energy to run for the door, but screamed as he found it locked. As he went for the dead bolt the man grabbed him from behind, and tossed him to the ground. It was in that moment when James spotted the sword he had given Charlie to use. He kicked the man as hard as he could in the ankle, but it had little effect; only enough to distract the man, and let James crawl for the sword next to the couch. The man started to fall intentionally when James grasped the sword, and thrust it out hitting the man hard in the chest with the sheath still on. The man landed next to James, as he pulled the sheath off, and stood up. He only had a split second to decide. To kill or not to kill was the decision that filled James brain. With all the might James could muster he made for the steps again. The man grabbed his leg before he got a step away, and with his other hand grabbed a shoe horn. The man hit James on the leg, and James screamed in pain. James thrust the sword into the man's head full force, and the he went limp.

James lay catching his breath for what seemed like an eternity before he looked down at the life he had taken. The eyes of the man were blood covered now, but retained a bright green they had known in life. James pulled the sword out, and stood up as his heart continued to race. James wondered how so many terrorists could kill everyday when one kill impacted him so hard. A flood of images came into James' head. He thought about who the man was, and what he had done with his life. Was he loved? Did he have children, and most of all what brought him to try and kill?

James did his best to push the images out of his head as he sat down on the stairs. It was in that millisecond that James knew he had to go get Michele. It was suddenly all he could think of. He wouldn't let her have to do what he had just done, and he wasn't about to let one of the rioters get her either. James was instantaneously consumed with the urge to find, and protect her.

He walked up the stairs, and banged on his door, "Charlie open up." After a moment the door swung open.

"I thought that guy got you," said Charlie relieved to see James.

"I'm going to get Michele," said James.

"Are you mental?" shouted Charlie, "She lives across town, and she's got parents to protect her."

"Could your parents protect you?" asked James.

"Shut up!" yelled Charlie.

"You don't have to come if you don't want to," said James, "I just need better clothes before I go, and my book bag." James walked to his dresser, and pulled out the first jeans that were in reach. Then he grabbed his leather jacket from Boston out of the closet, and slid the sword he had given to Charlie earlier into the back pack which pulled from under his bed. It didn't want to go in so he punched a hole into the bottom so it fit.

"What the hell's causing this?" asked James slightly calmer.

“I just had to kill a man to stop him from killing me,” yelled James, “and right now all that’s in my head is what if Michele can’t kill the person that attacks her. I can’t sit here, and wait while she might be getting killed.”

“You’re insane! She acts like a jackass to you half the time anyway,” said Charlie.

“Are you saying that to stop me from risking my life, or because you don’t want to be left alone?” asked James. Charlie opened his mouth, but said nothing as James left the room, and went down the stairs.

“James,” called Charlie, “good luck dude.” James paused, and then made for the front door.

It took a long time to get to Michele’s house because of the sheer chaos of the town. James found many streets occupied by cars that had crashed, or large groups of people. He still couldn’t tell which people were causing the madness, and which were just trying to survive. Never the less James arrived at Michele’s front door. He found it unscarred which made him smile. He rang the doorbell, but received no answer. Then he walked around to the back, but found the back gate locked, and it was too high of a wood fence to climb. James suddenly felt like a fool for acting so impulsively. Then the image of the dead man in his house came back, and James decided to try the front again.

He banged for a few seconds before reaching down, and grabbing the handle to propel himself into the door. The knob turned as he was about to make his first hit, and he pushed the door open. It looked like a ravens feathers inside. No one seemed to occupy the darkness within the home.

“Hello?” asked James to the dark house; hoping for a reply, but all he got was a bang from upstairs. “Hello,” asked James again a little louder. Another bang came from upstairs. James walked through the well kept living room to the stairs. He ascended slowly as his heart pounded. He had only been in Michele’s house once before, but he liked that time a lot better. James turned at the top of the stairs towards Michele’s room. He turned the knob, but something was barring his entrance. He used all his muscle to push it out of the way, and upon stepping into Michele’s room he was overcome with a terrible smell that he knew immediately as vomit. In a flash James found himself on the floor with something on his back. He quickly realized it was a person, and they began to pound hard on his skull. The pain was making things go black in his head.

3

Ronny found himself in a surprising situation. He was riding shotgun in a helicopter. His friend Dan was the pilot. After his brother's call he had checked the news, and found out that the town of Albanoville was being quarantined. He knew he could never get there by car as a result, but at the same time he knew there was no way he'd let anything happen to the one, and only person besides his late mother that meant something to him. He could only come up with one idea.

Ronny convinced his friend Dan to break some rules, and take the chopper out. He of course had to vow that if they were caught Ronny would swear that he threatened Dan with force. Ronny was willing to take that chance for his brother though. As the choppers propellers spun Ronny looked down on the earth. He got an intense free feeling being so far up above the masses.

"We're almost there," said Dan still hiding hints of nervousness in his voice.

"Good hopefully the quarantine won't be extended to the air," said Ronny cocking the pistol he brought for protection.

"This is the U.S. Air force you are entering a no fly zone turn back immediately," said a man's voice coming through Dan, and Ronny's head sets. Dan instantly began to move the controls in order to turn the chopper.

"Don't," said Ronny.

"Are you nuts?" asked Dan unwilling to break the choppers motion.

"Listen my brother's down there, and I made him a promise that I would be there to get him. Now you can put the chopper back on course, or I could draw my 9mm," said Ronny.

"Don't you realize how much trouble we're already in? We stole a military chopper! They're not going to just forget that."

"I'll cross that road when I come to it, but right now I need you to turn the chopper back towards Albanoville," demanded Ronny as he raised the 9mm a little.

"Alright; alright, but what do we do if they send up another helicopter, or something?"

"We'll deal as best we can," said Ronny as the chopper made another turn. The town came into view in the distance as some clouds moved away from it.

"This is the U.S. Air force. You are entering a no fly zone turn back immediately!" came the man's voice over the radio again. Ronny turned off the radio, and the chopper kept on course. It was only a few seconds later when two helicopters took up positions on either side of Dan, and Ronny's chopper. Dan turned the radio back on.

"Accompany us too the closest designated landing sight now or we will have no choice, but to take you out of the sky!"

"Roger that," said Dan into his headset. "They got us," said Dan as he turned again this time to follow the helicopters. Ronny felt completely helpless as the helicopter moved towards a large camp in the valley next to the mountain Albanoville was situated on. Dan turned, and looked at the parachute hanging behind him, but before he could even move they were descending into the camp. They hit the ground, and the sound of the

propeller started to wane. Before Ronny or Dan could react they were grabbed out of the chopper, and thrown on the ground.

“Don’t move!” said a soldier who had a gun to Ronny’s head. Another shouted the same at Dan. A group of soldiers surrounded the pair. One soldier from each group moved to cuff the men while two others held them down. Ronny felt himself picked up, and then he was shuffled to a nearby tent, and tossed into a chair. Ronny surveyed his surroundings. The tent was large, and army green, but had only two chairs, and a table separating them. Two guards stood out front, and one next to Ronny.

“I don’t have time to interview two flight school runaways!” said a man who Ronny could only see as a shadow outside.

“They could know something,” said another man who Ronny couldn’t see.

“You think if they knew something they would have tried to run away from an air force base to a militarily quarantined area?” asked the first man Ronny spotted.

“Do you think its coincidence they’re here?” asked the second man.

“Point taken, get me detailed files on both men in ten,” commanded the first man stepping into the tent. He was a large General whose chest was covered with stars, and stripes. He wore a black eye patch, and had dark brown hair that seemed a bit long for his age.

“What were you doing in a quarantined area?” asked the General sitting across from Ronny.

“Trying to get to my little brother,” said Ronny unwilling to jump around the truth.

“Where is he?” asked the General a bit excited.

“In the town,” said Ronny.

“So you’ve had contact with someone inside the town?” asked the General enthused.

“Yeah; that’s what I just said,” replied Ronny smartly.

“I’m just surprised son. We lost contact with the inside of the town a few hours before we enacted the quarantine.”

“What’s going on in there?” asked Ronny nodding towards the town.

“I’m not a liberty to discuss that,” said the General stonewalling Ronny. “Do you know the number of where your brother was?”

“It’s in my phone,” said Ronny reaching for the phone, and pulling it out with his hands cuffed.

“What’s the contact name?”

“Locke; James Locke,” said Ronny.

“Thank you. If we need any more help we’ll come, and get you,” said the General taking the phone.

“Put him in the barn!” commanded the General to the guard as he left. The guard escorted Ronny to a large rural barn surrounded by military personal, and a barbed wire fence. The guard opened the door, and nudged Ronny in.

Inside light quickly grew dim. It only came in from a few badly positioned lights, and cracks in the barn. People lay on blankets, and hay what ever they could find. Ronny started to walk towards an open space when he was grabbed on the arm.

“Ronny!”

* *

General Murphy handed the cell phone off to a technology specialist, and entered the command tent. Inside computers were set up everywhere; camera's fed live feeds of Albanoville, and its surrounding provinces to the screens.

“Jackson, update me!” commanded Murphy.

“We've spotted a few riot police left in the town. The occasional straggler, but the streets seem virtually clean now.”

“Where the hell did they all go?” asked Murphy out loud.

“Couldn't they be hiding?” asked Lt. Lea working on a small computer screen to Murphy's left.

“Why would they hide?” asked Murphy walking over to Lt. Lea.

“Any number of reason's we still don't know much about what's happening other than we have violent rioting on a massive level which has vanished suddenly.”

“Any suggestions then, Lieutenant?” asked Murphy surveying some more computer screens.

“We should send in a small unit to look around,” replied Lea. “I don't think we're ready to try, and evacuate survivors just yet, but a look around couldn't hurt.”

“Good idea, but we have no clue how to identify friend from foe?” said Murphy. “I don't think sending in troops without an enemy would be such a good thing.”

“Sir,” said a woman popping into the tent.

“Yes, Commander Hill?” questioned Murphy.

“The CDC's scientists have made a break through,” said Hill.

“Sir, we have a guy moving in town,” said one of the soldiers on the computers.

“Hill I'll be right there,” said Murphy moving to view the soldier's computer screen. “I'll be damned. A kid!”

4

James stalked the now empty streets slowly. He wasn't to sure what had happened to all the rioters, but he wasn't about to take another stupid chance like he just had. Blood still trickled down his head. He was having trouble stopping it, but he didn't feel it was as serious as it looked either. The cold was beginning to become more of a nuisance as well. His house came into view, and he breathed a sigh. The sun was starting to shade the town in the light of dusk as he opened the front door. When he was pushing the door closed he noticed someone outside. He immediately dropped to the ground, and finished shutting the door quietly.

Steps sounded on the porch. James heart beat like a jackhammer. He closed his eyes, and leaned against the door hoping whoever it was would just pass by. Then the phone rang.

"Is somebody in there?" asked the person outside. "I need help; if someone's in there please open up!" pleaded the voice outside. James noticed the ringing stop, and stood up. He pulled his sword from his back pack, and slowly cracked the door.

"Are you one of them?" asked James maintaining a foothold on the door.

"No; no I've been running from them since this morning. I just need someone to help me," said the man.

"Why didn't you try and find shelter earlier?" asked James.

"Those people seemed to be everywhere and..." the man paused. "I didn't want to be alone." James opened the door all the way.

"You're a kid." scoffed the man.

"Would you like to stay out here then?" asked James.

"No, no!" said the man, "I'm Gerald." he extended his hand courteously.

"James." he shook Gerald's hand, "Lock that door, and follow me." James noticed the table was back up against the window, but the dead body hadn't moved. James reached his door, and knocked, "Open up it's me," said James. He heard a commotion inside. Then the door swung open, and Charlie stood before him.

"I didn't think you were coming back," said Charlie.

"I got wrapped up; this is Gerald," said James gesturing towards him.

"I'm Charlie good to meet you," he let the two people enter.

"Who was on the phone?" asked James as he, and Charlie moved the barricade back into place.

"The freaking U.S. military," said Charlie in awe.

"What? Why?" James asked in shock.

"They wanted details on what was going on in the town; any thing that could help them basically."

"Are they getting us out?" asked James excitedly.

"They said it's too dangerous still," replied Charlie in disappointment.

"Anything else?" asked James.

"No; they told me to stay put." Charlie set the printer on the dresser re-completing the barricade.

Gerald stared at the woman unconscious on the floor. His eyes embodied lust, but unfortunately neither teenager had taken much note of Gerald because of the excitement of seeing each other alive again.

“Who’s she?” asked Gerald attempting to hide his wanton desire.

“Don’t know. We found her outside earlier,” said Charlie sitting down. “I got some food up here earlier,” Charlie pointed to a box in the corner. James pulled out a bag of chips, and devoured them.

“She’s out cold?” asked Gerald.

“Far as we know,” said Charlie. Gerald calculated his next move. He knew he would have to approach it delicately.

“Seeing as she’s well knocked out; couldn’t we,” James got a bad feeling that he knew where Gerald was going, and cut him off.

“I think you should be leaving now.” James stood up, and picked the sword out of his bag.

“Hold on dude,” said Charlie not realizing what James had.

“I didn’t want to do this,” said Gerald as removed a small revolver from his back pants. “I’m going to be taking this place for my own.”

“You told me you didn’t want to be alone,” said James feeling very stupid.

“I won’t be,” said Gerald nodding to the woman.

“Bastard!” said Charlie. In response to the unflattering remark directed at him Gerald pointed the gun at Charlie. Suddenly Gerald was overcome with a terrible cough. Blood came out of his mouth, and splattered the floor. James and Charlie acted in a split second. They threw themselves at Gerald. The gun went off, but missed everything, but the wall. James was again overcome with adrenaline. The need to survive was taking over as he pushed the man towards the window unthinking. Charlie was trying to get the gun, but James had him out the window before he could get it.

Gerald hit the ground with a resounding crack as glass sprinkled down on him at the same time.

“You killed him!” said Charlie.

“What should I have done,” said James slumping against the wall.

“I don’t know disarmed him, or something,” said Charlie unnerved by his friend’s actions.

“That guy was worse than those rioters!” said James annoyed that he had to defend actions he himself questioned. James found the pain of killing someone didn’t get easier with time like playing football, or jumping rope. It felt just as bad as the last time he had done it. Charlie sat down on the other side of the window.

5

General Murphy stood next to Commander Hill in the CDC's adopted headquarters. It was formerly a post office in the valley before the quarantine was put into effect. The room the General and Commander stood outside of was the clean room where the CDC scientist's were studying something.

Murphy wasn't even sure why they were involved in this whole affair. Unruly citizens seemed to be the department of the Military to him. The door to the clean room opened, and out stepped a man that looked like he belonged in space. Inside Murphy could see a series of check points to assure the room stayed clean to back up its name.

"General," said the man in the bio-hazard suit taking off his head piece to reveal his golden hair.

"This better be good." said Murphy.

"It is sir," said the man in the bio-hazard suit. "We've discovered the cause of the riots."

"Well? Out with it! Time's wasting, and lives are at stake."

"It's a mutated form of Rabies." replied the man in the bio-hazard suit getting straight to it.

"Rabies?" asked the General in disbelief.

"Yes, we're not sure how it mutated, but it's definitely rabies."

"Can it be cured?" asked the General.

"I'm afraid we don't have anything yet. It seems to be immune to most everything."

"Well is it going to kill these people that are rioting like normal Rabies?" asked the General recalling the little bit of knowledge he had on the disease.

"We have no idea." said the man in the bio-suite.

"Can I send in soldiers to evacuate people?"

"It's not airborne if that's what you mean," said the scientist. "The disease is transmitted through contact; bites, and scratches."

"Alright; keep me updated on your work." said the General walking out of the CDC's set up headquarters feeling much better about their involvement. Now he was thinking who ever got the CDC involved should be given a raise.

General Murphy stepped back into the command tent with Commander Hill no longer following him.

"I want a recon team equipped with body armor, and face shields in Albanoville in ten," said the General.

"We don't have face shields, sir." said one of the people at the computers, "Congress voted more military funding down."

"Well alright, but I want them in there with the best protection they can get."

Five minutes later General Murphy was watching a live feed from the soldier's individual helmets. The General was sporting a headset to keep him in contact with the Captain in the field.

* *

The sound of a helicopter quickly sprung James and Charlie to their feet. They looked out the window, and paid close attention to where it landed.

“Patterson and Smart Street.” they said in unison.

“It’s got to be the baseball field!” said Charlie.

James and Charlie looked at each other, and put their shoes on as fast as possible.

“Maybe we could just leave,” Charlie was cut off.

“Don’t even think about it! She’s coming with us!” commanded James.

“We don’t even know if she’s alive!” yelled Charlie. The woman coughed almost in a mocking remark. The two then worked fast to get rid of the barricade. As they opened the door another door could be heard opening from downstairs.

“What was that?” whispered James.

“Did you lock the front door when you came in?” asked Charlie.

“Of course,” said James before he could give it any more thought.

“Wait! Oh, god!” said Charlie.

“What?” asked James still whispering.

“I never shut the cellar door.” said Charlie.

“I told you to do that this morning!” said James.

“I was too freaked out man; I had just seen my mother die for god sakes!” said Charlie.

“That’s no excuse for,” James stopped as he heard the footsteps reach the stairs. “I’ve got an idea,” said James stepping back into his room. The two pushed his bookcase out of his room after a quick second passed by.

“We have to go quick!” said James, “One, two, three!” yelled James as the pair pushed the bookcase around the corner, and down the stairs crashing into a large man on the stair’s landing. “He could still be alive; lets get the girl, and go.”

James grabbed his backpack with the sword, and then helped Charlie each lifted a side of the woman; Charlie got her feet, and James her shoulders. They walked down the stairs as fast as they could. James and Charlie moved carefully around the mess of man and dresser at the bottom. Escaping the house went off without a hitch. They were walking down Smart Street towards Patterson in a matter of minutes. They could almost see the baseball field when they noticed a flood of people ahead of them. They seemed to be moving more then a rampaging rhino trapped on a trampoline.

“Hold on,” said Charlie stopping a few yards from the crowd. “They’re fighting,” said Charlie. James squinted before he noticed what Charlie saw. “The rioters are in the crowd,” said Charlie. “What the hell do we do now?”

“We can still make it to the chopper if we go through the woods,” declared James as both of them turned towards the forest that took up a slim residence on the side of Smart Street. They walked into it with the woman, and trod slowly behind the yards of the houses on Smart Street. As they got closer to the baseball field they noticed more and more people on the street between the houses. The rioters were struggling terribly with

the crowd of people that wanted to be rescued. Luckily this distracted all the rioters' attention.

As they reached the edge of the forest gunshots broke the sound of the struggle on Smart Street. The helicopter sat in the middle of the baseball field engulfed in a sea of people. The propellers started to spin, but too many people had latched on to the chopper. Then the rioters reached the scene. All hell erupted as people began fighting each other unable to identify friend from foe. Those who had guns started to fire, and the soldiers that rode in on the chopper began to fire in self-defense.

* * *

General Murphy watched as his worst fear was realized. The surviving civilians had made for the Chopper thinking it was their salvation. They wouldn't listen to reason as his men told them that this was a recon mission to decide how to rescue people faster. From there the scene turned into chaos.

"Get out of there!" shouted Murphy into the headset. The camera's that gave the General a live feed went out as different soldiers were trampled, or shot, or beaten by rioters. Two remained.

"Lethal force is authorized!" yelled Murphy as both soldiers struggled to stay in the chopper. On one screen a rifle was raised, but the camera then went fuzzy as the man fell from the chopper, and hit the ground. The other camera showed the man it was attached to kicking people off the chopper so it could get off the ground. Then he was hit by someone, and his camera went down.

6

James and Charlie watched as the rioters won out, and the pilots of the helicopter were thrown through the windshield. At the same time the chopper was just getting off the ground. It hovered before falling on its side. The propeller sent soil one hundred feet in the air, and chopped up anyone in reach.

“We better try to get back,” said James. The teenagers turned away from the carnage, and walked back towards their shelter as the last bit of sun vanished.

* *

Ronny sat with James’ grandparents in the barn. Roger and Margaret had met Ronny a few times; mostly at birthday parties, and the like for James, or Charlie. Now they sat trying to decide how best to escape the military barn they were being kept in, and rescue those they held most dear.

“So that’s the plan then?” whispered Ronny to Roger, and Margaret.

“Better not waste any time,” said Roger.

“Ok, here I go,” said Margaret. She walked to the barn doors, and knocked. A soldier opened the door.

“I’m feeling so,” she fell backwards, and the guard rushed in. Ronny and Roger sprang from their spots on either side of the door, and quickly overpowered the guard. One good hit over the head was enough to knock him unconscious.

“Hope he’s ok.” said Margaret.

“He should be fine. We’ll be back as soon as we can.” said Roger, kissing his wife, and following Ronny out the door. The duo stood in a small area between the barbed wire fence, and the barn doors. No one seemed alerted by their luring of the sentry, but if they didn’t move quickly another could be along at any time.

“Follow me.” said Roger leading Ronny around the back of the barn.

“Use my shirt.” said Ronny referring to the barbed wire in the back of the barn. Roger ripped off Ronny’s shirt, and placed it over the barbed wire, and after a few minutes they were both heading towards the woods of the Valley. They stopped a bit inside the foliage to catch their breath.

“It’s cold,” said Ronny.

“Well you’re the one who volunteered to throw your shirt on the barbed wire,” said Roger.

“Good point.” said Ronny.

“We should keep moving; we’re close to my house,” said Roger taking off at a jog with Ronny behind.

“How do we get there in the dark?” asked Ronny.

“I grew up playing in this valley kid. I know exactly how to get to my house no matter how dark it is.”

* * *

“Sir?” asked Commander Hill.

“Yes,” replied General Murphy standing in his tent.

“We’ve had a break out from the barn.”

“Who?” asked the Murphy walking out of his tent with Hill following.

“One of the soldiers we took out of the chopper, and a local.”

“We can’t spare the man power to track them down right now, but inform all the surrounding check points to be on alert.”

“Yes sir.” said Commander Hill walking off to another tent to complete her orders.

“General Murphy!” yelled the CDC scientist Murphy had met earlier.

“Yes Mr.?” asked the General unsure of what to substitute for the man’s name.

“Doctor Wesley,” said the scientist.

“Well,” asked the General eager for new information.

“We’ve traced the mutation to a meteorite that apparently entered the atmosphere near here.”

“Aren’t meteorites fairly big news?”

“Not if they burn up in the atmosphere,” said Wesley, “which is exactly what this was supposed to do, but apparently some parts of it didn’t, and made their way to this town.”

“Ok so how does a meteorite cause rabies to mutate?”

“We’re speculating that the meteorite had tiny particles of bacteria, or some thing wholly foreign to the planet. When it hit the earth it some how came in contact with rabies out in the woods, and from there it spread until the whole town was insane.”

“Ok so we know the origin of the Riot; now what?” asked Murphy.

“I think our only option is to nuke the whole area,” said Wesley after a long pause.

“Are you nuts? Nuking American soil?”

“It’s the only way to stop the spread farther; it could already be doing the same thing as it’s done here some where else. We have to act now.”

“Are you absolutely certain it can’t be cured?”

“Maybe some day, but we don’t have the time, or the knowledge on how to create that cure now,” said Wesley passionately. Murphy felt sicker then he had ever felt before.

“If the intense heat of entering the atmosphere didn’t kill this space microbe what makes you think nuking the area will?” asked the General.

“The few samples of the mutated disease we have all died when contacted with any major radiation,” said Wesley.

“Couldn’t you use that knowledge to cure people?” asked the General looking for any alternative to dropping a nuke.

“The damage to the person with the disease would make the treatment worthless. A nuclear bomb is the only way.”

“Alright Doctor.” said the General turning back to the military headquarters tent. He walked over to a phone next to one of the big screens set up, and dialed; he heard the other line pick up, “Get me the President.”

7

Ronny and Roger made it to Roger's home quickly. He truly did know his way through the woods like he told Ronny earlier. Roger collected what few things they would need for the self-rescue operation; while Ronny warmed up from the October night, and got dressed. Roger found two backpacks he used for camping. He also brought one of his deer hunting rifles, and his Glock 9mm out of his gun cabinet before removing his automatic machine gun. It was the pride, and joy of his gun collection. He had got it from a friend who had bought it illegally in New York. Roger had never thought he would actually need to do more than shoot targets in the woods, and admire it. After stocking up what few bullets he had into the bags, and dividing them up evenly he bundled up in his hunting jacket, and the hat his grandson had bought him on their trip to Boston. James bought him the hat to repay after Roger got him a new leather jacket.

Roger found a warm jacket for Ronny as well. After a good forty minutes the pair was ready to leave. They had packed a little food and hot coffee in thermoses.

They used Roger's second car to get fairly far up the mountain, but they had to stop a good distance from the top so they wouldn't hit a military barricade. They climbed through the dreary, and panther colored woods zigzagging for better grip from their feet. The sound of gunfire began to fill their ears in the distance.

"What do you think that is?" asked Ronny.

"The military," said Roger.

"Do you think they're fighting the rioters?"

"Can't see who else it would be," said Roger gaining a lead on Ronny up the mountain. Roger's gray hair and age betrayed his fitness. He often competed in running competitions to stay in shape, and even had a few trophies to show for it. So it was no wonder that Roger a fit runner, and Ronny a soldier in training made good time to the top.

Once they were there they found themselves staring at the military barricade from a distance. It was basically a big wall illuminating the darkness with lights lining it, and soldiers standing behind it. Unfortunately; the rioters were breaking through the barricade, and despite the amount of firepower issuing from the soldier's guns behind it the rioters were finding ways to get in, and rush them. It quickly turned into a grim sight as ten citizens swarmed, and beat one soldier before another soldier shot all of the rioters that had beat the last soldier, only to be overtaken by twenty more rioters.

"We should keep moving," said Roger to Ronny starting off towards his grandson's home.

* *

General Murphy found himself feeling like a child. His barricades, which had stood un-hindered since their erection hours earlier, were now in disarray. The few cameras the military had inside the city showed virtually no life left which meant that the rioters were focused on the barricades, and mostly everyone else was dead. General Murphy knew the

Presidents orders, but every bone in his body told him he had to try one more time to get some survivors out.

“General.” called Lt. Lea.

“Yes?” said Murphy walking over to her.

“I have two children carrying a woman here,” said Lt. Lea.

“Anyone else left?” questioned Murphy with hope in his voice.

“Not that I can find.”

“Alright,” said Murphy disappointedly.

“Everyone here listen up!” yelled Murphy as attention in the room shifted to him. “The President has given the order to nuke the area, and hopefully wipe out any chance of this thing spreading. We have exactly thirty minutes before detonation. Everyone should immediately move to their respected choppers.” The people in the tent looked aghast. Clearly none of them had realized how severe the situation was. “Commander Hill relay the order, and over see the evacuation, make sure the people in the barn get out too” he walked next to her, and whispered in her ear so that only she could hear, “I’ll meet you at the base.” Murphy stepped out of the tent. He walked straight towards where many of the helicopters had landed, and found a pilot sitting in one. The man jumped to attention, and saluted as General Murphy got to the helicopter’s door, and opened it. “I need your help,” said Murphy climbing into the chopper.

8

James began to cough terribly as he, and Charlie reached his front door.

“That took longer then expected,” said Charlie laughing for the first time since they pushed Gerald out the window.

“Well me coughing up blood half way back couldn’t have helped,” said James as he walked into his house, and helped Charlie set the woman down. Charlie froze as he caught sight of the broken book case.

“Do you think he’s still here?” asked Charlie looking un-easy.

“I doubt it,” said James pulling out the sword from his back pack, “but just in case.” James set off with a quick step towards the dinning room. Out of the corner came the man they had hit with a bookcase earlier. James was unable to react in time, and quickly found himself fighting the man with fists; as his sword had fallen to the floor near the short hallway into the living room.

“Charlie!” yelled James still taking hits from the man, and tossing out what he could, and yelling “Help!” Charlie stood frozen in the living room unable to move paralyzed by fear. His mind fought itself into stalemate; one side yelling to move to James’ aid; the other screaming for him to run. Charlie heard a clunk in the other room, and ran out the front door. He couldn’t bare the sight of another death. As he ran his mind turned to the woman he left on the couch, but only for a split second.

* *

James caught his breath on the floor. He had hit the man hard over the head with the toaster after they battled into the kitchen.

“Charlie?” called James already disappointed that his friend hadn’t come to his aid. James opened the back door, and dragged the man out into the dark and cold October night. Then he locked it, and made his way into the living room to find the woman lying on the couch, and Charlie gone. James immediately thought the worst. He quickly stepped outside looking for Charlie, or a sign of struggle, but what he found was Ronny, and his grandfather Roger.

“James,” yelled Roger running towards him, and bear hugging him.

“Grandpa,” said James as he found his circulation cut off.

“Where’s Charlie,” asked Ronny looking happy. James suddenly felt his joy in seeing his grandfather crushed; as he now had to tell Ronny he didn’t know what happened to the mans only remaining family.

“He vanished no more a minute ago,” said James.

“He could still be close,” said Ronny with hope. From overhead the sound of yet another helicopter echoed.

“Any one left alive in Albanoville; this is General Murphy. A strike to destroy the town is imminent. If you can make it in ten minutes I will be waiting on top of the

hospital on tenth, and Scarlet Street.” The helicopter lights appeared, and went towards the large hospital in the distance.

“It’s the other side of town,” said Roger apprehensive.

“You two go,” said Ronny, “I’ll go after my brother if I’m not there in time just go.”

“I don’t think we can make it even if we run,” said James.

“Do any of your neighbors have cars that might have keys in them?” asked Roger.

“The Redfield’s!” exclaimed James, “As terrible as this will sound I’m fairly certain they never made it to their car, and that’s not theirs either,” James pointed to his neighbors house which had a car smashed in the front. “The keys have to be there.”

“What about their car?” asked Ronny.

“It’s in the garage,” said James moving his finger to the most immaculate looking building left in Albanoville.

“That doesn’t change the fact that I have to look for my brother, and I’m wasting time,” Ronny said as he started to run off.

“How will you get to the hospital in time?” shouted Roger as he got further away.

“I’ll figure something out,” said Ronny as he turned the corner.

“Well let’s get those keys,” said Roger.

It only took them a few minutes to find the keys. The Redfield’s had a key holder which was carved out of wood in the shape of their names with the two sets of keys still hanging up. It seemed like the only part of their home besides the garage left intact. Roger started the bright yellow convertible with a vroom.

“Wait!” said James as they pulled out of the garage, “I have to get the girl.” James hopped out of the car, and ran back into his house as his Grandpa stared. He came back out with the girl that he had protected for the better part of the day. He set her gently in the back, and then he and his grandpa took off.

9

Ronny was yelling Charlie's name at the top of his lungs, but was getting no response. He was hoping Charlie had heard the General announce to go to the hospital.

* *

Charlie couldn't believe his eyes as he saw his brother. Charlie was hiding behind a car. He had dived behind it when he saw someone running down the street. Charlie had mistaken his brother for a Rioter. The largest smile ever to be seen by man spread across his face as he stepped away from the car, and saw his brother look back at him. Ronny felt euphoria come over him when he saw Charlie step seemingly out of no where. They both ran towards each other as fast as they could the last members of their small family.

Out of the shadows came a large man. He hit Ronny hard on the side of the head knocking him over. Charlie stopped so fast he fell. The man used all his force to hit Ronny in the head, but Ronny rolled out of the way. He reached for the deer rifle Roger had entrusted to him for his own protection, but he only managed to graze the handle of it before the man grabbed him off the ground, and head butted him.

"Charlie!" yelled Ronny, "Get the gun!" The man pounded Ronny again, and Charlie hesitated to pick up the gun waiting to see if it wasn't a moot point. He began to run away again as fast as he could. He had heard the General, and was making for the hospital. He wept more then he had for his mom as he tried to forget what he had just seen. All his family had died, and his best friend. Charlie racked his brain asking why the world was so cruel to him. Ronny opened his eyes one last time as he was being pummeled just to catch a glimpse his brother fleeing.

10

General Murphy sat on the hospital roof changing glances between his watch, and the town that would soon be wiped off the map. His vision was suddenly pulled to a nearby street where he saw car lights illuminating the darkness.

* *

Roger grabbed the woman, and James ran to the front door opening it for his grandfather.

“Hold the helicopter for five extra minutes. I have to give Ronny, and Charlie that much.” His grandfather nodded.

“I’ll hold it as long as I can, but I’m not waiting too long before I come down, and drag you onto that chopper. James coughed, and laughed at the same time as his grandfather stepped into the lobby elevator, and disappeared behind the metal doors. The floor counter for the elevator started to climb as James turned back to look for any sign of Charlie, or Ronny. He sat silent for a good five minutes before he decided to head up. Just as the elevator doors were about to close he caught movement. He slammed his hand between the doors to stop them from closing, and stepped out. Charlie was running with more speed than James ever thought he possessed towards the hospital.

“Charlie!” yelled James. Charlie stopped, and looked with awe at the friend he had thought lost.

“But your...” said Charlie speechless, and suddenly feeling worse than he had a moment ago, but now he was feeling guilty for the fact that he was facing someone he had abandoned in their time of need.

“Where’d you go?” asked James running out to greet Charlie, and lead him towards the elevator.

“I thought you were dead,” said Charlie with a somber tone to his voice.

“Didn’t you hear me yelling...for help?” asked James suddenly coming to the terrible realization that his best friend whom he thought would do anything for him had run off without even confirming if he were alive, or dead. Then he took notice of Ronny missing.

“Did you see Ronny?” asked James with a sudden grit to his voice.

“He’s dead,” said Ronny sobbing suddenly.

“Are you sure?” asked James half mocking, and half depressed.

“Yeah,” said Charlie as his own brain told him that Ronny could be as alive as James was now.

“Well let’s get to the roof. My grandfather’s got the chopper held up for us,” said James pressing the highest number on the floor selection switch of the elevator. The quick ride up was an enduring quiet. Each person left to their own depressing minds. The elevator doors slid open, and at the end of the hallway a sign read rooftop. They jogged to the door, and ascended the stairs coming out on the rooftop to greet the sight of James’ grandfather standing next to a United States army helicopter. They both jogged, and hopped into the chopper. Roger got in after them, and shut the door.

“You kids ok?” asked General Murphy sitting in the front with the pilot.

“Yeah,” said James, and Charlie. Murphy surveyed the group he had rescued, and his only wish was that he could have saved more.

“Alright, let’s go.” said Murphy to the pilot. The engines turned on, and the propellers started up. Murphy suddenly had an awful thought, but he couldn’t let it go without him putting it at ease.

“You four haven’t come into contact with any of the rioters?” asked the General.

“I think we all have,” said Roger.

“I mean you haven’t exchanged fluid, or anything with some one that was acting crazy?”

Both Roger, and Charlie said, “No.” but James remained quiet.

“The woman looks like she’s fine,” said Roger looking her over in the back of the chopper quick for signs of bite marks.

“What happens if we have?” asked James.

“I can’t bring you,” said the General with a definite tone.

“Oh, why?” asked James.

“I would be taking too great of a risk of further contamination. We’re nuking this city to halt this crazy thing before it goes any where else. If I let someone out who could continue it I would be spitting on the sacrifices of so many soldiers, and citizens,” said the General realizing that he couldn’t let the boy he had just met come any further.

“But you didn’t come into contact with any of those crazy’s did you?” asked James’ grandfather in disbelief.

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James thought back to his encounter with Michele who attempted to kill him. He wrestled her into submission after she bloodied his head. James drew his sword. He brought it to her neck, and looked into the eyes he had admired for so long. He put his sword back, and made a break for the door as fast as he could. She tripped him as he ran, and clamped her mouth onto his ankle. He screamed broke her grip, and got out of her house without looking back.

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“It’s funny, Charlie you always told me to forget about Michelle. Looks like you were right.” James started to laugh hysterically because of how terrible his situation was. He opened the chopper door, and jumped out before his grandfather could stop him.

“GET BACK IN HERE!” yelled Roger at his grandson.

“Tell my mom, and my whole family I love them,” said James turning towards Charlie. “It’s no big deal you ran out on me man. I overreacted.”

“I,” was all Charlie could say his guilty conscience kept his mouth sealed. In the back of his mind Charlie knew it should be he instead of James that was standing outside the chopper now. General Murphy couldn’t feel worse, but he knew that if the chopper didn’t

move now who stayed, and who went wouldn't matter. He leaned over, and whispered to the pilot, and the helicopter began to rise.

"No, No, NO!!!" yelled Roger he moved with all the speed he could muster, and threw open his side of the chopper, and leapt out. General Murphy couldn't believe that things had suddenly taken such a turn, but he felt that saving at least one person was worth the risk he had taken, and he had saved two.

"You shouldn't have done that." said James rushing to his grandfather's side.

"You think I would let you see this beautiful sunrise alone," said Roger laughing. "We're family James, and nothing not even impending doom could change that."

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The helicopter irked forward as the sky lit up with light. The woman in the back rolled forward as a result hitting Charlie's chair. It caused Charlie to look back in time to see Albanoville vanish. He suddenly felt more alone than he ever had in his time on earth.

Epilogue

Jenna Lennon sat with her family watching the news broadcast of the events she had lived through. The death toll was astronomical, but many survivors had escaped through various survival stories that the news was retelling to try, and make people feel better about the terrible tragedy. Jenna knew her own story well. Even if she hadn't opened her eyes, the doctors told her she was in an odd paralysis rarely seen. It resulted in her being conscious, but unable to move. She was told it was even more bizarre that she had come out of it, but they said with all the bad that had happened the world could use some good. Jenna's father turned to her with a smile.

“So what will you name the child?”

Jenna smiled, and said, “James.”