

The 2015-2016 students at Longview School present:

Creations



About Creations

Creations is a book published annually to showcase a selection of writing and art that our students create during the school year. Some of the students work on long-term projects, so several excerpts are included in this book. This book also includes some persuasive pieces as well as shorter pieces of fiction.

Longview's unique program offers students the opportunity to help make decisions about their own education. Our kids actively participate in choosing classes that appeal to their interests and are compatible with their unique learning styles. This involvement helps our students to become enthusiastic about the learning process and to achieve academic success. Of course, rather than expecting each child to achieve arbitrary milestones during their school years, Mark Jacobs, Carolin Trott, and Maddy Pereira are skilled at tailoring their English classes for each student's individual needs and strengths. By personalizing expectations, each student has an easier time reaching his or her own potential.

In addition to giving kids more autonomy in choosing the path of their education, Longview strongly believes in the value of art classes for all of its students. We are also extremely fortunate to have Sharon Nakazato as one of our teachers. She is patient with timid learners, she keeps up with eager students who want to plow ahead and she always manages to create an environment that encourages multidisciplinary learning. Many beautiful pieces of art were created because all of the students know that her room and her ear are always available during challenging moments.

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The Just So Story That Just Went Wrong

by Koryn & Max

Setting Scene

It was 1861. Civil war broke out in Afrocana because the giraffes and the zebras did not share the Halloween candy.

Chapter 1821

A long time ago, in a land where the grass was yellow and the trees were green, there were a giraffe and a zebra. The giraffe's name was Mika and the zebra's name was Zebi. Zebi and Mika had known each other since they were babies. Just like all of the other baby animals, Zebi had no stripes and Mika had no spots. They played together every day.

Mika and Zebi went out for a snack and saw a group of gazelles. The leader of the group, Zelda, was very mean to Mika and Zebi. "What are you doing here?" asked Zelda.

Zebi and Mika did not want to hear her. Zelda said, "You are not supposed to be together because you are different races!"

Zebi and Mika replied, "We don't care because we are friends!" They held hoofs and walked away together.

In the morning, Zebi and Mika came up with a plan to make sure that they would be able to stay friends forever. They went to Home Depot and bought brown and black paint so that nobody would notice that they were a giraffe and a zebra. They did not realize that the paint had Magical Fedora Essence in it. Paint with Magical Fedora Essence is penetrable by the four elements: earth, wind, fire, and water. Mika and Zebi walked to the Afrocana plains. Zebi painted spots on Mika using the Magical Fedora Essence paint and Zebi used it to paint stripes onto Mika. Then they just stood there in the Savanna waiting for the paint to dry.

While they were waiting, there was a large gust of wind. Two black-robed figures appeared in the sky and whispered, "You have changed the future! You must change it to its natural state in space or there will be consequences that you can not fathom." The two robed figures began moving quickly away from the two friends.

"Oh, no! OK! Holy Beep!" Zebi screamed.

Mika looked terrified. "What the beep! What have we done?"

Once the two figures were gone, a humongous aqua blue portal opened. A pickle and seaweed green tentacle squirmed out, grabbed the friends and took them to Hell.

Chapter 1921

Cthulhu lived in Hell, where it smelled like calamari and wet dogs. His mansion was gold plated and diamond encrusted with a platinum interior. He loved to eat animal and human souls. He also liked the taste of Jack Russell dogs, piña colodas, enormous afros, and fedoras.

"I want to meet your friends," Cthulhu told the giraffe and zebra.

"All right, I think I can trust you. Do you want to meet my friends at Afrocana?" Mika asked.

"Yes, I would love to eat, I mean, to meet your friends. Do you guys want hot cocoa?" asked Cthulhu.

"YES!" said Mika and Zebi at the same time.

Cthulhu went to the kitchen and took his tentacles off to pour hydrogen dioxide pills in the hot cocoa. Cthulhu went to the living room and gave Mika and Zebi the hot cocoa. They drank it and when the hydrogen dioxide kicked in, Mika had to use the john. In the meantime, Cthulhu ate Zebi in two bites. When Mika came out of the loo, Cthulhu told her that Zebi had left Mika behind.

"Zebi told me to tell you to leave her alone and that you are no longer friends!" Cthulhu told Mika. She felt alone and betrayed, so Cthulhu was nice and comforted her. They went to Afrocana and Mika introduced Cthulhu to all her friends. Everybody loved Cthulhu so they let him into their pack.

(To be continued)



How the Leafy Dragon Became Leafy

by Maeve

In the low and far off times, the Leafy Sea Dragon was just called Mia or The Water Dragon. Mia was not leafy. She was slippery, thin, a tiny bit hairy and moved from side to side. She was small and a little lonely. The eels were her friends, but they were always up to something.

"Will you play with me?" she asked her friend Eel.

"Yes," said Eel. "What do you want to play?"

"Hide and eep!" the Water Dragon said.

"Okay. You hide," said Eel. "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10!"

"Eeeep! Eeeep! Eeeep!" Mia screamed (and a long eep means something is wrong).

"What?" asked Eel.

"There are sharks in the reef!" said Mia.

"We have to warn the others!" said Eel.

"You are faster than me, so you warn the others," said Mia.

"Then you hide," said Eel. They went in opposite directions.

"I think I should hide in the seaweed on those rocks over there," said Mia to herself. "Maybe I should try to stick some seaweed on myself." She picked up a piece of seaweed, licked it and stuck it on her back. "I hope this works," said Mia. Just then five sharks went by.

"We are finally here," said Evil, the leader of the hammerhead sharks.

"Where is here?" asked Dark, the shark deputy.

"The Great Eel Reef," said Evil.

"You mean the reef where the Water Dragon lives?" asked Dark.

"Yes," said Evil.

"Oh no, I have to tell Eel this!" thought Mia. Mia swam away very slowly and carefully to find Eel. As Mia swam away, she saw a tiny movement by a rock. "Eel, is that you?" asked Mia.

"Mia, is that you?" asked Eel.

"Yes, it's me," said Mia.

"Mia, you look so different," said Eel.

"I know I look different," said Mia.

"How did you stick seaweed on your body?" asked Eel.

"I licked the seaweed and stuck it on myself," said Mia.

"Hide!" screamed Eel. Mia swam over to a patch of seaweed, over by the rock where Eel was hiding.

"I thought I saw a Water Dragon here," said Evil.

"Yes. I thought so, too," said Dark. When the sharks left, Mia and Eel started talking again.

“What should we do?” asked Mia.

“We have to see if there are other groups of sharks, so we can tell the others,” said Eel.

“Okay, Eel. You go that way and I’ll go this way,” said Mia.

“Okay, bye!” said Eel.

“Bye!” said Mia. “I’ll go to our favorite place.” Her face lit up at the thought. When she got there, she hid in the nearby seaweed patch.

As soon as she had hidden, six white tipped sharks arrived at the playground. “Small White!” said Whitetooth, the leader of the white tipped sharks. Small White is the white tipped sharks’ deputy.

“Yes?” said Small White.

“I have a feeling that Evil and Dark are close by,” said Whitetooth.

“Oh, no! Now I remember that yesterday in the Fish Wish, it said that Evil, Whitetooth, Dark and Small White are the fiercest sharks in the Ocean!” said Mia. The Fish Wish is the underwater newspaper.

“Hello, Whitetooth,” said Evil.

“Hello, Evil,” said Whitetooth.

“I think we should be friends,” said Evil.

“Yes, let’s be friends!” said Whitetooth. Evil, Whitetooth, and their deputies swam away and never came back to Eel Reef.

Two days later

“Hey, Mia! Are you ever going to take off those bits of seaweed?” said Eel.

“I tried to, but they didn’t come off,” said Mia.

“It’s okay. The leaves make you look better anyway,” said Eel.

“Thanks,” said Mia. This is how The Leafy Sea Dragon became leafy.



The Wall - Film Review Part 2

by Kenny

It is so bad that I think the first song would cause your mommy to scream like Jello pudding. Here's a song about it to the tune of Jingle Bells:

What the heck	What the heck
What the heck	What the heck
This is so insane	This is just inane
I can't understand this film	Why's Bob Geldof in this film
And I can't believe I paid!	I just should not have paid!

That is a very accurate description of *The Wall* and I strongly feel this movie is a crime against humanity. All the animated sequences are either weird or horrifying. (*cough**"Goodbye Blue" Sky!*cough*). Of course, the leading problem is the omission of "Hey You," and although the film has produced some classic sequences, most of the film is not worth your time. The new versions of "Empty Spaces" and "Outside The Wall," however, are very good. The film also gains points for its inclusion of "When The Tigers Broke Free." If you are not interested in watching *The Wall*, which you should not be, this song can be found on "The Final Cut."

I think that this film should be outlawed and all copies sent to Greece. If I had to choose between "Screaming Idiots Inside Giant Skunks with Professional Yodeler-Skateboarders 2: Electric Boogaloo" and this film, I'd pick the Screaming Idiots. The soundtrack to the film, however, is worth it. I would like to recommend simply turning your TV to face the wall, so that you can only hear the soundtrack.

Admittedly, some of the film is cool, like the wife shown during "Don't Leave Me Now" and "The Trial." Speaking of "The Trial," it's arguably the craziest, most inappropriate and kind of scary sequence in the film. It's been around since the album was made. You will want to duck and cover during the "Goodbye Blue Sky" sequence. To be honest, you probably should. You will NOT make it to the end of this film, let alone the grotesque "meltdown" sequence in "Comfortably Numb" or the fascist rally sequence during "In The Flesh," "Run Like Heck," and "Waiting For The Worms." "Run Like Heck" is precisely what you'll want to do from this film.

Checklist: Racism: Check! Nudity: Check! Swearing: Check! Smoking and Drugs: Check! Violence and gore: Triple Check! As you can see, *The Wall* is easily the most inappropriate film ever! (Although the "racism" is just to prove a point during the aforementioned fascist rally sequence.)

If "breaking bottles in the hall" is what I need to do to get "beyond The Wall," SIGN ME UP! Any sane man would barf in the presence of this barfaretchalicious film. I cannot believe the audacity of Alan Parker when he signed on to make this crazy, crazy, crazy film. And Gerald Scarfe's animations, new, old, and older, are even weirder and more terrifying than their predecessors. Speaking of older, a few animations are reused from the Animals tour.

Here's a definitive guide to reused animation:

Original:

"Leaf Man" sequence:
"Wish You Were Here"
"Rabid Dog" sequence:
"Shine On You Crazy Diamond part 1"
"Welcome To The Machine."

Wall:

"The Trial"
"Shine On You Crazy Diamond Part 2"
"Waiting For The Worms"
Possibly Cut from The Wall: "Beheading sequence"
Possibly Cut from The Wall: "Goodbye Blue Sky"

As you can see, they were cheap enough to use really old animations for *The Wall* and probably just didn't care about whether or not it was even a decent film. I would think this film would be used as a punishment, like, you know, on Death row. It's that bad. On an aside note, my hatred for this film will not keep me from purchasing the "Roger Waters The Wall" soundtrack on iTunes. But this isn't an ad for the "Roger Waters' The Wall" soundtrack, so let's continue. This film is 100% terrifying and will *probably* keep you up at night.

It is a massive **DO NOT WATCH EVER OR YOUR NIGHTMARES WILL HAVE NIGHTMARES!!!** movie. I think at this point I should point out that I in no way dislike the music. The music's pretty great. It's the movie I don't like. I totally recommend the album.

Back to the -m-o-v-i-e- crud. It's like a festering wart that just won't go away, except the wart is set to some really good music and the wart will sometimes do something really weird, like transforming into a bomber plane. The "Empty Spaces" sequence is now even more terrifying, grotesque, and weird than in the original tour. It did, however, produce "When The Tigers Broke Free," which can be found on "Echoes: The Best Of Pink Floyd." (And on new versions of "The Final Cut," but I recommend skipping or deleting it, as it completely obliterates a transition between "One Of The Few" and "The Hero's Return.") Also contained in the film is a new version of "Stop," extended and with lyrics of "Your Possible Past" and "5:11 A.M (Moment Of Clarity)." Another difference is the move of "This Is United States Calling" to the intro of empty spaces. "Oh My God What A Fabulous Room" however, is still in its spot right before "One Of My Turns."

The plot is so thick it would confuse a level 100 Alakazam. I would include photos, but since I am completely sane, I decided not to. I still consider it miraculous that I've gotten through this review without using a single real cussword.

If films were food, this would be chopped liver a la burnt embers. Look for Tommy instead of this cruddy crud. It is so bad that I cannot write anymore..... Yeah, it's that badly egregiously atrociously bad. The quality of this film is the quality of this font. I need to change fonts now because we are about to get

BRUTAL!!!

Like, really. Watch out, Pink Floyd, because you are about to cry!!

The rancid cabbage-skunks of the world would turn their noses up at this film. I hereby wouldn't hesitate to wage, and therefore declare, COMPLETE AND TOTAL WAR on this film. I hereby dedicate this poem to The Wall:

I think that I have never saw
A movie as ugly as The Wall
It's ugliness is really stunning
It would send an A-Bomb
running.
And until I'm 18 I won't take a
seat
Or else I will concede defeat
For I am sure that everyone
Thinks this film was poorly done

I think the music's really great
But to the film I give my hate
It's terrible, this can't be real
I think I can no longer feel
I'm sure that when this film
appeared
Everyone knew it was too weird
So when you think of the album
Think of this film and have a tantrum

I'm pretty sure that the
nightmares
Are as bad as black bears
And although they are full
of flair
They are as bad as
timeshares

Thank you!

No autographs, please. Now, onto the next section.



U.F.O. Sighting in Brewster, New York!

by Bella, Kenny R., Koryn, Maeve & Ryann

During second period on November 12th, the Language Arts class from Longview School went to the field at the Electro Zone to look at nature. At 10:05, while Koryn was looking at the sky to see if there were any birds, she saw an object silently hovering in the air.

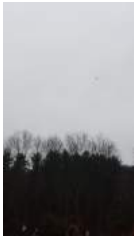
When Koryn screamed, Carolin, the teacher, and Ryann, another student, who were close to the gazebo ran towards the others to ensure they did not hurt themselves. Koryn and Maeve shakingly pointed towards the object. When Bella glanced up and showed that there was a mysterious object in the sky, Ryann and Carolin took pictures with their mobile phones.

The UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) had bumps on it like an unpaved road. It hovered silently like a condor about to attack. A moment later, the object dashed across the sky. It stayed in the same place for at least 30 seconds, making an unusual cracking noise that frightened everyone and made them scream.



*Upper left picture:
From left to right, Maeve,
Koryn and Bella are pointing
at the mysterious object.*

*The ship is in the center of
the sky, slightly to the right
of the middle of this picture.*



*Lower left picture:
In this picture, you can see
the U.F.O. in the sky. This is a
close up picture. The little dot
is the U.F.O.*

*Picture to the right:
This is a zoomed in picture of
the alien craft.*



When the UFO was gone, everybody ran back to school as quickly as possible. They arrived out of breath and still shaken from the experience. The students were so scared that they pushed past the door quickly to tell Kathleen and Angela, both staff at Longview School. Half an hour later, Sharon told a story about a similar incident years ago that she had witnessed. The teacher's story quickly went around the whole school, leaving everyone somewhat excited and a little nervous. Now, everyone is on the lookout for anything mysterious. If you see any strange objects similar to the one described, please contact us immediately. You may have seen an alien craft.



Koryn



Red Knight

Henry
Henry 12/04



Rio

Shovel Knight Review

By Teshome Gray

NOTICE

The following review is highly opinionated and may offend some readers. If you're offended by strong language or opinions that may come off as fact, please reconsider reading this review. You have been warned.

Opening

Shovel Knight is an action platforming video game created by a small indie games studio named Yacht Club Games, and funded through the use of the popular crowdfunding site, Kickstarter. (Yacht Club Games. "Shovel")

Shovel Knight is a simple game, using many different elements from classic games while adding some new ones. It borrows techniques like parallax scrolling, pixel art and chiptune music.

Shovel Knight uses its own aesthetic, which looks really nice. There are tiny details on each character that make them feel like actual people, not just uninteresting filler. The way the characters look communicates their physicality and personality.

The music is also remarkable! The composer, Jake Kaufman, has done an excellent job creating the soundtrack. My favorite song of his has to be "An Underlying Problem." Thanks to Kickstarter, Yacht Club Games also got Manami Matsumae, the composer of the original Mega Man, to do some songs. The two songs that she made, "Flowers of Antimony" and "A Thousand Leagues Below," are, in my opinion, tied as the best songs in the game. (Yacht Club Games. "Update 10")

Gameplay

Like I said earlier, Shovel Knight is an action platforming video game by Yacht Club Games. Its main style of gameplay is action. You move at a nice fast pace. Moving is neither a slugfest nor seizure inducing, it's just the right mixture. Your main source of combat is your trusty Shovel Blade. This combat shovel swings in front of you and allows you to perform the Shovel Drop, a deadly attack, that's also your most important platforming tool. Shovel Knight hops on his shovel like a pogo stick to bounce off of and damage enemies. Most enemies take two hits to defeat, which is a very forgiving trait in case you miss with your first bounce. You also bounce rather high in the air, which makes indecisiveness forgivable.

Complementing the your Shovel Blade is the relic system. If you've played the original Castlevania before, or even Mega Man, this concept won't be very difficult to understand. Through each stage, you find these items called "relics" that help you complete that particular stage. In Shovel Knight, it's not critical to the gameplay to use relics. Actually, you could go without them and it'd still be easy, but the items help. I chose the word "help" specifically because that's just what they do. They don't change the gameplay. Even though you might want to use them; most times they're just extra. I think the area where to relics truly shine are the item stages. The item stages are created specifically for different relics. Rather than relying on your Shovel Drop for platforming, you use these relics to get around specific problems. These stages are especially great because they don't overstay their welcome. They rarely reuse

the same puzzle in each screen. New puzzles are introduced right after completing the one before. These stages aren't mandatory, but are some of my favorite parts in the game and shouldn't be overlooked when playing.

Notice something I've said a lot before: The game is forgiving. It's a little too forgiving, almost to the point of being easy! It's especially easy when you replay levels. This is not a criticism. This is really good! Why? It's good because it makes the game open to everyone. Shovel Knight's gameplay matches its cute aesthetic. This is what's known as being accessible. Accessibility is good for one, large reason: It builds the community. More people start playing the game, rather than it just being the few core gamers. The downside of its being easy is that it actually alienates hardcore gamers, which Yacht Club Games previously attracted through use of its retro aesthetic. This problem is actually remedied once you beat the game and unlock the "New Game Plus" mode which makes you take double the damage, find no health and have fewer checkpoints in each level.

Shovel Knight's gameplay is fun. Strangely, I noticed that Shovel Knight's gameplay is a little too inspired by classic games.

For comparison, let's look at a game like Titanfall. Titanfall is a first-person shooter created by Respawn Entertainment, which in turn was created by two ex-Call of Duty developers from Infinity Ward. Titanfall copied a lot from Call of Duty. Nearly the entire system of picking your weapons was taken from Call of Duty. Respawn Entertainment took a tiny part from Call of Duty and added it to a completely different game. Titanfall has an original futuristic aesthetic, story and gameplay which includes giant mechs and freerunning. Does that sound like Call of Duty? No, it doesn't.

Similarly, Shovel Knight uses many different aspects from classic Nintendo Entertainment System [NES] games. It blends them to create something new, but the conventionality bleeds through. The gameplay doesn't feel new. It's good, but not new.

Story

Shovel Knight, like most NES games, has a very simple, yet touching story. Here's the opening quote:

"Long ago, the lands were untamed, and roamed by legendary adventurers! Of all heroes, none shone brighter than Shovel Knight and Shield Knight. But their travels together ended at the Tower of Fate; when a cursed amulet wrought a terrible magic. When Shovel Knight awoke, the Tower was sealed, and Shield Knight was gone. His spirit broken, a grieving Shovel Knight went into a life of solitude. But without champions, the land was seized by a vile power: The Enchantress and her Order of No Quarter! Now, the Tower is unsealed, and devastation looms. A new adventure is about to begin..."
(Shovel Knight)

Shovel Knight, now a simple farmer, starts a brand new adventure. He must travel throughout the land, battling the different members of The Order of No Quarter (The Order for short) to make it to the evil Enchantress and save Shield Knight. Shovel Knight begins his journey in the first stage, the Plains, encountering the wanderer Black Knight. Black Knight is a fierce knight who pledges loyalty only to the Enchantress. Before he's quickly defeated, he warns you of the threat that The Order pose. In order of encounter, here's all of the Order of No Quarter:

King Knight, of Pridemoor Keep;

Specter Knight, of The Lich Yard;
Mole Knight, of The Lost City;
Plague Knight, of the Explodatorium;
Treasure Knight, of the Iron Whale;
Tinker Knight, of Clockwork Tower;
Polar Knight, of the Stranded Ship;
Propeller Knight, of The Flying Machine.

Of these eight Knights, I'd have to say that Plague Knight and Tinker Knight are my favorites.

Tinker Knight is one of my favorites just because of how hilarious he is! He's clearly the shortest of all the Knights, and his initial fight is seriously amazing. This tiny metalworking-themed knight charges you, throwing hilariously tiny wrenches at you! At first he appears to be a pushover, until he reveals his greatest weapon: the Tinker Tank. This is a giant tank with heat seeking missiles, spikes and one huge drill. Even now when I replay the level, it's one of the hardest boss battles in the game! Tinker Knight is great because Yacht Club really throws a curveball by starting with an enemy who looks weak, but evolves into a giant dangerous tank!

I find Plague Knight to be my favorite of the two. Plague Knight's entire demeanor makes him my favorite knight. He's a conniving snake of a knight. Usually knights are associated with being honorable and just, but Plague Knight is the exact opposite! He can literally pull things from his sleeve, seeing how he actually has an oversized robe. Befitting his name, he hides his face under a creepy plague doctor mask. He battles by throwing potions from long range, ignoring the upfront honorable nature of most all of the Order. Everything about Plague Knight just exudes the opposite of being a knight. It's a great contrast to the other knights of the Order.

The Order of No Quarter is a ragtag group of loveable knights who serve the Enchantress for each of their own reason. Each of them has awesome personalities and is seriously great foe.

Aesthetic

Shovel Knight follows a now stale trend of indie games that have a pixel art aesthetic. It used to be unique, but now it's just overused. Use of this aesthetic would have been unexceptional if it hadn't been for one thing; its gameplay. Shovel Knight's aesthetic and gameplay mesh together well to create an experience that feels genuinely retro. The gameplay took inspiration from many old video games. The game's aesthetic and gameplay come to together to create a truly retro feeling game. They use retro game mechanics, music and graphics. They tried their best to stick with the original NES' color palette. You even move to the next screen in a very slow scrolling fashion!

This is what wraps Shovel Knight into one, nice ball of joy and nostalgia. It tries its hardest to be like an NES game, rather than just a game with pixel art graphics. Even the music sounds like something you'd hear on an NES.

World

After the first stage, the next area you advance towards is the local village. The village guard demands you halt and bring no weapons into the peaceful village, but luckily, you possess no weapons, you simply have a shovel. The village is a bright, inhabited area. All throughout the village, you're reminded just how wacky the game is. People with animal heads, funny puns and awesome music really set the tone of the world. It shows how nice the world is! It shows you how nice and peaceful world is. You journey through the world, finding small things that make

the world feel even more lived in than it already did! The land feels peaceful! This actually turns out to be a problem.

The world doesn't feel like it's in turmoil. It doesn't feel that there are lives (aside from Shield Knight's) at stake. The world not being in turmoil isn't what's needed to drive the player, but only having Shield Knight be the focus is boring. Oftentimes I found myself not caring that much about Shield Knight; I was just playing because I wanted to. I gleaned that Shovel Knight cared a lot about Shield Knight, but I didn't really care. I don't know who Shield Knight is; I just know she's Shovel Knight's friend. I know and care about the world, so give me the opportunity to save it!

The overall problem is that I feel disconnected from Shovel Knight. This leads perfectly into the next topic, Shovel Knight himself.

Main Character

I feel like I'm playing *as* Shovel Knight rather than actually *being* Shovel Knight. This was especially jarring because NES games usually had those silent protagonists with little personality. They didn't have personalities, which made them more relatable. You could project yourself onto them. Characters like Mega Man, Mario and Link are some good examples, but Shovel Knight is different. He appears to have a strong sense of justice, which I understand, but cannot fully relate to. I also do not understand why he cares so much about Shield Knight; they were friends, possibly romantically involved, but that's all I know. When I played Super Mario Bros., I never knew who Princess Peach was, but I could understand that Bowser was a bad dude. I could visibly see what Bowser was doing to the Mushroom Kingdom, but in Shovel Knight, you can't. It doesn't feel like you're saving the world. What are you saving the world from? I don't know! That's the problem! Having your main protagonist be different from the player is fine, but not showing why that has worth, isn't.

Shovel Knight's story is a personal one, and that's fine, but I don't know enough about the relationship between Shovel Knight and Shield Knight, which is the focus of the entire story. By the time the end of the game rolls around, I'm left not really caring about what happened. Aside from the very final boss battle in the game, I don't care at all about Shield Knight and her relationship with Shovel Knight.

Final Verdict

In my opinion the game is good. The aesthetic, world and gameplay blend perfectly together to create a good NES-like game. The gameplay is simply good, not new, and the story isn't relatable. The world is great! It's funny, while not being boring. The environments are interesting and varied. The themes are a little bit cliché, using mostly cookie cutter worlds like plains, water, ice, and fire. I can't criticize it for that, mainly because I feel it was intentional. Admittedly, there are different spins on these themes, which makes it better, but it doesn't detract from it being cliché.

Overall the game is good. I give Shovel Knight a 4/5! Its unrelatable story and rehashed gameplay are really what make this game not 5/5 worthy. The gameplay was fun, but I think it's justified to have expected more. The same applies to the story. I rated Shovel Knight a 4/5 because that's how I feel about it. Personally I really like the game, but you might not and that's fine.

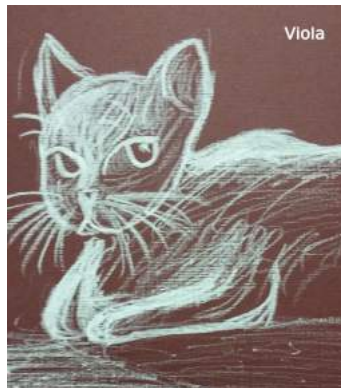
Shovel Knight: 4/5

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The Cats of Three: The Journey

by Ryann

Glossary

Nofur: A name for a human

Hard-Path: A name for a road

Big-Den: Where a Nofur lives

Powerwinds: A tornado

Yellowsneeze: A mild cold

Redsneeze: A bad cold

Peace-Lands: A place where the good go when they die

Prologue

In the moonlight, a leopard stalks her prey, alert and quiet. The leopard pushes off with her strong legs and sand flies through the air. The leopard is on her prey, sinking her sharp teeth into the gazelle's neck and her claws digging into the gazelle's back. The gazelle is dead. She drags the gazelle up a tree and settles down to eat. Luckily the meat doesn't attract hyenas or lions.

Chapter 1: Alari

After Alari eats her fill, she puts the gazelle on a higher branch so it doesn't fall. She walks down the high branch onto a much wider branch, where she can sleep. She soon falls asleep. In the morning, Alari finishes her gazelle. After she heads down to a waterhole where she usually gets water and goes for a little swim when she is hot. All of a sudden the water splashes, and Alari goes flying in the air with fear. There was a crocodile chasing right after her. He stopped chasing her.

"Stupid! This is my waterhole!" hissed the Crocodile.

"Since when? We made a deal that you would live in the other waterhole where there are many fish to feed, and dumb zebras that rest there!" spat Alari. The crocodile snapped his jaws in frustration.

"Fine, but if you come to my new waterhole, you will be Fish-Food!" the crocodile growled. Alari nodded in agreement, but not very happily. The crocodile walked away towards the waterhole. Alari just sat there, still frustrated. She lay down to groom herself.

Chapter 2: Jazz

In a humid misty jungle, a jaguar fights a python. He scratches, bites and pounces on his slithery prey. The python struggles to wriggle away, but the pain and the bite marks of the jaguar stop her. The python manages to get a hold on the jaguar's arm. Jazz yowled and jumped off the beaten snake.

"I m... meant no harm!" the snake hissed.

"You were in my territory!" Jazz protested.

"Many other snakes pass through your territory!" the snake yelled in frustration.

"Well, how come I never see any!?" Jazz asked.

"Probably cause you're so lazy, and you never spend time checking your own territory, looking for creatures such as me!" the python hissed fiercely. Jazz frowned. He calmed his voice.

"Have you seen any other jaguars or other mysterious animals?" Jazz asked.

The python sighed. "I have smelled some, but not that recently. They must of moved out of your territory," the python explained.

"But how will I get them out, if it is to happen again?" Jazz asked. The python just sat still for a moment.

"You're a jaguar, Jazz. I can't help you. I have to go. I have my offspring to care for," the python explained. Jazz gasped. He had not realized he had wounded a mother python that he just befriended.

"Oh no, I am so sorry, I did not realize. I'm assuming that your home is in my territory. Do you need any help?" Jazz asked in concern.

"No, I don't, but may we not fight when I cross near your den. I really don't want to fight you again. You are a kind jaguar, Jazz," the python said in a friendly voice. Jazz felt a rush of happiness.

"I will not fight you ever again. I never made a good friend so quickly in my life, especially for a python," Jazz said. The python smiled, her eyes soft with kindness.

"I am sorry Jazz, but I need to tend to my young," the python explained with a long sigh. Jazz frowned. "Yes, I know. Can you come back tomorrow?" Jazz asked.

"Maybe. If I can, I will."

"Okay, goodbye!" The python said goodbye and gave him a nuzzle. He watched her slither away into the bright green brambles.

Chapter 3: Skylar

A puma sits in a tree hissing at Nofur's and their dogs. The puma hesitates many times to jump down. The Nofur darts the puma in the back of her leg. She goes limp and passes out with the medicine. The Nofur climbs up the tree and drops her into a pile of nettles and soft snow. Many minutes later, Skylar wakes up. All she knows is that Nofurs can track her now. She once saw another puma get captured who had something from a Nofur on his neck. She hisses in frustration. Skylar sits up, feeling very dizzy. She starts walking and breaks into a run. She slows down and pants heavily. She lays down in a small thicket and fall asleep.

Chapter 4: Alari

Alari bents over the water and stars to drink. Alari walks back to her tree, climbs up and hangs her legs over a branch and sleeps. Alari does not know that the gazelle's carcass is attracting a

group of four hyenas. They sneak through the dried out brambles. The hyenas bark and yip like laughing donkeys. Alari finally wakes up and hisses immediately at the flea-bitten creatures.

“Hog-Brains! Get away from my carcass!” Alari spits angrily.

“Oh, your carcass? Finders Keepers!” growls one of the hyenas.

“Either leave, or I will rip your eyes out!” Alari challenged.

“Come down and fight us, you stupid coward!” the hyena barks. Alari doesn’t reply to his insult. She slowly walks down her branch and sits there worried for a moment. Then she remembers that she is much faster than them. She could outrun them. Alari decides to trick them. While the leader of them was not looking, Alari gets ready for a pounce, her haunches up and her heart pounding. She flings herself off the branch and lands on top of the hyena. Her nostrils are filled with the revolting stench of the hyena. She digs her claws in his back and bites down hard on his shoulder.

“Attack!” yelled the leader to the group of hyenas. The leader turns around like a flash of lightning. Alari gets knocked to the ground, she scrambles to her paws and sees another hyena charging right after her. She runs to her tree and tries to climb up, but the hyena grabs a hold of her foot and starts tugging. Alari knows that she will be ripped to pieces if she lets go of the tree. She tries to dig her claws deeper into the tree, but she feels her foot getting ripped in half. She screams in agony. Was she really going to die?

Chapter 5: Jazz

Jazz feels a familiar hiss. He catches a glimpse of his new friend Python. Her eyes are soft and also somewhat worried. Jazz sits down. She slithered her way to him. She gives him a kind nuzzle and said: “You will meet your own kind, Jazz. You need to be strong and clever. You can do it!” Jazz closes his eyes for a moment. He opens them and she is gone. All he is able to see is nothing but the jungle. Jazz wakes up worried. He has been dreaming. “Was that a prophecy?” Jazz murmurs to himself. What did the snake mean? Jazz shakes the thought away. He heads down to where he usually catches fat fish to feed on. He stares at the fast flowing river and catches a glimpse of a fat, well fed fish. Jazz gets ready for the pounce. He pushes off with his strong legs, grabs the trout with his paws and bites down on its head. The trout is dead. Jazz brings it back to the shore of the river. He shakes the water droplets off and starts ripping the trout’s scales off with his strong, needle sharp teeth. Jazz lays down in the warm sunlight to groom himself. After he sharpens his claws on a rotten fallen tree, the thought about his dream comes back to Jazz. His stomach hurts with nervousness. He starts walking through the jungle. He soon remembers about the time when Python said that he should check his territory. Jazz put his nose in the air and smells. There was a strange smell that made Jazz scared. His fur started to bristle and his tail puffed out. Was his own kind following him?

Chapter 6: Skular

Skylar wakes up. She feels very hungry. She decides to head for flat land where there is always deer. She gets up and stretches her back. She stalks down the rocky hill and sprints to the flat grassy land. Skylar scans the land for deer and spots a mother deer and her baby. She is surprised by the small amount of deer.

"Rats!" Skylar spits. She gets into a crouch and starts stalking towards the two deer. She freezes once the deer look her way. Skylar's heart is pounding. The deer stamps the ground with her hooves to warn her offspring. Mother and fawn starts to run away. Skylar pushes off with her strong legs and runs after the fawn. She finally gets a chance to pounce on the skinny creature. Her teeth sink into the fawn's neck. It lets out a scream. Out of the corner of her eye she sees that the mother is just staring helplessly. Skylar ignores the mother deer. She picks up the limp prey and heads over to a thicket where she fell asleep after the Nofurs had put a thing around her neck. She has gotten used to the collar around her neck. Sklar lays down in her thicket and starts to eat her prey. After she grooms herself, she falls asleep.

Chapter 7: Jazz

Jazz sees that another jaguar is stalking towards him. If he is to fight, it will be his first time. Jazz arches his back and shows his teeth at the other jaguar.

"My territory!" Jazz spits. The jaguar just ignores him. Jazz runs after him and leaps at him at once. He is clawing at his back. He almost sinks his teeth into his neck, but the other male jaguar flings him off. Jazz is laying on the ground with the wind knocked out of him. He could have sworn that he got a wiff of his friend Python's scent. He was right. He saw her slithering towards Jazz's enemy and was about to attack him.

"Python!" Jazz screeched. The other male jaguar was about to pounce when he had seen the snake.

"Oh, Now you are going to be weaker and die with that creature suffocating you to death!" The vicious jaguar growled.

"No! I'm going to suffocate you! This is Jazz's territory!" Python hissed. Jazz had the chance to pounce on the intruder's back and sink his teeth into him, while he was arguing with Python. He manages to do so. He sinks his teeth into the jaguar's neck and that sends him screaming far, far away. Jazz knows if that intruder was to see Jazz again, he would not even dare come near him. The python slithers her way to Jazz. Jazz licks her scaly head.

"Thank you so much, Python!" Jazz says.

"Eh, It was nothing. I just wanted to let that savage know to never bother you again and that this is your territory," Python explains.

Jazz sighs, "I have not marked it yet. I must do it later, soon after you leave, or you can come with me."

"I will come with you, Jazz. My offspring are safe in their nest, so I can come," Python whispers. After they talk, Jazz and his friend hurry over to where he is going to mark his territory border.

Chapter 8: Alari

Alari feels a horrifying snap in her foot. She screams in agony. Her foot has been torn off by one of the hyenas. No matter how much pain she is in, she has to hold on to the tree.

"We will leave now. That will leave you weak, but we will return," the pack leader growls. Alari just ignores him. She watches them run away. She collapses from the tree and falls on the ground. She knows she will die if her leg does not get healed. Her claws are so sore and her

arms are also sore from holding on the tree so tight. A couple of moments later she has passed out. She has lost the fight.

Alari wakes up to see Nofurs cleaning her foot with a weird liquid that stings like a thorn in her foot. Alari knows that the Nofur was helping her. Then she feels a weird pain feeling, but somewhat very numb. She digs her claws into the Earth's soil. A Nofur is putting a thornlike object through Alari's leg and a string has sealed where her foot had been torn off by the bloodthirsty hyena. Alari's leg was soon sealed with a tool that the Nofur used. Then Nofur the creature pours water on her leg and taps her on the head. She tries to take a swipe at him, but she feels too drowsy so her paw drops heavily on the ground. Then she has noticed how much blood she has lost, and her fur bristles with shock. Blood is all over her leg and has stained the dirt.

Chapter 9: Jazz

Jazz stops dead in his tracks. Python also freezes. He can hear a very loud rumbling noise far in the distance. Then smoke and dust starts blowing towards them.

"Python.. whats happening!?" Jazz screeches.

"I... I have no clue," Python admits.

"Run!" Jazz screeches once more. Jazz and Python moved quickly through the jungle. Jazz is surprised in how fast his slithery friend is. Thorns and thick brambles are tugging at his fur, and some pricklers stabbing into his skin. He has to slow down to wait for Python. Then he realizes she is ahead of him. Jazz is confused. I must have been running too fast, so my head is spinning, Jazz thinks. Soon Jazz and Python come to a stop at the edge of a waterfall.

"Oh no! What do we do? I can't... my offspring!!" Python screeches.

"It's my fault!" Jazz yowls.

"No it's not! They're gone anyway," Python says in a lowered voice.

"Wait...You can't swim," Jazz meows.

"I can swim. I just can't leap into the lake below us," Python mutters loud enough so Jazz can hear. Jazz looks back and notices trees are falling far in the distance, and the ground is breaking apart with dirt and rocks flying everywhere. This is an earthquake. Python also looks back. Both of them are in shock.

"Jazz...You have to jump! I'll be fine. I promise," Python hisses. Jazz hesitates. What if his friend wouldn't make it? Jazz is torn. Then Jazz nods and leaps into the lake that is far below him. Jazz holds his breath and the underwater is as pretty as ever. He has never seen the water so blue before. He can not focus on that. Jazz has to get to the Lake's shore and find out if Python has lived or not. He swims as fast as he can to the shore. He steps onto land and gives himself a shake. His whiskers quiver, and his stomach tight is with nervousness. Then he sees her slithering towards him on the shore.

"Jazz, I...I can't make it. You have to go on without me!" Jazz's fur bristles.

"No! No! No! You are coming with me no matter what happens! I will—" Python interrupts.

"Jazz I am going to die no matter what! You have to continue on without me! I...I will watch over you...I promise," Python whispers. Jazz yowls in frustration.

"No...you can't go! I... I love you!" Jazz yowls. "You have been the greatest friend. I...will miss you, Python," Jazz whispers. He watches Python start breathing very slowly. Her head rests on the ground, she gives a massive jerk and is still. Jazz licks her head. He rests his head on her head. "May the spirits guide you to the wonderful Peace-Lands of the Great," Jazz mutters. "Goodbye, Python." Jazz now has to live on without his best friend that has just fallen, missed the lake and died.

Chapter 10: Skylar

Skylar wakes up to a very loud rumbling sound in the distance. She scrambles to her paws and dashes out of a thicket that she had slept in. Trees are being torn apart, the ground is rumbling and dirt and rocks are flying in the air. Skylar's fur bristles and her tail puffs out in extreme fear. This is an earthquake. She tries to run to safety, but a rock hits her in the head and she almost falls to the ground but she keeps running. Then a flying twig stabs her in the flank and she falls to the ground. Dust and sand are stinging her eyes. Skylar is blinded by the dust and sand. She yowls in pain. She then hears a figure galloping towards her. She assumes it is a deer. The winds are so powerful that it makes her tumble across the whole grass field. She can feel pricklers stabbing into her skin and her bones cracking. At least none are broken, but it is very painful. Is Skylar really going to die?

The Cats Meet

Three cats had survived a terrible earthquake that had made them shocked and traumatized for at least three days. These cats are Alari, Jazz and Skylar. Alari is a leopard, Jazz is a jaguar, and Skylar is a mountain lion. These cats might have to work together to hunt and recover from the terrible storm that had happened. Will these powerful creatures travel and thrive together for the rest of their lives?

(To Be Continued)



The Writing Class Dilemma

by Rio

12/14/15 10:00AM

One day at Longview School during one of the many periods, Rio, Eva, Nick, Connor, Dylan, Aaron, Sunny and Emma decided to take part in a play that Eva had made.

"Alright, so Rio, you'll be the Narrator of this story," Eva told Rio.

"Um...that's the one with the N, right?" Rio responded.

"No duh. Sunny, you'll be John Horsehold," Eva said.

"So what does he do? I mean 'Horsehold?' That sounds like I'm a barn with a fancy name, unless I'm your barn. Then I don't mind what my name is," Sunny said.

"Not now, Sunny. I haven't told the others their roles yet. Make another comment like that and I'll hang you by your man parts," Eva replied.

"Nick, you'll be the tree," Eva told Nick.

"What? Why am I a tree?" Nick wondered.

"Why don't you stop asking questions? Be a good little tree," Eva said.

Nick looked at her but said nothing and sat there with a pouty face.

"Good tree," Eva laughed.

"Mark, you'll be the Bearded Menace," Eva said. Mark gave a brief smile and went back to his work.

"Now, Emma...you'll be the newcomer, since...well, you are the newcomer," Eva laughed.

"Alright, I guess," Emma replied, but looked confused.

"Hmm, Connor, you'll be the hero," Eva said.

"Got it!" Connor replied. Eva looked around the room.

"Oh, that's right, Aaron. You'll be the hero's assistant. Think of it as being the Robin to Connor's Batman," Eva laughed.

"Yeah, Aaron. You're Robin, and you always will be," Connor laughed evilly.

Aaron went to Connor and grabbed his computer's mouse. He threw it to the ground and smashed it. Connor looked at Aaron.

"You dun' messed up, boy," Connor said in a Western accent.

"I reckon you'd do something, Dirty Dan," Aaron replied. Shortly after that, Aaron and Connor resumed their endless battle: punching, kicking, scratching, biting until one of them would give up.

Nick pulled out his iPad and started playing games.

"Alright, now we got every—" Eva almost said.

"Hey, what about me?" Dylan asked.

"Hush, you. You don't play a role in this," Eva replied.

"But I really want a role," Dylan pleaded. Eva got up and threw Dylan into the wall with the whiteboards on it. Dylan went unconscious.

Aaron and Connor's endless battle paused. Nick turned his iPad off.

"Anymore questions?" Eva asked threateningly. Everyone shook their heads no.

"Good," Eva replied. Shortly after Eva stopped speaking, Aaron and Connor's battle started up again.

"So, now that we have everyone's role, we can finally start," Eva said.

"Oh, what does the 'newcomer' do?" Emma wondered.

"Read the script," Eva replied.

"Thanks?" Emma said.

Eva turned toward Aaron and Connor to speak. "Connor, Aaron, stop your endless battle or whatever and come sit down." They didn't pay any attention to her.

"Aaron, Connor, please sit down and play your roles!" Eva yelled politely. Aaron and Connor temporarily halted their endless battle.

"Yes, ma'am!" Aaron and Connor said simultaneously. Aaron and Connor got back in their chairs and started to listen.

"Alright, now let's finally begin. So, the first sce—" Eva said.

"Hey, so, I have a question!" Rio screamed.

"What is it, Rio, since you think it's so important that you had to cut me off and all?" Eva said impatiently.

"Why am I so uninterested in this?" Rio wondered.

"Because you're an idiot," Eva replied.

"Well, I feel rather offended now," Rio replied in a snobby manner.

"Well, I don't really care how you feel," Eva giggled.

"Fine then, I just won't play a part in this lame story," Rio smirked.

"Oh, so you think you have a choice in this. Sorry to break it to ya, but you really don't," Eva smirked.

"Like hell I don't, right, Mark?" Rio said. Mark looked at Rio, then went back to his work.

"Exactly," Eva laughed.

"I don't think we'll have enough time for this play or whatever it is anyways," Rio said.

"What do you mean we won't have time? We should have plenty of time," Eva argued. Eva then looked at the time. It was 10:30 AM.

"See, you're running out of time. Eva deary, gotta go fast or finish last," Rio jokingly said.

"We still have 10 minutes. That's more than enough time," Eva said confidently.

"9 minutes to be exact," Rio mockingly replied.

"Alright, let's start thi—" Eva cheered.

BANG! A loud sound came from the science room.

"What are you doing?" Keith screamed.

"I'm making the class more interesting," Henry said.

"Nooooo!" Keith screamed. Aaron and Connor started laughing.

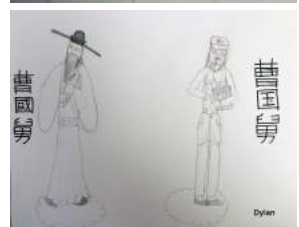
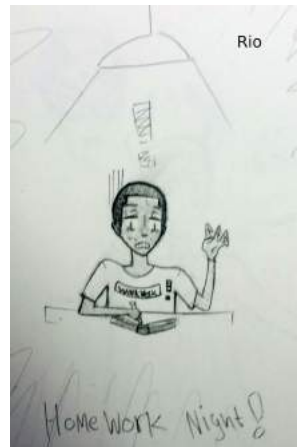
"Be quiet!" Aaron told Connor.

"Shut up, nerd," Connor replied. Thus, their never ending battle began once more.

Eva tried taking control of the class but with no luck. She started crying. Everyone stopped messing around. "Why did this have to happen. I just wanted to do my play and everything went wrong. Do you all hate me that much?" Eva cried.

"Eva, we're not doing this because we hate you. We're doing this because we feel like doing it." Rio said. The bells rang.

"And that's class," Mark told everyone.



Stars of the Moon

By Neil Schilliple

And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as bride adorned for her groom. And I heard a loud voice saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is among [sic] the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

-Book of Revelations 21:2-4

Prologue

Everything was according to plan. The ships, built. The workers, paid. The colonists, boarded. The tools, packed. All that was left to do was press the button. Pierre and his wife, Francoise, walked casually to the lighthouse in their evening attire. Pierre was on edge, as he had been the entire day. He looked around; there was nothing outside the building for miles but insects. Trying to keep a calm face, he opened the door to the dark monument of man, and he and Francoise stepped inside.

Inside, two guards led them to separate changing rooms, where they removed their formal wear and put on tight pressure suits made of thick leather. They both stepped out of the changing rooms and walked up the staircase of the lighthouse.

When they arrived at the very top, Pierre opened a hatch in the glass cover of the lighthouse's light, which made a pop and hissing noise before splitting in half and revealing the pointed top of a cylindrical rocket. Two other guards, who were chatting in Polish, immediately stood at attention, opening the hatch for them to enter the rocket.

Pierre Weinstein and his wife stepped into the small compartment, which was roughly large enough to hold them both quite comfortably, if a bit tightly. There they sat, facing skyward, clutching each other's hands. Francoise flipped a switch and two helmets descended from hydraulic arms. Pierre flipped open a glass case next to his seat. Within it was a large red button, this would trigger rockets all over the world to launch, from his launch pad in Normandy, to Germany, Spain, the Americas, and more. His arms were shaking from exhaustion and excitement. Seven years of careful planning had led up to this moment. Excitedly, he pressed the button.

Engines below the shaking couple burst to life. Any guards or workers had boarded the second habitation pod near the midpoint. The lighthouse began to split itself open down the middle. Huge amounts of force battered everyone on the ship, and before seven hours of grueling G-force, most people had passed into unconsciousness. Pierre and Francoise included. They would most likely remain unconscious until arriving at their destination. Two weeks later, those who had lost consciousness were awoken upon arrival. When they arrived, a ladder dropped from Pierre and Francoise's cabin, for it was appropriate for the project's leader to step out first onto this brave new world. Pierre opened the cabin door, and slowly stepped down the metal ladder, finally stepped on the rocky barren surface. He looked up and saw hundreds of other rockets, some filled with colonists, building materials, food and medicine, while a handful carried fellow funders of this project. He beckoned a worker to bring him "the package" (which was a small paper box). Inside was a brass plate, a small marble stand, some screws, and a

screwdriver. First he screwed the brass plate to the marble stand, and then the stand to the ground. On the brass plate read the words:

**“On This Day, May 2nd, 1860, The Jewish People, In Hopes Of Finding Their
True Homeworld, Founded The First Colony On The North Pole Of The Moon.”**

“*Syma tov & mazel tov & mazel tov and syma tov!*” The words echoed through the cathedral-sized synagogue. Felix watched in joy as his younger sister Eva carried the Torah around and then off the bima. There was clapping and cheers throughout the main chamber as the rabbi said the final blessing over Felix’s younger sister, her white and blue dress trailing behind her. Finally their father, Mayor of New Jerusalem and Grandson of her founder, Alexandre, stepped atop the bima. “Welcome, friends! Welcome to the 13th birthday and bat mitzvah of my beloved daughter.” He turned to Eva. “*Mes petite fille*, your mother and I are so proud that you could make it to this moment.” He looked at the crowd with a devious look in his eye. “As special treat...” He pulled out a small remote from his inside jacket pocket. “*Herre hjalp mig (God help me)*.” The rabbi, (who was Swedish), muttered to himself, face white as chalk. Alexandre pushed a red button on the remote, and everything began to float up to the chamber roof.

When the gravity in the room shut off, people didn’t really fly to the roof, it was more the liquids began to float in little globs. The entire contents of the kiddush cup in front of the bima (much to the rabbi’s dismay) emptied and floated up, the liquid grease dripping off a lamb floated through the Synagogue’s dining hall. Salty wet tears, drifted from cheeks of overjoyed relatives. People who were sipping champagne served by robotic servants, got some up their noses, while actual people simply felt a slight lack of weight, and when trying to walk, would float for a moment before slowly, falling back down. Felix, unlike many of the older relatives around him, was enjoying every second of no gravity. There is something about having weight that makes being practically weightless and almost flying a little euphoric. They floated around for what must have been 10 to 15 minutes, the younger children screamed and giggled, a few of the older and weak-stomached became sick, adding another type of glob to many others floating and dancing across the ceiling, when he was finished dancing with his wife, Claudia. Floated to the podium on the other side of the room, slowly turned a green dial, gradually introducing gravity to the room, to the relief and disappointment of many. “Right,” he said, “now, who is hungry?”

After the dinner, which lasted well into the night (if you can say “night” on the moon) people headed off to their respective homes, some taking ornate lunar carriages to illustrious mansions, while some, like journalists and photographers, simply hailed taxis to apartments in the actual city part of New Jerusalem. Felix, being the son of the mayor of the whole city, was escorted by armed guards to a gilt lunar carriage, which can be described as having the body of a closed carriage, with airlocks on each door, and being driven by a small engine in front, connected by a metal pole.

After a half hour ride (of which Felix was asleep for the first third), he was dropped off from his personal lunar carriage at the mayoral mansion. A beautiful Victorian mansion, surrounded by a clear glass bio-dome, which allowed for some illustrious gardens, the actual airlock and the dome were connected by a long glass tube, which gave some beautiful views of the obsidian skyscrapers that made up the city. Two more security guards led him to the other end, bypassing robotic turrets, which looked liked an android dressed like a hussar with the skin peeled off, its face a clockwork of gears, permanently squatting at its machine gun post.

When Felix arrived at the massive front doors of the mayoral palace, he was greeted by his

family's personal butler, Clarence.

"Good evening, young master," said Clarence, the hydraulics in his jaw hissing audibly. "I trust the celebration of your younger sister's bat mitzvah was...enjoyable."

"It was, thank you Clarence."

"No thanks required, young master, and before you retire, young master, your parents wish to speak with you in the library."

"Thank you, Clarence, tell them I just need to change into something, a little more loose."

Forty minutes later, Felix had removed the more formal, vested suit for the Bat Mitzvah, and into a much looser suit without many of the additions that would be worn for such a celebration, and headed for the Presidential Library.

Being the second largest library in New Jerusalem (only seconds to the absolutely massive council library), it was filled with books of every kind: history, science, fantasy, medical, architecture, theological, political, and it even had a whole sub-room dedicated to children's stories and fairy tales! In the center was the main reading room, surrounded by shelves of the oldest volumes. In the center were a couch, which held his parents, a table and chairs, a smaller chair and coffee table next to a huge fireplace, and a mantle, above which was a painting of Felix's great-grandfather, Pierre Weinstein, Founder of the entirety of New Jerusalem. Felix focused less on the scenery that he must have seen dozens of times and more on his parents.

When she saw him, Felix's mother, Claudia, rushed over to give him a hug, "Oh, *Mein kleiner junge*, how did you, feel? Did you get overwhelmed?" she said, practically crushing his ribs.

"No mother, I was fine." *She always fusses over me, ever since the diagnosis.* When Felix was 7, the newly arrived friend of an up and coming Austrian psychologist on Earth named Hans Asperger had done an experiment on him and said that he had a social disability that was called Asperger Syndrome, which also made him very sensitive to loud noises. Since then, his mother had been constantly worried for him, even when he was fine. His father stepped up from the low gilt couch, and patted his son's shoulder, followed by a quick ruffling of his curly brown hair.

"Today you did an excellent job." Alexandre called forth one of the clockwork librarians. "Fetch *the book*," he said to it. A moment later the librarian brought a small leather bound book. "This is your great-grandfather's diary."

"Wow...." said Felix, lost for words, "I.....I..." Clarence burst in before he could finish his sentence.

"Mister Alexandre," he said, "General Boroi has arrived." *General Boroi?* Felix thought. *Why would my father be talking to him? The mayor is not allowed to declare war, right?*

"Thank you, Clarence," Alexandre said, "Felix, I will have to ask to ask you to leave."

"But...." Felix stammered

"Go!" his father shouted. Felix paled, but finally complied and shuffled out. He slowly roamed towards his room while collecting himself. By the time he got there, he sank into bed. He had no idea why his father would snap at him. He knew he was emotionally sensitive. He was biting his cheek just to prevent himself from crying. After a moment of struggle, he collected himself, put on night clothing, and went to sleep.

Alexandre was on edge, not only because this conversation was of the most vital importance, but also because he had yelled at Felix. His son was one of the most important things to him,

especially him now being 16. His son was growing up too fast. If only he hadn't been so busy with his mayoral duties.....

"Sir?" General Boroi's thick Romanian accent cut his train of thought. "Shall we continue?" he asked.

"Of course" he responded."You were saying?"

"Well, our trade gifts to New London have been trying to improve relations for ages."

"And....."

"Well, we lost contact with our last transport, but before they went to static they sent us a special message." He pulled out a small wax cylinder and put it in the library's phonograph. What came out sounded like white noise dropping and rising in octaves at random. "At first we didn't know what it was," continued the general, "until we put it through a sound to image recorder. Then we got this." He pushed a hidden button underneath the library coffee table and the portrait of New Jerusalem's founding father flipped to reveal a projector screen in the painting's frame. A small projector on the wall glowed to life, a black and white film began to play, showing glass domes filled with forts and barracks. Soldiers in military parades, artillery being fired into the moon's barren surface, Generals giving fiery speeches to crowds of people.

As Alexandre and general Boroi watched, the mayor's eyes widened in horror. "And the worst part," said General Boroi. "This is not the half of it." The general continued, "There were 3 hours worth of audio that was transmitted, 1 minute of audio equals 10 minutes of film. For all we know what we where given is not the entire signal."

The mayor looked at him, his eyes bugging out of his head. Finally, he said, "*Mon Dieu, this* can't be." Suddenly he remembered something, something that could save millions, "Is the Talos project complete yet?"

"*Nu, sir,*" the general responded, "the last batch of prototypes are being finished though."

"*Tres excellent, General,* this is the ultimate test, and let's pray they do not fail."

"Shall I hold a press conference on behalf of the army?"

"No, better to keep them blissfully ignorant, General. Activate project *tah machartrot* immediately. We are going to war."

(To Be Continued)



End of the World

By Nick

Journal Entry #1.

The year is 2028, July 4th. It's been two weeks since the world came to an end.

There is limited power outside the city. No one has ever gone back in to see what happened to all the people, but we still hear screams and gunfire.

Journal Entry #2.

The past week, we found twenty survivors and have brought them back to our holding area. Still no attacks on us.

Journal Entry #3.

It's been four weeks since the world came to an end and we are running low on supplies.

We decided that we have to go into the city for supplies and to look for survivors. What caused the end of the world?

Journal Entry #4.

Two days after we entered the city, we found some supplies but not enough to last more than a week. We watched people running from something. We have no idea what it is. We can not see. Someone is calling, so I must go but will write more when I have some free time. Bye for now.

Journal Entry #5.

It's has been a month since I have written. We have been under attack and are still trying to find more supplies. We have found dozens of survivors.

Journal Entry #6.

Sorry, I have been busy with some of the army that survived. It seems that recently, there have been more attacks. As far as we know, Colonel Porter is the last high-ranking officer in the army. He came up with a simple plan to make the enemy visible to us. We will put people on the roof of the building with tons of paint and will dump paint on them when they attack again. Hopefully, this will work out.

Sleeping on the ground was the worst thing Mike had ever done. When Dave woke Mike, he was stiff all over. Mike said, "Hey, Dave, what are the orders today?"

Dave said, "We are going scouting for supplies."

Mike said, "Yes it's about time. I am tired of being on Guard and mess hall duty. It was starting to drive me crazy. What time are we heading out?"

Dave said, "15 minutes."

Mike said, "Wait, what? I have not had breakfast yet."

Dave said, "Well, we have about 10 miles to cover today, so get a banana and a muffin and let's go."

Mike said, "Any word on enemy movement today?"

Dave said, "Yeah, they are increasing the scouting party numbers by about tenfold."

Mike said, "Great, I am sure we will run into them. Do not forget to bring more ammo with us in case we get in a firefight. I'd hate to be like those guys who run out of ammo and got shot in the back."

Dave said, "Alright, alright, I will grab extra ammo, but it's going to slow us down a bit. Hey, don't forget to pack more water."

Mike said, "Yeah, I will fill up the camel packs with water and ice. Hey, Dave, are you ready to go?"

Dave said, "Yes. By the way, if we are not back by tonight, they will send search parties. OK, it's 8 AM. Let's head out."

Four hours later

Mike said, "Hey, I never got a chance to ask you, Dave. What did you do for a living before...well, you know?"

Dave said, "You mean the end of the world?"

Mike said, "Yes."

Dave said, "I worked as private security for some rich people. What did you do for a living?"

Mike said, "Well, I was in between jobs as a computer programmer. I was looking to join a major company like Apple, Google or Microsoft before the world came to an end. Now I'm really out of a job."

Dave said, "Hey, let's stop for lunch. I see what looks like a small town up ahead. We will go there and look for supplies. If we find nothing, we'll cover the last five miles before we head back."

Mike said, "OK. So who packed the lunch?"

Dave said, "I don't know. It's probably just a couple of sandwiches."

Mike said, "Hey, look! It's not sandwiches. Oh, it's been so long since I had a homecooked meal! I have not had one since before the end of the world."

Dave said, "It looks good and smells great, so dig in. Hey, I got meatloaf!"

Mike said, "Cool, I got a spaghetti bake."

Dave said, "Hey, it's been a half hour, so we should get moving. We have to search that town, plus we still have five more miles left."

Mike said, "You should call base to report to on what we are going to be doing. Ask if we can turn it into an outpost."

Dave said, "I will get the satellite phone and report our position. Then we can head to the town."

Dave called Command. "They said they will send a scout team tomorrow with more weapons and food. We are not to go into the town without reinforcements."

Mike said, "Okay. I will go on first watch. Get some sleep and I will wake you when it's your turn in four hours."

Mike said, "Hey, Dave. You need to get up. It has been four hours and I am about ready to fall asleep standing up."

Dave said, "All right, I am getting up. You get some sleep. Did anything happen while I was asleep?"

Mike said, "No, just some deer running by us. I thought it was the Aliens, but it would not have made a difference since I did not have a spray paint can ready in time. Damn invisible aliens."

Dave said, "Hey, what if we used an EMP to disable their cloaking device? Then we would have advantage."

Mike said, "Yes, but probably just for a short time. It is most likely would not be long before they would get back online and disappeared again."

Dave said, "I did not say to use it on Earth. What if we sent it up in space and fired it. We would win, right?"

Mike said, "No, because we do not know if the aliens use electricity to run their ships. It might be an element or another source that we do not know about yet. I am tired, man. I am going to get some sleep. Wake me only when they get here."

Dave said, "OK. Hey, quick question. Did you make any coffee?"

Dave turned around for an answer that he was never going to get and said, "It figures that he would fall right to sleep."

Dave made coffee while Mike slept. He needed to stay awake, plus Mike would have something to drink when he woke up. It was only six hours to sunrise and then it would be off to the town.

Two hours later, nothing was happening. Dave did not want his guns to jam or accidentally go off, so he was disassembling, cleaning and putting them back together.

Four more hours passed. Dave was sharpening his knife when the reinforcements showed up. He said, "It's time to wake Mike up so we can head into town. We can use it as a forward operating base and hopefully find supplies."

After he woke Mike, Dave said, "Reinforcements have arrived. After everyone has breakfast and something warm to drink, we are starting to the town. This morning, the foods are eggs, pancakes, waffles, cereal, banana and the hot drinks are coffee, hot chocolate or you can have juice. All components of HQ will be after the town, as we head back to base."

Half an hour later, the group headed for town and only took ten minutes to reach the entrance to the town. It looked weird, like aliens had gathered humans together in the center of town. By the looks of it, some people had tried to run away and were killed, but everything outside of the center of town seemed fine.

The team continued exploring until they found a group of survivors hiding together in a house. It was hard to convince them that the soldiers were also survivors and to agree to come back to command for help.

One of the soldiers said, "Great, so you guys thought that it was a good idea to bring back people who are "mentally unstable" because of things they had seen?"

Colonel said, "You all are lucky. We have a military and civilian psychologist who will help them to try to get back to normal, or at least as close to normal as possible. Now all of you, go get some rest and something to eat."

Then Colonel Porter spoke to Mike and David. "You two wait right there. We need to talk."

Mike said, "Hey, Dave. I think we are in trouble."

Dave said, "No, you don't say. Why would the Colonel be keeping us here? It is definitely is not to give us a medal and a pat on the back for a job well done, is it?"

Mike said, "No guess. It wasn't worth the thought, was it? If we get in trouble, it was all your fault. I had nothing to do with it at all, you hear? I was against it the whole time."

Dave said, "You would try to get yourself out of trouble by putting the blame on someone else instead of you."

Colonel Porter said, "You two, stop trying to whisper. I can hear everything you are saying. I am not deaf."

Both replied in unison, "No, Colonel! No one said you were."

Dave said, "Good job. He heard everything we were talking about."

Mike said, "Wait, wait, here he comes. We're going down in a burning ring of fire."

Colonel Porter said, "You two are not in trouble. Actually, I thank you two for finding them. We can finally get a good idea what those aliens look like, plus you guys saved an old friend of mine and his last surviving family members. For that, I am grateful. What can I get or do for you both?"

Mike and Dave both looked relieved, since they both thought that they were in trouble.

Colonel Porter said, "Of course you're not in trouble. It's always good to have new people with us. Plus, it will lift everyone's hope that there are more survivors out there that need our help. We need their help in return. In the meantime, go get food and sleep. Enjoy a few days off. I have to go meet an old friend. We have a lot to talk about. I will see you later."

Dave said, "Great, we are not in trouble and we get a few days off from working. It's a nice change."

Mike said, "I can not wait until I can sleep on my own bed! I will probably sleep for a long time, then eat until I am stuffed."

Dave said, "I am going to the shooting range and to have some drinks. Want to come?"

Mike said, "Yeah, I guess I can improve my aim."

Dave said, "Wait, improve how? By actually hitting the target instead of everything else?"

Mike said, "That's not true. I can hit the target just fine."

Dave said, "Well then, tell that to Joe who you shot in the butt. You're telling me you can hit a target? I would love to see you try."

Mike said, "Fine, then let's go to the shooting range right now."

Dave said, "We will have a contest to see who can hit the most targets in a row without missing a single shot. Let the best man win."

Mike said, "You're going down, Dave."

Dave said, "Let's start with something simple. The first to drop all ten targets with a pistol wins that round and we move on to the next."

Dave asked, "Ready?"

Mike said, "No, wait, my gun jammed."

Dave said, "Already? We have not even started yet and you managed to jam it."

Mike said, "Hey, it's not my fault. The round will not go into the chamber."

Dave said, "Really? And why is that?"

Mike said, "I do not know."

Dave said, "Oh, just give to me."

Mike said, "No, I got it."

Dave said, "No, you don't."

Bang.

Mike said, "Damn, you shot me in the foot."

Dave said, "Dude, your foot is bleeding a lot."

Mike said, "I did not notice my foot bleeding after I just got shot."

Dave said, "Let's get you to the first aid hospital. Just hop on one foot. We'll get there as fast as we can. By the way, this your fault, not mine."

Mike said, "Whatever, not now. Let's just get there already."

Dave said, "It is just around the corner."

Jade met David and Mike at the hospital. She asked, "What happened here?"

Mike said, "Not now, Jade. I am hurt."

Jade said, "No, really, why you are bleeding?"

Mike said, "I was shot!!"

Jade said, "Do you need help?"

Dave said, "We to get him there quickly before he loses any more blood and passes out."

Jade said, "Do mean like now, because he already passed out."

Dave yelled, "No, no, no, Jade, run ahead and open the door. I am right behind you with him. Alert the doctors. We need help now!! "

Jade said, "Colonel Porter, the doctors took him in over two hours ago. I will get you when he gets out of surgery and is awake. Dave, go get some sleep. Do not worry, it's not your fault."

Dave said, "But it is my fault. I was just trying to prove that he can not hit a target. He was shot in the foot was because his gun was jammed and we fought over who could fix it. So yes, it is my fault. Let me know if anything happens. I've got to go."

Jade said, "Yes, Dave. Just go already, ok? Bye."

Jade said, "Colonel, he has been out of surgery for almost four hours but is still unconscious. I am beginning to worry that he might never wake up."

Colonel Porter said, "Jade, you must give him time to recover. According to the doctors, he lost a lot of blood and might not come to for twenty four hours. He needs to rest and something to eat to bring up his blood sugar and will need someone there to help him. You should go wait for him because he will need someone who cares as much as you do.

"You can find Dave at my office to let him know that Mike is out of surgery. He finally fell asleep, but he is very upset about what happened and I thought he would never stop talking. You know that they are close friends since Dave is the one who saved him from the aliens.

"Dave has been like an older brother to Mike and taught him things he never knew. I think that's because Dave's younger brother was killed in the first attack. They had not spoken in years so I guess that he is trying to make amends by helping Mike.

"Sam was an IT guy stationed at the first American air force base. He gave his life to save his commander during an alien attack. This battle also took the lives of 150,497 other men and women before reinforcements arrived.

"Dave could never forgive himself for his brother's death. He was working as a personal security guard. His employer was visiting the base, so Dave was going to visit Sam. When he got to Sam, he was already dead. That is why Dave gave up being a personal security guard. Then the main force of the aliens attacked, wiping out cities and everything at once.

"Now, go tell Dave. I will go check on Mike and see how he's doing. I have a lot of work changing the scouting teams around to because Dave and Mike are not capable of working in the field. Bye for now."

Jade found Dave passed out and woke him. "Mike is OK and is going to make a full recovery." Dave said, "Can I see Mike? I want to apologize for fighting with him."

Jade said, "Yes, you can see him but he is not awake yet. It might be a while before he comes to. Let's go see Mike and we should bring him something to eat for when he wakes up."

One hour later, Mike woke up to see Dave and Jade sitting in the room staring at him. Dave and Jade were very happy to see Mike awake and offered him something to eat. They talked all day and all night before Mike fell back to sleep at nine in the morning. Jade and Dave left to get a cup of coffee and go to bed.

Later that day, Jade and Dave went to visit Mike. He was awake and eating lunch. About a half hour later after lunch, the doctor came to change his bandages so the wound would not get infected. When the doctor removed the bandages, Jade and Dave could see how bad the wound was. The scar from where the doctor stitched it was very big and bright red. The doctor cleaned and redressed the wound, asked Mike how he was feeling and explained that the swelling could take a few days to go down. He let Mike know that he could be unable to walk for a month or two.

After a week passed, Mike was walking again for a few minutes at a time with Jade and Dave helping him, but the doctor wanted him to stay in the hospital so they could do additional tests on Mike's foot. There was a lot of damage to the nerves in his foot and the doctor wanted to know if Mike could feel anything. The doctor ran across his foot with the back of a pen but Mike could not feel anything at all. This worried the doctor.

Luckily, there was a nerve specialist to help him. The nerve specialist came to see Mike to see how bad the damage was. After several tests, the nerve specialist said, "It could take anywhere from couple of weeks to months before Mike will be able to feel anything."

Jade left the room to tell Colonel Porter about Mike's foot.

When Jade arrived at the Colonel's office, she found the Colonel asleep. "Colonel, wake up. We need to talk. Come on, Colonel." Colonel Porter jumped to his feet and said, "Corporal Porter reporting for duty, General, sir."

The Colonel had been in the army for over thirty years. He joined when he was twenty years old, but even though he was fifty years old, he was still a Colonel. Even though he should have been a General, he had been passed over several times when it was time for promotions.

The Colonel told Jade to get Mike something to eat and let him do what he does best with computers. Then he said, "I will see you later, Jade. I am going to find Dave and head out."

Back at the hospital, Mike announced, "I am off to go fix everyone's computer problems for free. Money no longer has any value."

Jade said, "Very funny, Mike, but I've got to run. See you later."

Jade returned to the Colonel's office and found Dave still talking to the Colonel about Mike and other things.

The Colonel asked, "Dave, are you ready to head out for more supplies? Mike asked me to find some things for computers that I don't understand. He said it is very important that he has them."

Dave said, "Yeah, I am ready to go. Mike explained what he needs and gave me some sketches to identify the parts."

Traveling by vehicle was dangerous because the aliens attacked moving vehicles and hunted down all of the survivors. The Colonel gave Dave permission to take vehicles, but only for less than half the trip. After that, they would have to abandon the vehicles and continue on foot so that the aliens could not detect their location.

Dave and Jade said goodbye to the Colonel and asked him to please keep things running like normal. He reassured them that nothing would happen and told them to get going right away, since they needed the supplies.

Jade and Dave drove for 15 miles before they found a giant hole that was created when an alien spaceship crashed into a nuclear power plant. It measured 30 miles wide by 45 miles long. Jade asked Dave how he knew that there had been a nuclear power plant here.

Dave explained, "My former employer and I were heading here before the world ended. He wanted to know how his money was being used because he had been told that they were creating faster trains. If you ask me, I thought it was weird."

Jade said, "Wow, that's sort of cool, I guess. How do you know that it was hit by an alien spaceship?"

Dave replied, "I do not know. Maybe if you looked down into the crater, you could see their ship. What could have brought down one of their ships, though? I do not know, so let's go see. There might be something useful on that ship to fight back with. It might even be full of aliens! I want to go see if we can learn what can take down one of their ships."

Jade nodded in agreement. "Come on, Dave. Alright, I'm coming. The rest of you should stay here and move into the surrounding woods. Try not to get killed or taken by them. Bye."

Dave and Jade climbed down the side of the crater for half an hour before reaching the ship.

Jade asked, "Dave, where do you think the door or entrance is? On this ship, it has to be huge! Hitting a nuclear power plant could have even broken it into two pieces and there's no way to know where the rest is. It could be miles away from here or just deeper in the hole."

Dave replied, "Who knows how deep it goes. Jade, I guess we should just start pushing on the ship. I am hoping that we get lucky like they do in all of the movies. You start over there. I'll start here and work the other way. Hopefully, we'll find a way in."

After ten minutes, Jade screamed so loud that Dave thought she must have found a dead body. She had leaned against the ship to rest for a moment and triggered the door mechanism, revealing an alien's body.

Dave immediately asked, "What's wrong, Jade?"

Jade replied, "I think it's dead. It's not moving."

He said, "Alright, let's just leave it. We have to go in and try to find out what happened to them."

Jade asked, "Dave? Did you bring a flashlight? It's pitch black in here and we have no idea where we are going. I think we should try to find their version of a Command Bridge and see what this ship was doing in orbit." A few moments later, Jade called to Dave. "Hey, take a look at this. It looks like a 3D map of the ship. If I am reading this correctly, we entered through the escape pod launch doors. It seems like that alien was trying to abandon ship, but he died."

Dave looked at the map and agreed. "This looks like where the command bridge is. We should get the others down here so we can explore more of the ship in less time. See if we can contact Mike and see if he can decode the alien language on these computers."

Dave and the others set up camp next to the ship. They set up a computer in order to report back to base and let the Colonel know what they had found. Over the next few hours, everyone was setting up camp while Jade and Dave took turns attempting to reach the Colonel.

Dave was setting up Jade's tent when she was finally able to get through to command. The Colonel demanded to know where everybody was. Suddenly, Jade watched the command as there was a sudden explosion and people began fighting. She yelled for Dave to come quickly. "You'd better get over here with everyone and see this!" Everyone came running to see what was wrong.

Dave turned to the computer and explained what was happening. "Jade, our base is under attack!"

She asked, "Have you seen the Colonel or Mike?"

Dave said, "No..." but was interrupted by someone at the computer. "Hey, there goes Mike."

Dave and Jade watched computer screen to see Mike limping across the battlefield carrying a machine gun and a rocket launcher.

Jade asked, "Dave, why is Mike carrying weapons? He is supposed to be resting and not to be fighting." Just then, Colonel returned to the computer while yelling at Mike to stop before he got himself killed.

Dave called to Colonel Porter. He stopped, remembering that Jade, Dave and the others were watching him. He said, "I do not have time to talk. We are suffering a lot of casualties and I must stop Mike before he gets himself killed. We will call you after the battle. I have to go now. Bye." Just like that, the Colonel walked away. Jade and Dave could hear yelling and explosions but the only thing on screen were the injured being dragged to the hospital while still getting shot at. It must have been about three hours before the fighting stopped.

Dave and Jade waited by the computer to see the outcome of the battle. Colonel Porter eventually walked past the computer and saw that Jade and Dave were still watching everything that was happening. He picked up the computer and started for his office where he was finally able to sit down and talk. They told the Colonel what they had found and he let them know that Mike was still alive.

Dave asked Colonel Porter if he would mind giving him a moment to speak to Mike privately. The Colonel left and Mike asked what Dave wanted.

Dave said, "We have something we want you to take a look at."

Mike asked, "Okay, what is it?"

Jade said, "It looks like human writing, but it's really alien words. We were hoping you could decode their language and tell us what it says. Okay?"

Mike said, "Show it to me. It might be weeks or even months before I can decode any of it. Why do you guys need to know what it says, anyway?"

"We might have stumbled upon something big while looking for supplies and the parts you asked for, Mike." Dave said. "A ship of some kind."

Mike asked, "You mean a Cruise ship or a warship in the Navy?"

Dave and Jade both said, "Neither."

Jade continued, "It's an alien ship we found. There, are you happy? We told you now, so please decode that for us and not tell anyone including the Colonel."

Mike said, "OK, fine. I will not tell anyone. Oh, here comes the Colonel. He said he wants to finish talking to you guys. Send that stuff to my personal computer and I will get started on that. Gotta go. Bye."

Colonel Porter said bye to Mike, sat down and started talking about continuing to find supplies and any place still standing in one piece.

The next morning, yelling woke Jade and Dave. "Help! Something's got me!"

Dave and Jade came running out of their tents to see who was yelling. Dave yelled, "Let that person go or we'll shoot."

They found a group of aliens in the human camp. They were about the same size as the humans and looked a little human. Jade and Dave knew that they probably could not speak any human

languages, but they wanted to try to communicate anyway. Dave moved toward a group of about twenty aliens. When one of them moved forward and extended what looked like a hand, he stepped forward and shook the alien's hand.

Another alien stepped forward and said, "Greetings, humans. We are to talk peace."

Dave was skeptical. "What do you mean talk peace? Is this just the way you think we are going to surrender?"

The lead alien said, "Let's sit down and talk about what has happened here. We are the leaders of these aliens. When we learned what was happening to Earth, we left our home to stop these attacks on you humans. This was never supposed to happen. The scouting party was sent to assess humans' space travel ability and see how far the human race was from joining other planets. We are going to talk with our scouting party leader. After we are done talking to our scouts, we would like to talk with whoever leads this last small group of humans."

Dave was surprised by how well the aliens spoke English, but he only said, "Yes, I will talk with our leaders." The aliens bowed, walked behind the crashed ship and they were gone.

Jade walked over to Dave and asked, "Should we call the Colonel and tell him what just happened?"

Dave turned to Jade and said, "Start packing everything. We are heading back to base now and we have to warn about an attack."

Jade yelled for everyone to get their things packed and in the cars right away. Within ten minutes, everything was packed in the cars and the group raced back to base. Jade called ahead to the base to update them while Dave drove with their convoy following close behind.

After driving for almost ten hours, they arrived at the base. When they got there, everyone was gone. Dave stopped the car and got out to examine the base's main gate. It had been blown clean off its hinges.

Jade got out and joined Dave. They walked together through the gate to see if anyone or anything was left. Dave and Jade, as well as a scouting party, spread out to see if they could find out what had happened to everyone. Dave headed to the Colonel's office while Jade headed to Mike's repair shop.

Dave entered into the Colonel's office. There were bullet holes behind the Colonel's chair. Dave walked over to the wall to get a better look, then he stepped in a puddle of blood.

Jade walked into Mike's repair shop and looked around to see where Mike was. There was a huge mess. It looked like Mike left in a hurry and a lot of things were left behind. Then Jade went to looking for Dave. She found Dave sitting in the Colonel's chair and looking in his desk drawers. Jade saw Dave's foot covered in blood. Jade panicked and asked, "Is that your blood? Please tell me that's not your blood, Dave."

Dave said, "It's not my blood but I think it's the Colonel's blood." Dave stood up and said, "Let's go see what everyone else has found."

Jade ran to catch up to Dave who was getting everyone back together. People started saying what they found. The mess hall was empty, no one was in the living quarters, hospital empty, car pool and supplies were both empty. Everyone wanted to know what they would do next.

Jade said, "Let's get back in the vehicles. We will drive until we find some place safe to stay."

A few days passed. The group came to a small town surrounded by walls and watchtowers. It looked like people were living there, so Dave turned to Jade and said, "Let's see who's home." Jade called for all vehicles to stop. Dave and Jade approached a gated wall with a few others. As they approached, gun fire came to life from the watchtowers. They were forced to retreat to the cars for cover. Dave called the convoy for a Bradley fighting vehicle to move up and provide suppressive fire.

Jade said to Dave, "It's nice that the army gave us some armor or we would not be here."

As Jade was talking, the Bradley moved into position and opened fire with just machine guns in order to stop the gunfire. The gun fire from the towers stopped and Dave and Jade gave orders to the soldiers in the Bradley to move up. They walked behind the vehicle as it moved forward. When they reached the gate, it opened and they went inside.

(To Be Continued)



Book 5

by Connor

PROLOGUE

Three years after the New California Republic kicked Caesar's Legion out of the Mojave Wasteland, a new faction rose to take their place. Calling themselves The Mojave Rangers, they fight for the Independence of Vegas and the surrounding territories. With the NCR occupied with remnants Caesar's Legion in Arizona, the Mojave Rangers have easy pickings with the inexperienced troops and washouts sent to patrol the Mojave Wasteland.

CHAPTER I

HALF A MILE FROM NCR BASE, CAMP GOLF

10 YEARS AFTER THE SECOND BATTLE FOR HOOVER DAM

APRIL 11, 2289

"I don't like the look of this," I whisper.

"What is it?" Tucker asks.

"Looks like an NCR patrol," I say.

"How many do you see?" Tucker asks. "What kind of weapons do they have?"

"Maybe if you gave me some time I would tell you," I respond.

"How come I never get the sniper rifle?" Tucker whispers to himself.

"You have a sniper rifle," I say.

"But you always get the anti-material rifle," Tucker says. The four troopers continue down highway 95.

"Radio command. Tell them we got a patrol half a mile from Camp Golf. They are probably returning," I say.

"Okay," Tucker says. He crawls away from the nest. I line up the lead troopers chest in my sights. I hold my breath and squeeze the trigger. The report of the rifle echoes around the hills behind me. The .50 MG round goes through the first three troopers. The fourth gets knocked down by the bullet, but it doesn't have enough force to go through her armor. I pull the bolt back and look through the scope. The trooper hides behind the highway divider. *I've got no shot. Dammit.*

"Tucker, grab your rifle," I order. Two NCR Rangers come running over the hill. They join the trooper behind the barrier.

"Present," Tucker says.

"They need us to fire another shot, so they can find our position," I say.

"You hear that, right?" Tucker asks. The whine of artillery grows louder. I grab my rifle and back out of the sniper's nest. Tucker does the same. The shell strikes the nest, sending shrapnel in all directions.

"We need to get back to the camp," I say. Three more shells streak across the sky. They explode behind the rock formation the camp is behind. I run down the path towards Campsite Delta. I shoulder my gun as I come to a halt at the base of the trail. It smells of burning flesh and rubber. Two of the three tents are on fire. The pack Brahmin pen is a smoldering crater in the ground. Half of one of the two-headed beasts lay at the end of the trail. A fifth shell hits the munitions tent. It explodes and the resulting shock wave knocks Tucker and me off our feet.

"Dammit!" Tucker shouts over the sound of gunfire and any surviving explosives going off in the munitions tent.

"You hit!?" I ask.

"Don't think so!" Tucker says, checking for blood. "How'd they spot us?"

"Glare of the scope, a mole, who knows?" I answer. Two Rangers are wandering around the wreckage. "HEY!! Get over here!" I yell at them. They start running towards us.

"Identify yourselves!" Tucker says.

"Sixth Rangers, Natalie Valdez and Tyrone Stanton at your service!" Valdez says.

"Any survivors?!" I ask.

"Before we answer that, what are your ranks?!" Stanton asks.

"Alex Miller, first Rangers, second squad!" I answer. They stand straighter.

"Tucker, same unit!" he says.

"Now, how many survivors?!" I ask again.

"Couldn't find any!" Stanton says.

"Nice job on the Courier! Sir!" Natalie says. I nod my head in appreciation.

"Let's leave before the Bear is out in force!" I say.

CHAPTER II

APRIL 20, 2289

MOJAVE RANGER COMMAND

FORMERLY KNOWN AS GYPSUM TRAIN YARD

"What makes you think the NCR has embedded a mole in our ranks?" General Osada asks.

"The artillery directly hit all our tents and Brahmin pen, Sir," I answer.

"Lucky shots?" the general suggests.

"No such thing as luck, Sir," I say.

"I'll look into the matter. Dismissed," the general says. I salute and walk out of the command tent. Tucker is waiting by the door.

"We need to talk," he says.

"Why?" I ask.

"Let's just get somewhere private, okay?" Tucker says. I follow him along the tracks to the Ranger tents. We enter Second Squad's tent.

"You are all dismissed," I say to the rest of the squad. They march single file out of the door.

"Your father...is still alive," Tucker says.

"How do you know?" I ask.

"One of our spies is 'serving' under his command," Tucker answers. "He wants you dead."

"Why should he even care?" I ask.

"I don't know, but I think it has to do with your shooting him three times with his own gun," Tucker says.

"Some trooper he turned out to be. Y'know he fought at the second battle for the dam?" I say. "How is the NCR okay with this?"

"After you killed the Courier, they gave him a squad and the green light to kill you," Tucker answers. "Apparently he has been asking for a while."

"How is the NCR okay with a drunk who knocked up a prostitute carrying out hits on people?" I ask. "Shouldn't they leave it to a professional?"

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," Tucker answers. "He knows you better than everyone else in the NCR."

"He doesn't know anything about me," I respond with a rising temper.

"He's stationed at Camp McCarran," Tucker says, "but you didn't hear that from me." I get up and walk out of the tent.

APRIL 30, 2289

CAMP McCARRAN

1:00 AM

The only working street light flickers on and off. I approach it, unholster my silenced 10 mm pistol. I aim up and shoot the flickering light. The lone door guard is still sleeping. Ever so silently, I creep up on him. I take my knife in my left hand, pistol in right. I sink the blade below the base of his skull. I slowly lower the body onto the ground and drag it into the shadows. I sheath my knife and pull out a detonator. I press the trigger for the C4 I had placed at the base of a guard tower. The explosion echoes around outer Vegas. I sink back into the shadows. I hear the gate open and troopers running outside. The Great Khans I hired open fire on the soldiers. The distracted troopers return fire and advance on the Khans. I activate my Stealth Boy 3001 personal stealth device and sneak in the open gate. More troops run outside.

I eventually get to the terminal building of the old airport. The firefight outside still rages on. I open the door to the building. Most of the lights are off, but I can make out two electric staircases and a plane hanging from the ceiling. I can hear muffled gunshots and explosions from the uproar outside.

"Okay, we are under attack by some Khans. Wipe them out," someone says in a gruff voice that could only be my father's.

"Sir, I have something for you," a familiar voice says.

"What is it?" Dad asks.

"Intel, about your son. He survived the bombardment at Campsite Delta," the woman says. "I slipped a bug on him on our way back from Delta."

"Well, how'd ya manage to do that?" Dad asks.

"I have my ways," Natalie says.

"*You traitor,*" I whisper to myself.

"You say something?" Natalie says.

"No," Dad says.

"I wasn't talking to you," Natalie says. My Stealth Boy wears off. I stand up.

"Hello, son," Dad says.

"Shut up," I say. The door opens and a trooper enters.

"Sir, the Kha—" A gunshot rings out from my father's pistol. The trooper falls, blood squirting from his head.

"The NCR is corr—," my Dad starts saying.

"No s&*, I interrupt.

"We need to leave," Natalie says.

"The gunshot came from here!" a trooper says.

"Do you have any more Stealth Boys?" Dad asks.

"No," I lie. The sound of stomping boots grows louder.

"Over there!" a trooper yells. The trooper fires three shots. I dive behind a pillar. Valdez hides in a doorway and Dad takes cover behind a table lined with slot machines. I peek my head around the pillar. A squad of troopers lines up on the upper level and starts shooting. I unshoulder my Brush Gun. I push the safety off.

"I count five!" Valdez says. I turn the corner of the pillar and line up the trooper the farthest left in my sights. I fire a round into the trooper's head. I continue moving right along the row of soldiers.

"Where did ya learn to shoot like that, son?" Dad asks.

"Certainly not from you," I say. I start reloading the gun.

"For all it's worth, I'm sorry," Dad says with a frown.

"You're *sorry*? For all you put me through, you're *sorry*!" I shout.

"You can have this reunion elsewhere, but *we need* to leave now!" Natalie says with a rising urgency in her voice.

"Over here!" a Ranger shouts. I line him up and take three shots. He falls onto an advancing trooper.

"Take these," I hand out two Stealth Boys to Natalie and Dad.

"I thought you didn't have any more," Natalie says.

"Just take them," I say. I activate mine as do the others. Three troopers run in through the door where I entered. I sneak past the three of them as do Dad and Natalie. I stick to the shadows. Troopers are running in all directions, wondering what the hell happened. I take a grenade and

pull the pin. I throw it as hard as I can, hoping to cause a distraction. It bounces off a tent and explodes. I continue out through the gate. The bodies of NCR troopers litter the road. I follow them to El Rey Motel. I dive into an open door as my Stealth Boy dies.

"Do you mind explaining what that was about?" I ask.

"NCR are power hungry tyrants and are funding the Mojave Rangers," Dad says.

"How do you know?" I ask.

"We bugged some communication equipment a few months back," Dad says.

"There is a lot of chatter between General Osada and General Oliver, usually about an old Military vault supposedly under Nipton. They think there are tons of weapons and other Prewar toys," Valdez says. "But the NCR is funding the Rangers to increase funds to their war department for experiments and other things."

"Wasn't Nipton raided by the Legion?" I ask.

"Yes, they killed everyone except two people, who won the lottery, or so I'm told," Dad says.

"On an unrelated note, when did you slip the bug on me?" I ask.

"When you were tying your boot. I slipped it into your arm pocket," Natalie answers.

"What about when we did that...thing. Was that sincere or were you gaining my trust?" I ask.

"A little of both," Natalie replies.

"I think we should investigate Nipton," Dad says.

"Alright, it's a few day hike from here," I say.

"We need to pick up a few things. You should head back to the Rangers. They'll be looking for the best shot in the Mojave," Valdez says.

"Okay, pick up some things and we'll meet at Nipton in ten days," I say.

"Hey! What are you doing!" a trooper yells.

"Our friend was hit by your barrage. He's bleeding out! You've got to help him!" I say.

"Where is he?" the trooper asks.

"Bathroom," Valdez replies. He walks into the room.

"Hey, there's no one he—" I snap his neck and lower the body.

"Grab his ammo and let's go," Dad says. I take the magazine out of his service rifle and the two spare ones. I sneak out of the room with Valdez and Dad.

CHAPTER III

NIPTON

MAY 10, 2289

The sun peeks over the hills to the east. The desert has already started to reclaim the town. Sand covers everything, even the road, which I can barely see. Sand has also piled up around the houses, making it impossible to get in. I turn left from the General Store and head down the main street. The telephone poles have been turned into crucifixes. The crumbled remains of Powder Gangers litter the area under telephone poles, giving the town a much more eerie

feeling. I continue down the street. A small Legion banner is stuck in the ground by the Mayor's office. The red background and gold bull are so faded I can hardly distinguish the difference. I remove my lighter and set the Legion banner on fire. I still have a good three hours before the others are supposed to arrive.

I walk up the stairs and try to open the double doors on the town hall. They're rusted shut. I kick the door to no use. I back up and shoulder charge the doors. They collapse and I'm left face down on the floor. The smell of rotting flesh fills my nostrils. I immediately back out, coughing. It feels like I'm going to throw up. I look into the darkened lobby. Grime has built up on all of the windows. The only real light entering the building is from the doorway. I can make out a dead body on the reception desk to the far right of the room. I see a pair of glowing eyes in the far side of the room. I take a flare and throw it inside the building. The red light dances on the walls. The eyes are gone. There is a hallway with a few doors thirty feet from the entrance.

I turn around and walk back down the sand covered steps. I sit on the third step from the bottom and unsling my Anti-Material rifle. I hear a roar that could only belong to a Deathclaw. *What are Deathclaws doing here.* It rounds the corner of the General Store. At ten feet tall, with foot long claws coming out of its hands, the monster is terrifying. I aim my rifle, resting the sights on its horned head. I pull the trigger: *click*, I pull the bolt back and try to fire again: *click*. Deciding that the rifle had jammed, I remove my .44 from its holster. The Deathclaw starts sniffing. Evidently it hasn't seen me yet. I take a few steps forward. I hold the pistol above my head and pull the trigger. The Deathclaw turns its head and charges towards me. I take one of my throwing knives and throw it. The knife sails through the air and into the Deathclaw's eye. It rears its head back and continues charging. I empty my .44 into its chest. It shrugs off the rounds like it's nothing. I unsheathe my Machete Gladius. The curved blade glints in the morning sun. It swings its arms out to the side. I run and slide. The Deathclaw's initial strike misses. I bring my Machete up into its gut. It roars in pain. The Machete slices through the Deathclaw's abdomen. I roll, get up and turn around. The Deathclaw clutches its gut. I run and jump on its back. I bring the Machete down on the base of its skull. With its last strength, it manages to throw me off and land at the base of the steps. I hear the thump of the body on the ground.

"I give that a ten," Tucker says.

"Ehh, eight... the landing was a bit rough," Valdez says. I turn around.

"How much did you see?" I ask.

"The part before you fired a round into the sky," Dad says.

"None of you could have helped?" I ask.

"It was blind," Tucker says.

"It's still a *Deathclaw!*" I yell.

"But you had it under control," Valdez says.

"One of you check what's wrong with my rifle," I order.

"Why? It's your rifle," Tucker says.

"I had to fight a Deathclaw while you clowns watched," I say.

"I'll do it," Valdez says. I turn around and start walking towards the Town Hall.

"You might want to cover your nose when we go in. Smells of rotting flesh," I warn. Valdez starts stripping my rifle.

"Ya, the firing pin is broken," Valdez says.

"Know where I can find another?" I ask. She nods her head no.

"Okay, everyone, get in the Town Hall," Dad says. Valdez hands me my assembled rifle. I leave it by the base of the steps and unsling my Brush gun. I walk up the steps and into the doorway. I put my hand over my mouth and nose. I walk around the receptionist's desk. I push the half eaten body to the floor. I take another road flare and light it. I prop it up on the old terminal and start looking around. I feel under the desk's ledge. I feel a button under the place the terminal is resting. I push the button. The screen of the computer lights up. I start reading. Open map room Y/N. *Map room, the hell?*

"Hey! I found something!" I say. Another message pops up. I hit the Y key again. A cabinet behind me opens up and a dark staircase appears behind it. I take the flare and toss it down the stairs. The others round the corner.

"What did you do?" Tucker asks.

"I found a button under the desk and the terminal turned on," I say.

"Let's go," Valdez says.

"Well, ladies first," I say.

"You must have me confused with someone else," Valdez says as she takes the first steps down the staircase. I follow after her and then Dad takes the first steps down with Tucker bringing up the rear. Fluorescent lights start turning on. When the third one lights up, it explodes in a shower of sparks.

"Jesus!" Valdez says backing into me.

We reach the bottom of the stairway. A locked door stands between us and the vault. Valdez unslings her Trail Carbine and shoots the lock out. She kicks the door open and walks in. I walk in behind her and sweep the right side of the room. That's what it is: a room with a circular table that's lit blue at the tabletop with yellow and red triangles. Tucker throws the flare to the far side of the room. It bounces off the far wall and lights up a terminal.

"Tucker, check for doors, passages, anything. Valdez, see if that table is of any use," I order.

"I'll be lookout," Dad says. I walk over to the terminal. I press the power button and the screen glows green. Password required.

"Found a door!" Tucker says. The lights flicker to life.

"Found the lights," Dad says. Tucker presses a button on the wall. The door hisses open. He steps in what appears to be a large kitchen. I walk up beside him. I raise my Brush Gun. Tucker does the same with his Trail Carbine. I sweep right and he sweeps left.

"Clear!" we say in unison. The lights start turning on, row by row, revealing some cots and a door.

"Tucker, check that door," I order. He walks over and pushes the door open.

"It's just the bathroom, boss," he says.

"Look for a piece of paper, a holotape, anything that might contain a password," I say.

"On it, Sir," he answers. I return through the door.

"Found anything?" I ask.

"Seems this table is controlled by that terminal," Valdez says.

"Go help Tucker find the password," I order.

"On it, Sir," she replies. I turn to Dad.

"So why'd you request to take me out?" I ask.

"I knew it would be the only way to see you. Since you joined the 'enemy,' I knew I'd be hung if I ever tried to contact you," he answers.

"Is that why you cleaned up your act?" I ask.

"That was a few years later when I decided that the NCR weren't as good as they played themselves out to be. I decided to bring them down from within. Over the years I assembled a squad of the most trustworthy men and women I could find."

"Where are they?" I ask.

"Camp Golf. There's a comm officer and four troopers," he answers. "I knew I needed your help."

"What's the deal with Natalie?" I ask.

"She's one of those five members. I recruited her at the end of her deployment. I asked her to join the Mojave Rangers to keep an eye on you. This was after you killed the unkillable Courier," Dad answers.

"How'd she get into Camp McCarran? What were you doing there?" I ask.

"I was giving a report to my superiors. She got in posing as ex-military visiting friends. That's what she told me anyways," Dad answers.

"Got something!" Tucker shouts. "The password is 'password.'"

"You kidding me?" I ask.

"Yes, the password is 'velocity,'" Tucker says.

"Go type it in," I order. Tucker walks over to the terminal. Valdez stops and leans in the doorway. The table lights up. A map of Nevada is hovering about five inches off of the table. Red, blue and green triangles pop up.

"The triangles are vaults. Green is military. Blue is civilian. Red is compromised civ vaults," Tuckers says.

"There are no blue ones," Valdez says.

"Which one are we looking for?" I ask.

"Vault three, seven, four, niner," Dad answers. Tucker taps away at the keyboard. The table goes dark and a map of the United States flickers on. The table projects Nevada again, then slides northwest for a second.

"Oregon. Freaking Oregon. How the hell are we supposed to get to Oregon?" Tucker asks hitting the side of the terminal.

"How are we getting out of the Mojave? NCR is all around," Valdez says.

"Only on the main roads," I respond. "We just have to avoid checkpoints."

"Heard about some weird stuff going down in Oregon," Dad says.

"Like what?" Tucker asks.

"Travelers coming from that direction tell strange stories about a faction that calls themselves the Not zees," Dad answers. "NCR is mobilizing its army for a northern invasion. Legion is on its knees."

"Let's copy the location on a holotape and get out of here," I say getting back on track.

"Hold on," Tucker says and types away at the keyboard. "We need a holotape."

"Screw it. Get me a pencil and paper," I say. Valdez grabs a notebook and pencil from her bag and hands them to me. I copy the coordinates of the vault onto the paper. I tear the page from the notebook and put it in my boot. Two gunshots ring out. I throw the notebook over to Valdez and dive away from the door. Dad does the same. Tucker and Valdez hide behind the table.

"This is the Rangers! Come out with your hands up!" a man says.

"Which ones?" I ask.

"NCR. Comply with our orders," a second female voice shouts. Dad aims his service rifle at the table and shoots it three times.

"It's okay! I've shot them. I'm NCR!" Dad says motioning Natalie and Tucker to get down. I sling my brush gun and unsheath my machete. The Rangers footsteps grow louder. The barrel of a rifle pokes through the doorway. Dad nods. I raise the blade and bring it into the lead Ranger's chest and he falls to the ground. Tucker pops over the table and fires a round into the second Ranger's head. She falls with a thud. I pick myself up and try to get the machete from the Ranger's chest. It won't budge.

"Son of a b*#@!" I mutter. I take his brush gun and eject the six 45-70 rounds. "Search their bodies," I say as I'm picking up the bullets. I creep up the stairs and signal for Tucker to follow. I reach the top of the staircase and poke my rifle into the opening. I sweep the room.

"Get down, I see something," Tucker whispers.

"Ready! Fire!" a voice yells. The sound of machine gunfire is deafening. Bullets tear through the lobby. I back into the stairwell.

"What the hell is that!?" I yell over the clattering machine gun.

"No idea. Makes short work of everything!" Tucker replies.

The gun falls silent after a minute. The front wall is in pieces. I poke my head out. The barrel of the gun is glowing red and smoking. It's mounted to some kind of armored vehicle.

"Any heavy weapons down there?" I ask.

"No, just bunks," Tucker answers with a frown.

"Knock down the building!" the same voice orders. The truck roars to life. The truck backs up, down the main road.

"We've got to go now," I say. I get up and run into the hallway. Tucker and Valdez follow my lead. The truck revs and speeds towards the building. It flattens the Deathclaw and makes short work of the stairs. It smashes through what's left of the front entrance sending splinters in every direction. I duck into the doorway. The armored beast backs out of the new doorway it created. Dad throws a molotov at the beast as it backs down the stairs. A hatch flies open on the top and a trooper pokes out. He fires his weapon in Dad's direction. I line his head up in my sights and squeeze the trigger. I chamber another round.

"Tucker, break that wall down. Dad, you hit?" I ask.

"No, I do—," he looks down at his gut. "Well, I guess I am."

"Wall down," Tucker says.

"Get out of here. I'm not going to make it," Dad says.

"Take a Stimpak. I hav—,"

"It's hollow point. It didn't go through. Go, now," Dad says. "It's okay, I can handle this." He removes a frag grenade from his pocket. I turn around and go through the hole in the wall. I hear the muffled boom of a grenade. The metal beast crashes through the opening Tucker had created. NCR troopers appear on the steep hill around the back of the town hall.

"Drop your weapons and put your hands on your heads!" one of the troopers shouts. I drop my brush gun and unholster my .44. The troopers come down the hill.

"On your knees," a different trooper says. I do as he says. He starts wrapping duct tape around my wrists. "Not a word out of you." The hatch on the beast opens and someone pokes out, the commander by the look of her. She climbs out and walks down the scorched angular front end of the beast. She walks over to the hole in the wall and enters the building. A growling roar of an engine is quickly approaching. A truck appears from around the side of the town hall. It doesn't look like the usual military trucks from around the wasteland. It's smaller and boxier. I turn back to face the others. The commander returns from the town hall holding a blood soaked burlap sack. She throws it at me and Dad's head rolls out. I look down in horror. The trooper holds me back. I shake him off and bring my elbow down on his jaw, shattering it.

"I'll kill you!" I shout. A trooper raises his rifle and hits me in the head. My vision goes black.

CHAPTER IV

LOCATION UNKNOWN

DATE UNKNOWN

I wake to the sound of a running engine. I open my eyes and look around. I'm in the back of a truck. Eight NCR troopers are sitting on benches on either side of the bed. It's night. The lights from the truck behind us occasionally flood the canvas covered bed of our truck. The truck screeches to a stop.

"It's the Colonels convoy! Open the gate," someone shouts.

"Everyone out!" another trooper says as he hits the side of the truck. I get up and walk towards the back of the truck. I jump out. My vision is blocked by a bag.

"Sorry," a female voice whispers. I feel an arm squeeze my throat. My eyes roll behind my head and I fall to the ground.

LOCATION STILL UNKNOWN

DATE STILL UNKNOWN

I wake to find myself in an eight by eight room with a metal table in the center. I drag myself off of the floor and stretch my arms and legs. A chair is on either side of the table. A black screen is on one wall. The metal door opens with a groan. A man walks in. He's in a suit.

"What were you doing in Nipton?" he asks.

"What were your people doing there?" I ask.

"Building a town for refugees," he responds.

"With tanks and Rangers?" I ask. "Stop lying."

"You are in no position to be giving orders," he says.

"Let's make a deal: I tell you what I was doing there and you tell me what your people were doing there. I also walk out of here with my friends," I say.

"I'm afraid I can't let you walk out of here. You see, there's a bounty on your head. Quite a large one," he says with a sinister grin.

"How much?" I ask.

"More than what your father paid for you," he replies. I get up and grip the edge of the table. I flip it over and it lands on the door. "Guards, get in here now!" the man says with a rising panic. I take a swing at his face. My fist collides with his nose, breaking it. Blood starts spurting out. The door flies open and two MPs rush in.

"STOP, NOW!" the bigger MP shouts. I punch the interrogator in the nose again and he cries in pain. The first MP unholsters his cattle prod. I turn towards him. The second MP helps the interrogator up and out of the room. The bigger MP swings the cattle prod. I dodge to the left and punch him in the side, under the rib cage. He stumbles back and I punch him in the throat, hard. The MP drops the prod and clutches his throat, gasping for air. I pick it up and hit him across the side of his head. He hits the ground dead. The second MP rushes in, cattle prod raised. I dodge right and kick him in the back of the knee, hard. I swing the cattle prod at his head. It collides with head, sending him to the ground where a pool of blood starts forming.

"Stop right now!" an MP says leveling a twelve gauge at my head. He slowly walks forward. He levels the shotgun with his right arm and reaches for a pair of handcuffs with the left. I drop to the ground and kick the MP in the groin. He drops his shotgun and starts rolling on the floor, in his own vomit. I peek out into the hallway. Empty left and right. There are drops of blood on the floor leading right. I start left.

"This way," a muffled voice says. "He is this way." I start running down the hallway. The corridor turns left and I keep running. There is a set of double doors with a sign reading: "Restricted Access. Authorized Personnel Only." I try to push them open with no luck. I take a step back, raise the shotgun and fire. The buckshot shreds the lock and part of the door. I chamber a round and kick the doors open. A trooper fumbles with his rifle. I raise the shotgun to his chest and fire. The blast sends him into the wall behind his desk. The room is lined with lockers. There is a table next to the desk that belonged to the dead trooper. My gear is there. I put the shotgun on the desk and put on my bandoleer of 45-70 rounds. I grab my brush gun, .44 and backpack. I load my brush gun and revolver. I walk over to the door and poke my head out. Four troopers are crouching from the way I came. The other way is a dead end. I set my pack on the floor. I remove a grenade and set my pack back on my shoulders.

"Surrender!! This is your only warning!" a trooper says. The sound of stomping boots grows louder. I pull the pin on the grenade and throw it down the hallway.

"Grenade!" another trooper shouts. The grenade goes off with a deafening boom. I walk over to the trooper's desk and pick up his service rifle, thumb the safety off and walk back to the door. I stick the rifle into the hallway and pull the trigger. I empty the twenty round magazine and toss the weapons aside.

"Fall back. We need reinforcements," a trooper says. I turn into the hallway to see three troopers rounding the corner. The rest of the NCR troops lay dead in the hallway. Blood soaks the floor. Chunks of flesh and bone litter the corridor. I walk into the hallway and step over the disgusting bits of gore. I round the corner and the two of the three troopers that escaped are limping down the hallway.

"Drop your weapons," I order as I raise my rifle. They turn around and drop their rifles and 9mm pistols. "Back up." They do so. I jog over, still aiming my brush gun at them. I set my backpack down and secure my brush gun on it. I remove two syringes of morphine. I remove the magazines from two of the service rifles and pick up the third. I take the pistols and put them in my pack. I heft it onto my shoulders and hand the morphine to the healthy trooper.

"Thanks," one of the wounded troopers says. I nod my head and sprint down the hallway. I reach the end where it turns right. I slowly poke my head out. Twenty or so troopers line the hallway, weapons pointed at the end of the hallway. A gunshot rings out.

"Dammit, Jenkins!" a sergeant yells.

"Sorry, Sir," Jenkins says sheepishly. An alarm goes off. The white lights go out and red emergency lights go on. I take this opportunity to remove another grenade from my pack. I pull the pin. *One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand...* I toss the frag down the hallway... *Four one thousand, five one thousand six one thousand.* The grenade detonates. I feel the shock wave from around the corner. I round the corner, fire three shots, hitting three troopers. I roll, take a knee and fire the rest of the magazine into doorways the troopers were using for cover. I duck into an empty interrogation room.

"No target! No target!" a trooper says. I reload the service rifle and peek out into the hallway. I can make out a few troopers in the red light, all of which are strafing their rifles down the hall. I poke the barrel of my rifle out of the doorway and level it with a trooper's head. I squeeze the trigger and the bullet collides with her head, sending her to the floor of the empty interrogation room. I step out into the hallway and duck into the dead trooper's room.

"Those were my friends you killed!!!" a trooper in the room says. He charges me with a knife. I raise my rifle to block the incoming attack. The blade of the knife stops inches from my face as it was caught in the handle bar sights of my service rifle. I push the trooper back and hit him in the throat with the butt of the rifle. He clutches his throat and falls to the floor, gasping for air. I step out into the hallway and send a trio of bullets into a confused trooper. Another trooper enters the corridor. I roll towards him and bring my foot into his stomach. I stand up, walk behind him and snap his neck. I hear metal clanking down the hallway. I can make out an NCR power armor trooper in the lighting. I hear the sound of a motor starting. I duck into an empty room as a stream of bullets fly past the door. I set my pack on the floor. *Where is that EMP grenade I found? Oh, that's right. I sold it. I do have a molotov.* I remove the molotov and my lighter. I flip the top of the lighter off and hit the spark wheel. A triangular orange flame comes to life. I turn the molotov upside down, soaking the sock with vodka. I touch the flame with the sock, and it lights up. I throw the molotov at the power armor soldier. It collides with his left shoulder. The vodka splashes down his side and ignites. Bullets zip down the hallway.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are. I just want to play," the heavy trooper says. He continues down the hallway. "Peekaboo!" He's standing in a doorway. "Aww, nobody's home." He continues down the hall. He stands in the doorway opposite mine. I remove a dead trooper's knife from its sheath. I slowly walk up to the heavy. I jump on his back and sink the knife into his neck. I jump off the heavy as he falls to the ground with a thud. I gather magazines off of the

dead troopers until I have about 140 rounds. I sprint down the hallway until I see troopers in a defensive position around a curious set of double doors.

"There he is. Fire!" a sergeant says. I dive into a doorway and shoot the lock off. I enter the room as the hallway erupts in gunfire. Tucker is sitting at a table, hands cuffed around the back of his chair.

"There you are, you amazing man!" Tucker says. I walk behind him and shoot the cuffs off. I set my pack on the table and remove the three 9mm pistols. I remove the magazines of two and hand the third to Tucker.

"Happy birthday," I say handing him the pistol and spare magazines. I examine his room. "Why did you get a bed?" I ask.

"Because I didn't shatter a trooper's jaw as I was being apprehended," Tucker replies sarcastically.

"Cease fire!" the sergeant yells.

"Where's Natalie?" I ask.

"There," Tucker says, pointing to the room across the hall.

"Why the hell are you next to each other?" I ask.

"They already interrogated us, and we were moved to cells," Tucker answers. I shoot the lock off of the door on the opposite side of the hallway.

"Cover me," I order. I run across the hallway and slam into the door.

"Took you long enough," Valdez says. I walk behind her and shoot the cuffs off with my service rifle. I unholster my .44 and place it on the table in front of her. I remove my last grenade and walk over to the door. I pull the pin, wait three seconds and lob it down the hallway. It explodes, sending shrapnel and bits of gore down the corridor. Sporadic gunfire fills the hallway as scared and confused troopers fire randomly down the corridor.

"Cease fire!" the sergeant says. "Cease fire, dammmmit!" Tucker pokes his arm out and starts firing his 9mm. The hallway is filled with gunfire until Tucker drops back into cover.

"Got a Stimpak?" Tucker asks.

"Yeah," I respond. I remove one from my pack. I toss it across the hall. It gets halfway across when it's shot out of the air.

"So, you thought I was dead?" someone says.

"Who are you?" I ask.

"I'm called many things, but you know me simply as 'The Courier'," she says.

"How did—" I start saying.

"You grazed me. I played along," the Courier answers.

"You must have a really thick skull," I say

"Didn't your mama ever teach you not to be rude? Oh, that's right, she died giving birth to you," the Courier says.

"Let's fight, mano a mano," I say. A knife is slid down the hallway. I drop my pack, brush gun and service rifle, and walk out into the corridor. I pick the knife up. "Let's dance." The two power armor troopers flanking her step aside. She charges down the hall, covering thirty feet in no

time. I raise my arms. The Courier swings her knife at my head. I grab her knife arm and attempt to bring my knife into her gut. She blocks, knocking the knife out of my hand. She kicks the side of my knee, forcing my to the ground. She places both hands on her knife and tries to stab my throat. I grab both her wrists, struggling to throw her off. She puts more and more weight onto the knife. My arms buckle. I place my boot on her abdomen and send her tumbling ahead of me. I get up and take my knife. The Courier is up and swinging her knife at my leg. I dodge and kick the back of her knee. She falls and I stab her in the lower rib cage, puncturing a lung. I keep pushing the knife into her lung until its hilt deep. I yank the knife out and slash her jugular. She falls, blood spurting from her neck.

I turn around, clutching the knife in my right hand. I walk over to the NCR position, blood dripping from the knife. I start running down the hallway. The two heavy troopers start their miniguns. By the time they've fired, I've jumped onto the closest heavy. I bring the knife into his throat and he lets out a stifled scream. I jump onto the other heavy and stick the knife in the base of his neck. I jump off and both heavies fall with a loud thud. The six or so remaining troopers drop their weapons.

"Pick your weapons up, dammit," the sergeant orders.

"Do you want to die, Sarge?" one of the troopers says. The sergeant drops his rifle.

"Pile your weapons and ammo," I order the prisoners. Tucker hands me my equipment and Valdez watches over the prisoners.

"Open that door," Valdez says, pointing at one of the cells.

"What's behind that door?" I ask pointing at the set of double doors the troopers were guarding.

"Control room, opens cells," the sergeant says.

"These doors are opened by keys, aren't they?" I ask.

"Not these cells," the sergeant says.

"How many people are in there?" Tucker asks.

"Seven scientists and three troopers," the sergeant answers. I take my service rifle and shoot the lock out.

"I found this," Tucker says handing me a flashbang. I take the flashbang and stand on one side of the door. Tucker and Valdez take the other. I push the door open, pull the pin and toss the flash bang in the room. The flashbang goes off with a deafening boom. Tucker and Valdez rush into the room. Six gunshots ring out from their service rifles. I walk into the control room. The scientists are cowering at their stations. Three dead troopers lie in the middle of the room. I motion for the prisoners to enter the room, sit down and keep quiet.

"I hit him first," Valdez says.

"Please, I got the kill," Tucker says.

"I put two rounds in the right guy and one in the middle," Valdez says.

"After I already shot him, in the face," Tucker says.

"That's where I hit him," Valdez responds.

"After I hit him there," Tucker says.

"I love ya both to death, but please for the love of God, shut up," I say brushing past them. A glass wall catches my attention. I walk over to it. I peer out of the glass wall. Rows upon rows of large cells line quite a large room. Troopers are coming in from the far side of the cell room. Pieces of bone start poking out through the cells.

"Holy s*#%, those are Deathclaws," Tucker says.

"Open the cells," I order a scientist.

"I...can't," he says. I press the muzzle of my rifle against his head.

"Do it," I order.

"I...know some... of, of those soldiers," he mutters.

"One of you do it, unless you want to see your friend die," I say. A scientist walks over to a console by the window. She presses a few buttons and the cages open with a loud, metallic screech. The Deathclaws rush out of their cells. They are bigger than usual.

"What the hell did you do to them?" Tucker asks.

"We are trying to create the perfect army," a scientist says, the project leader by the looks of him.

"How do we kill them?" I ask.

"You don't. We've made them impervious to any kind of bullet. You'll need energy weapons, which are stored on the other side of the base, and the only way to get there from here is through there," the project leader says, pointing to the door at the far side of the Deathclaw pen.

"That's stupid, mister," Tucker says.

"Doctor Thomas Hildern, and no, it's not. You came from the prison wing. The way to the rest of the base is through the Deathclaws," he says. "Think of it as an extra security measure."

"Tucker, check the hallway for troopers," I order.

"It's highly likely that they are all dead," Hildern says. Tucker ignores him and peers out of the door.

"Just bodies, blood and shell casings," Tucker says.

"Is there any way to kill the Deathclaws from this room?" I ask.

"We implanted a chip in their brains. When activated, it detonates, killing them," Hildern says.

"Stop giving them classified information," the trooper sergeant says.

"If none of us talked, we'd be dead," Hildern says sternly.

"We can sneak past them. They're distracted by all the food," Valdez says.

"We've increased their hearing abilities. You won't make it three feet. That is if you manage to open the door quietly," Hildern says.

"Why would you do all of this? Wouldn't training regular ones be easier?" I ask.

"To answer your first question, we were ordered to and because we can. Second, we lack the heavy lifting equipment to move an alpha male and female Deathclaw here. So we trapped one, took its genes and grew these in a lab. Before the time of adolescence, we gave them muscle enhancers and ceramic bone implants," Hildern says.

“Do the thing with the explodey brain chip,” Tucker says.

“I can’t. I don’t have the clearance,” Hildern says.

“Hildern, shut up or you’ll be in deeper trouble than you already are,” the sergeant says.

“Shut up, trooper. The good doctor won’t face any court trial, because we’ll feed him to his pets,” I say. I look out of the window at the bloodbath. Deathclaws are devouring what remains of the unlucky troopers.

“How many explosives do you have?” Valdez asks.

“None. There is a confiscated item room. You might find some there,” I respond.

“How do we get there?” Valdez asks.

“Follow the bodies,” I answer. “Take two troopers. Pile anything useful into a locker and bring it here.”

“Can we get the Deathclaws to fight each other to the death?” Tucker asks.

“If you can make it look like one is stealing another’s food. The chances of you being able to pull it off are extraordinarily low,” Hildern says.

“So we wait until your people authorize the destruction of the very expensive science projects, or they starve us out,” I say.

“We’ve already invested nearly a million caps into this project. They aren’t going to destroy them,” Hildern says.

“How would you get them out anyway?” I ask.

“We would lure them into cages, tranquilize them and open the roof for a vertibird to pick them up,” Hildern says.

“Do you have any tranq guns here?” I ask.

“Of course we do. Who do you think we are? Some band of imbecilic vault scientists?” Hildern replies sharply.

“What is this place?” I say.

“Well, it was a prewar military research base,” Hildern says.

“Define research,” Tucker says.

“Human and weapon experimentation. All sorts of that fun stuff,” Hildern replies sarcastically.

“Drop your weapons and turn around slowly,” Valdez says.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I say.

“I wish I could say that I was. Now drop them,” Valdez says. I place my service rifle on the ground and drop my pack. Tucker does the same. I turn slowly. A trooper is handing rifles to the captured troopers. I look out the window into the Deathclaw pen. Heavy troopers armed with tranq guns storm the place. Dozens of troopers swarm in, stepping over the remnants of their comrades.

“I came into this world kicking, screaming and covered in someone else’s blood and by God, that’s how I’m going out,” I say jumping on the closest trooper. I punch him in the throat and take his gun. I start firing at the recently freed troopers. Tucker grabs his gun and fires a trio of bullets into Valdez. I empty the magazine into the doorway where several troopers have

already entered. I pick up my pack up and original service rifle. Tucker walks over to the doorway.

"We've got hostages. Back off or we'll kill them," Tucker says. The troopers hold their positions.

"How are we getting out of this one?" I ask.

"We certainly can't shoot our way out. Not like Nelson," Tucker says.

"Ah, Nelson, that useless Godforsaken town. Those were the good old days," I reply.

"We can wait until the Deathclaws wake up," Tucker says. "How long do those tranqs last?"

"Three hours," Hildern replies hopelessly.

"Eight suits of power armor," Tucker says.

"Three in the hallway," I add. "Where did you get all of it?"

"We have skirmishes with the Brotherhood of Steel every week it seems, although they haven't attacked in a while. If you ask me, it's more like they are probing our defenses, but of course none of my superiors will listen to me, because "It's not your job. Worry about the lab," Hildern says.

"That's great. We have to worry about the tech whores now," Tucker says.

"The Brotherhood is on the offensive? Where are we?" I ask.

"Northern Nevada. By Winnemucca," Hildern says. "Brotherhood has control over the town. Although it's more like a fortress," Hildern says. A loud motor sound starts seemingly out of nowhere.

"The hell is that?" Tucker asks as it grows louder.

"Vertibirds," Hildern says.

"The Brotherhood," I say. An alarm goes off. Red lights start flashing.

"About time they arrived," the scientist who opened the Deathclaw pens says.

"You're BoS?" I ask.

"Nothing gets past you," she replies. "Let me open the roof. They need a place to land." She gets up and walks over to the console in front of the window. She presses a few buttons. The roof starts to open with a very loud metallic shriek. Daylight starts pouring in from the opening. The door opens completely and a vertibird starts making its descent, gatling lasers firing. The gray, twin rotor, bug like beast lands in the center of the room. There is a sword and three gears painted on the side. Six people in power armor jump out of the side hatch and start to fire on the NCR. The vertibird lifts off and another one takes its place. Six more people in power armor get out and the vertibird starts to lift off. I see a smoke trail appear from one from one of the doors, and an explosion lights up the side of the second vertibird. The force from the explosion knocks the vertibird off balance and sends it flying into the control room.

"Get down!" I shout, diving into the hallway as the vertibird shreds through the wall.

CHAPTER V

LOCATION AND TIME UNKNOWN...AGAIN

I open my eyes and blink a few times to adjust to the white light above my head. I'm in some kind of bed. I hear the steady beat of a heart rate monitor. An IV is attached to my arm. I move my arms and legs to make sure they are still attached.

"Woah, woah, take it easy," someone says.

"Where am I?" I ask.

"Fort Winnemucca," he says.

"What happened?" I ask.

"After the crash, some survivors pulled you and your friend, Tucker, out of some rubble. You suffered some head trauma. You were bleeding on the brain. I drained the blood. You should be fine. Now, I have a question for you. That piece of paper in your boot had some coordinates on it. What is there?" he asks.

"I'll tell you if you show me Tucker is alive. I want my gear back and some supplies. Don't you people have doctors?" I say.

"Initiate, get Tucker in here," the man orders someone I can't see. "I'm a Scribe. We take care of everything from logging data to fixing bullet holes."

"What happened at the base?" I ask.

"We won, NCR retreated. We took what we could from the base and destroyed it. Those abominations should have never seen the light of day," he answers.

"Welcome back from the dead," Tucker says.

"Before you start talking, the coordinates. Where do they go?" he asks.

"A prewar military bunker in Oregon," I answer. "If you plan any mission there, I'm going and I'm taking what I can carry."

"That can be arranged. By the way I'm Scribe Killian," he says.

"I'm Samuel Miller of the Mojave Rangers." I say.

"Mojave Rangers. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the Brotherhood chapter there reports that the NCR wiped them out," Killian says.

"What? How?" I ask.

"Valdez, has been funneling info to the NCR for months," Tucker says. "They knew when and where to strike."

"When are your people planning to leave?" I ask.

"Three days," Scribe Killian says. "Your clothes are in that locker." I walk over to the only locker in the room and hastily throw my clothes on.

MARCH 6 2289

TEN MINUTES BEFORE FLIGHT

"This is the last time I'll go over the plan," Killian says. "We fly to the bunker and radio for reinforcements. We are not expecting much in the form of anti aircraft fire, but if you are shot down, continue on mission," Killian says.

CHAPTER VI

MARCH 3 2289

IN FLIGHT SOMEWHERE OVER OREGON

Heavy flak blankets the sky as people on the ground try to and shoot down the Vertibirds.

"Who the hell are these guys?" the copilot asks.

"Doesn't matter. Stay focused," the pilot says. I look out the side door. The Vertibird designated bravo is taking heavy fire.

"They aren't NCR, that's for sure," Killian says.

"How do you know," I ask?

"They don't have these kinds of heavy weapons this far from any major settlement," Killian responds.

"Bravo, pull up," the copilot says. A missile collides with the right rotor, spraying my Vertibird with shrapnel.

"Going down. Hang onto something!" one of bravo's pilots says. Another missile collides with the cockpit, exposing the skeleton of the Vertibird.

"Delta, move to take bravo's place," Killian says over the radio. The flak lets up and the last deafening boom echoes around the mountain side.

"We are three clicks away from the vault, Sir," one pilot says.

"Bring us to one hundred feet," Killian orders.

"Yes, Sir," the left pilot says. The Vertibird decreases its altitude quite quickly.

"Taking small arms fire," the right pilot says. A missile hits the left rotor. I look out of the cockpit window. We are heading into a city. The Vertibird starts spinning. It collides with a tall building and falls to the street. I black out.

I wake to the sound of gunfire in the street. I struggle to get up. I can barely make out Tucker and Killian sitting on the ground. Some Knights are crouching in their bulky power armor. The vertibird landed on its side. I remove my knife from its sheath and begin cutting the harness on my seat. I cut the last strap and fall to the ground.

"Oh good, you're alive," Tucker says.

"On three, lift the Vertibird upright," Killian says. "One, two, three." The Vertibird begins to slowly lift upright. I grip my Brush gun.

I aim my missile launcher at the three gray airships speeding towards the city. I aim ahead of the rotor on the side of the lead airship. I pull the trigger on the launcher and a missile streaks into the sky. A few seconds later, it collides with the rotor. The ship starts spinning and collides with a building. It hangs there for a second and falls to the ground. I reload the launcher and aim it at another airship. I aim at the front end and squeeze off another round. The missile screams out of the tube and collides with the tail end of another airship. The ship buckles and starts spinning towards the ground. It crashes onto the roof of a nearby building. The last ship is out of range. I sling the launcher and grab my hunting rifle. I walk over to the ladder and start climbing down. I reach the bottom of the ladder. An olive six-wheeled APC stops in front of me. Two cannons are in the front and one is up top. The rear ramp lowers rapidly.

“Get in tank, Desmond,” Yuri says. I run up the ramp and take a seat opposite Yuri, since all the others are taken by people I don’t recognize. The ramp closes and the APC speeds off. The APC screeches to a halt a minute later. The ramp lowers and I run out onto the street, along with the eight others that were in Yuri’s squad. I look up and see thick black smoke billowing out of the top of a building. That’s where the airship crashed. It must have fallen all the way to the basement, judging from the exterior. Some of Yuri’s soldiers are kicking down the door.

“Yuri, who is in the ships?” I ask.

“No clue. They must have good loot regardless of faction,” Yuri responds with a chuckle. The door finally gives out and bursts open. A giant gray man walks out of the doorway. He’s got some kind of weird rectangle in his hands. Red beams come out of the end and cut down half of Yuri’s squad. I retreat behind the APC, as do the surviving soldiers.

“What the hell is that?” I ask.

“Power armor and gatling laser,” Yuri responds, the color drained from his face. I poke my head around the end of the APC. Three people with power armor are approaching the APC. Two go towards my end and the one with the gatling laser heads to the other. I load my missile launcher. I jump around the side of the APC and fire the launcher. The missile screams to its target. It detonates, stopping the person in power armor. He fires his laser rifle and hits me square in the chest. I stumble back and fall to the pavement.

“Into the subway!” Killian shouts. I follow him through the subway entrance. The only light is from the entrance. I remove my flashlight and turn it on. The beam does little to cut through the darkness. Tucker and the three knights burst through the doorway a moment later. The knights turn on the spotlights attached to their helmets, flooding the area with light.

“What do we do now?” Tucker asks.

“Scuttle the armor. Collapse the entrance. That should buy us some time,” Killian says. The suits of armor open up and the knights exit. The armor seals itself shut again. I remove a frag grenade, a roll of duct tape, and some fishing wire.

“Was gonna use this for something else,” I mutter to myself. I tape the frag over the fusion core of one suit of armor. I tie the wire to the pin and slowly back up. A knight kicks the door in on a supply closet.

“Everyone get in,” he says. I back up another three yards and yank the wire. I dive into the closet. Two knights slam the door behind me and brace themselves to keep it shut. The grenade detonates, setting off the three fusion cores that power the armor. The sound of groaning metal and falling concrete is deafening. It stops a second later.

“Let’s get moving,” Killian says. The knights remove themselves from the door. It falls on the ground with a loud clang.

I wake to the smell of burning leather. I pick myself up and scan the area. The people in power armor are gone. So is my missile launcher and any spare missiles that were in my backpack. I still have my hunting rifle. Yuri and his squad lay dead in the street. I walk into the APC. The door to the cockpit is open and the driver is dead. The radio crackles to life.

“Assault squad Echo, come in. This is the last time I’m saying this before I declare all of you deserters,” a man over the radio says. I pick up the mic and press the button on the side.

“They are dead,” I say into the mic.

"Who is this?" the man asks.

"Desmond. Designation three three one," I say.

"What happened to the rest of your squad?" he asks.

"Killed by people in power armor with laser weapons," I answer.

"I'll get a team to your location ASAP," he says.

I run through a security gate and make a left down a straight hallway. I stop, turn, take a knee and level my brush gun. I control my breathing as the others round the corner. A second later a feral ghoul rounds the corner. I fire my rifle. The round hits the feral in the head, turning what's left of its brain into red mist. More round the corner and I empty my rifle into the horde. I turn and run into the darkness. I can make out three figures kneeling in the darkness. It's the Brotherhood Knights. I run past them and reload with shaking hands.

"Here they come," a knight says. The hallway is illuminated with the red beams from their laser rifles as the knights mow down the pack of ferals.

"Gotta reload," a knight says. I fire my rifle into the pack until I hear a *click*.

"Fall back," the third knight says. I run down the hallway. I see a light at the end of the corridor. Killian has his laser pistol out of its holster. Tucker has his trail carbine leveled down the hallway. I run past them into a large room. The ceiling is easily twenty feet high. A giant blast door, fifty feet away, blocks us in. I don't see any doorways on the right side of the room. I look left. It's the same story. No doors except another giant blast door and its thirty feet away with no bridge across.

"Against the door. This is where we make our stand," Killian says. We run to the door. Flood lights turn on, illuminating the passage we came through. The door on the other side slowly opens.

"Stand back, we are opening the door," someone says over the PA system. The pack of ferals charge through the passage. The other door is open completely and a rail car exits. Four people are on it. The knights start firing into the pack, as do the strangers on the cart. The door behind us slowly begins to creak open. I reload and fire into the horde of feral ghouls. We inch forward, avoiding the door as it is almost fully open. Two men in heavy, makeshift armor, armed with flamethrowers, jog out from the door. They open up with the flamers, melting dead and live ferals. I rush inside with the others. The ferals keep on coming. The pyro troopers keep firing their flamers until the door is sealed shut. They turn to us.

"On your knees. Now," the one with red-striped armor says. I look over my shoulder. Eight people in tan combat armor armed with weird looking rifles form a semicircle be behind us.

"What are you doing in the metro?" a man in a black military-looking suit asks.

"We were running from hostile forces above ground," Killian answers. "They chased us into the subway so we collapsed the entrance. The noise attracted the ferals and we ended up here."

"What is your faction called?" the man in the suit asks.

"The Brotherhood of Steel," Killian responds.

"Lower your weapons. They are of no threat," he orders. The strangers slowly lower their rifles. "Come with me." I follow him through the dimly lit winding passages of the subway. People are lining the sides of hallways with shops full of strange food and other miscellaneous items. We eventually reach a platform with a makeshift shack. A sign with a rifle has been hung over it.

"Hello, Vladimir," the vendor says.

"Hello, Dimitri," Vladimir responds. "If you need to stock up on arms and ammunition, here is the place to do so."

"Best weapons in the Metro," Dimitri says.

"Do you have any 45-70 rounds?" I ask.

"Just sold last few rounds to some mercenary. Sorry, comrade," Dimitri responds.

"Before you carry on with discussion, can I meet with you in my office?" Vladimir asks.

"Sure. Where is it?" Killian asks. Vladimir motions us to follow him. We walk through a doorway to the right of the armory. Vladimir takes his hat off and tosses it onto a wooden desk in the center of a ten by ten room. There is a bed in the corner farthest from the door. A red flag with a golden hammer and sickle hangs above the bed. Vladimir sits in the chair at his desk.

"What are you doing here?" Vladimir asks.

"What are you doing here?" Killian asks. "Your accent. You're obviously not from around here."

"Me and my people come from Russia. There is little to no food in Motherland and the bears are d*mn near impossible to kill with regular bullets. And it's really cold," Vladimir says.

"The bear here are pretty tough to kill," a knight says.

"Your bears are little compared to bears in Motherland," Vladimir says.

"Do you have Deathclaws in Russia?" I ask.

"What the hell is a Death claw?" Vladimir asks. "Tell me later. Now answer my question."

"How do we know we can trust you?" Killian asks.

"We saved you from the pack of ferals, did we not," Vladimir responds.

A person bursts into the room, redfaced and wheezing. "The... here... whoooo," he says, gasping for air.

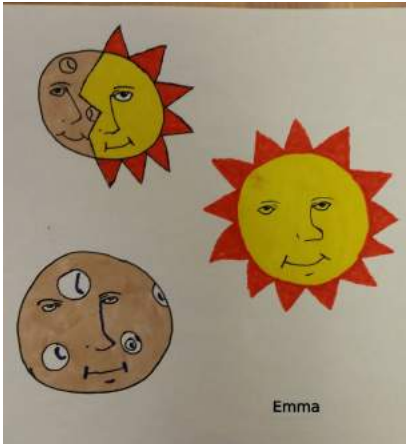
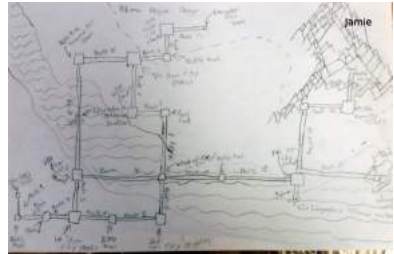
"Catch your breath, comrade. What is happening?" Vladimir asks. The messenger takes a deep breath.

"Stormtroopers. They've breached the south entrance," he says.

"Raise alarm and get as many soldiers as possible to repel the attack," Vladimir orders. "Do you have ammunition?" The knights, along with Tucker and Killian nod their heads yes. Vladimir walks over to the far side of the room, opens a cabinet and removes a long bolt action rifle and three clips. "Here. Take mosin. It's good rifle, you use it to kill Nazis."

"Nazi?" I ask.

"I'll explain on way," Vladimir says, taking one of those weird automatic rifles. He loads a curved magazine and chambers a round. I pull the bolt back on the mosin, load the empty rifle and close the bolt. "Let us get moving."



Our students as seen through their own eyes



Rio



Maeve

This book would never have been possible without all of the students' hard work and endless flow of creative ideas. Thank you!!!



Upper row: Maeve, Harry, Dylan, Kaylah, Nick

Middle row: Tommy, Teshome, Ryann, Kenny, Viola

Bottom row: Bella, Emma, Koryn, Max, Connor