My Private Global War

Confessions while drinking Wild Turkey

A man talks about his life and his part of a war with an alien race while facing what could be his end.
Prelude

The massive ship shuttered then broke into several large parts crashing into the ground. The central core smashing down into the weapon. The ground shook for miles. A cloud of dust blocked the sky. The last of the large ships was gone. The ruins they left behind would take many years to rebuild and would most likely be taken over by nature long before man. The war was far from over, but the battle once thought lost now had hope.

A man slid down a broken airshaft to a room just as a series of explosions closed off the rest of the structure. He made his way into an axillary control room just as the last hallway collapsed. Behind him, the way was closed with no way out. He checked his guns then checked around for supplies finding a field kit with some food and a working laptop with a connection to a cloud server but not the internet. The man sat down using the kit to dress his wounds while heating some food. In a closet, he found a box filled with bottles of Wild Turkey whiskey. The man sat down with an open bottle and a blank screen……..
Chapter One

Where do I begin? It’s hard to start a story with a firm start knowing where it all must end. Getting to the end is where most would like to start, and it’s that end that is the important part, but the end doesn’t explain the entire story, so I guess I’ll start at the beginning. As I sit here I can hear the structure creak and smell smoke. I don’t know if I have just moments or days before it all comes down. What I have are a couple of Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), six bottles of Wild Turkey, and this connection to a cloud. Trying to get to me would waste too many lives to save just one, so I won’t divulge my location. I’m ready to die to save what must be left of humanity if any still exists. I’m not a hero nor do I play one on TV, I just want people to maybe remember us and why we fought. I guess I should start with my name. My name is William James Masters, but most people called be Bill or Billy, Mac or Buddy……… sorry, I liked that song, but really, they just called me Bill.

To start there was nothing……… and no I’m not going all the way back to that beginning I’m starting where this story began with me alone. I was or am the oldest of four children from Frank James Masters and Mary Lynne Colt Masters. It’s hard to see myself as the only one left, but that might be the truth for the entire world. I might be typing this for no one to read. Dad worked as a truck driver for twenty years before one slippery road in Michigan cost him and us his life. He died in the winter of 1995 just weeks after the birth of their last child, but I’ll get to her soon. I was twelve years old and the self-diagnosed man of the house. My mom was a stay-at-home mom until dad died. She had a degree in education, but she saw her family as her greatest accomplishment, but really, she had her last three children in the last six years keeping her on her toes while off her feet. Mom went back to teaching, where she taught for seventeen years until a student shot her over a bad grade.

Mom lived long enough to bury her second son. Frank Colt Masters Junior or Frankie joined the Marines right out of high school and served with distinction for four years. Frankie was home on leave. He signed his reenlistment papers and was on his way back to Afghanistan. That night he just turned twenty-one, and he and his friends went out drinking, and none of them
survived that night. It’s hard to say what happened. The wreck was so bad that no one could tell who was driving or who was at fault. My silver star war hero brother was buried with a closed casket with a footnote in the paper about the perils of drunk driving. Not that I’m bitter or anything. I know we most likely broke a few laws, but we buried him with his metals and our mother with his flag. We didn’t know then as we lowered our mother into the ground that our sister would be following her in just a year.

Magdalene Tabatha Masters or Maggie was just twenty when she died. Her friends called her Molly not because of her name but her drug of choice. She was a party girl and one of my greatest disappointments. No, I was never disappointed in her I was disappointed in how I handled her addiction. She was thirteen months younger than Frankie and his opposite. Where Frankie was driven, Maggie was drifting from party to party just looking for a good time. She was the gifted one of all of us with grades that should have made her their class leader, but her reputation and purple hair put her on the sideline when they graduated. It’s just as well, she planned on streaking the podium, and it wouldn’t have been the first time. Maggie was the life of any room and a party in a person. I look back now, and I can see where things went wrong. When Frankie died a part of her died too. She went from a borderline addiction to being high every day. I thought my job was as an enforcer with tough love. She was found in the back of a stolen car unresponsive, but really, she was dead.

I think I’m about half a mile underground. The roof just shifted, and I think this room is about to become my tomb…. sorry about the rhyme. As the roof moves, I wonder if I should just speed up, but no it’s my story, so I’m telling it my way. The youngest of the four of us was Francene Marylynn Masters. She died about two years ago. Of the four of us, Pasties had the closest thing to life. Side note, we called her Pasties because of her choices in swimsuits or the lack of material. At the age of ten long before it would be a more apparent issue, she had found a set of pasties, you know those things meant to cover the nipple and wore them out to our pool instead of her bikini top. Mom just shook her head and didn’t say a word, but from there on, she was Pasties. A year after mom died in 2012, Pasties married an asshole named David Harm, and his name should have been a clue. Eight years into their marriage and three months into their first
pregnancy good old David pushed her down a flight of steps killing both her and the baby. It would later come out while he was on trial about the years of physical and mental abuse. He got away with it…… but not really.

I killed him, at this point there’s no need to hide it, I killed the bastard. About a month after he was found not guilty, he and some of his friends went up to Lake Erie for a night of drinking and camping. I found myself following him after the trial, and that night, I found him on the beach passed out. His friends were at their campsite trespassing on private land around an illegal fire also drunk and passed out. I stole a boat and took him out into the lake near their campsite. He never woke up. I struck him in the head with a rock I took from the beach and pushed him into the water. The police ruled it an accidental drowning saying he hit his head under the water and went down. I thought about the day after the trial and how he had said to me how he did, in fact, kill my sister because he didn’t want to be a father. I returned the boat and cleaned up my Jeep, getting away with murder. I don’t know why but even now I dream about the lake and going back to where I did what I did so just maybe there’s some truth to that returning to the scene of the crime thing. At this point, if you want to stop reading this, I could understand, but I don’t regret it.

My sister’s death left me alone…… I know most of that is my fault. I drove everyone away. This started with my first girlfriend, Sasha Smith. She was my friend long before she was my girlfriend. It’s hard to say when we became friends because it was like she was always there. I don’t remember a time when she wasn’t there. Sasha or Sassy was cute, I say cute because it’s creepy for a grown man to say a teenager was beautiful, but she was, more than any of that she was fun to be around. Her father was from the Russian occupied part of the country of Georgia while her mother was from the American state of Georgia. Sassy told people she was a black Russian. At ten, she was my first kiss, and at thirteen she was the first girl I made out with. Our families all camped together, and one night, we snuck away from the group and kissed under the stars. It was one of those perfect moments you don’t realize until years later. No, we didn’t go all the way, but we went further than before and just maybe too far for us. She stopped hanging
around us, and the next year the girls went off on their own forever dividing boys and girls. She would later tell me she felt used that night, and that was why we broke up.

I dated on and off throughout high school, but I never had another true friend that was a girl like Sassy. My senior year, I met the girl that would be the longest relationship I would have…… assuming I am going to die down here. We met in homeroom on the first day of school. Denny or Denise Drake was fair-skinned with ultraviolet red hair. She changed the color from red to blue to green and rose gold, which was the closest thing to her natural color. I can say that I never saw her with her natural strawberry blonde hair in person, but the rug matched the drapes…… sorry about that. We went from lunch in school to studying after going out on official dates. She wasn’t the first girl I said I love you too, but she was the first to say it back. Despite my carpet joke I respect her and want nothing but the best for her and whomever she ended up with. When we broke up, we broke up hard with plenty of harsh words and accusations, but I would rather think about the good times.

A week before graduation, we were at our usual spot, a drive-in called Swenson’s. I had my first Jeep, and Denny loved taking it out into the country into the mud, but she also liked how difficult it was for the server with a vehicle without doors. We left the Falls that is Cuyahoga Falls and drove into Portage county looking for some mud and good times spending the day sliding around. With no doors, we ended up covered in mud. We stopped and using a self-wash carwash we cleaned the Jeep then each other. We drove into what was supposed to be a closed park and took our clothes off to let them dry…… yeah that’s why we got naked to let our clothes dry. Naked, illegally parked in a park we did what you should be guessing…… yes, we played scrabble. OK, no not really but just maybe that part is just for us.

After school, I got a job in a factory making toys. Now I’m not going to mention the name of the company in Hudson Ohio, but anyone from the area should know whom I’m talking about. Denny started at Kent State in Kent, Ohio. She wanted to become a teacher, and from the last time, we spoke, she was teaching in an elementary in East Cleveland. I would like to say we
made up, but that would be a lie we just became less angry at each other and just maybe a little nostalgic. She went to school and worked as a waitress in a restaurant nearby while I worked the continuous operations B team from 6am to 6 pm two days on and two days off. I think our schedules, as well as the pressures she felt working 18 hours a day with both school and work, broke us up, but that would take the pressure off me. I did nothing to help her with her rushed life just thinking about what I wanted. It wasn’t too unrealistic for her to say I was treating her like a fuck buddy and not a girlfriend. After one particularly bad day for her, we fought, and it was over. I left her the apartment paying for it for the next year until she could take over the payments. No matter how angry I was, I would have never left her with no place to go. That’s not true if she would have cheated on me then it would have been different, but we were just kids playing house. I hope Denny, her husband, and child are still alive.

I just spent a lot of time talking about the past. I confessed to murder while saying how I was a bad boyfriend and brother. I think to understand how I got to where I am, I should explain where I came from. That includes the people I lost and those people I hurt along the way. A few years on the job, I was on my way to becoming a machine operator when I was laid off. The company wanted to cut costs while hiring a temp service over traditional hires. I had my Jeep and a minivan I bought hoping to convert into a makeshift camper but no job. I found a job with a delivery company where I use my own vehicle, acting as an independent operator. I liked the idea because I would set my own hours, but over time, I learned it really meant I would work from sunup to sunset with a company that was never satisfied with good enough. Working fourteen hours a day, six days a week changed my life, or that is it took the place of my life, and I let it. Now excuse me while I take a drink.
Chapter Two

Six months ago, I was delivering a couple of packages to a strangely shaped building out among the corn and cows. That is out in farm country where you will find corn fields planted to feed the cows which are raised for their manure to fertilize the corn. It was early in the growing season, and with all that rain, the corn was about a month behind. It’s funny to think how that was just so important to people back then, and that back then was just six months ago. OK, back to where I was, I usually just drop off packages at people’s front door and try and stay away from business deliveries. If I could, I would go the entire day without speaking to anyone other than the usual, “have a nice day.” I say it so often I do it without thinking, I say it when it’s nowhere close to a nice day. The building turned out to be a fancy telescope. What do you want? I’m a delivery driver, not a tech guy.

I dropped off the packages with someone at the door. I didn’t know Diana’s name at the time or any of them. I worked in several locations where multiple packages would be going to different places, but those packages would all have the same name, or every other name would be Jennifer. The system sorted by first name-giving me three to four pages of Jennifer or Jon Yoder. Yeah, a lot of Amish folks out in Medina, Doylestown, and Portage County. Let me say here that people are strange. No, I don’t mean the Amish…… well I don’t just mean the Amish. You could tell there was something in her that is Diana’s eyes something was wrong. When people get their packages, they are usually happy even when they are late, but when they are with a company or an apartment building that joy turns to annoyance. It seems like no one likes getting another person’s stuff. Diana seemed a little more than disinterested. This delivery was early in the morning and still more than a little dark outside. I know now she thought I was someone else.

The night had been darker than usual with a new moon. The darkness cleared out the sky making the stars come to life. Well, not really, but it was easier to see them. I pulled up in my Kia Soul Delivery car. Yes, a Kia Soul. It works for me, and since I paid for my gas, it didn’t take much. Diana came running out to my car only to stop when she saw the delivery car sign on
the side. I got out and said I had a package for their address. She told me I had to go now. I took the package out and scanned it using the app on my phone. I had her sign and gave her the package. She dropped it to the ground, but that wasn’t my problem. I had twenty more stops, and she signed. The long driveway had a turnaround, but it was blocked by a car. This meant I would either turn around in a row of corn most likely getting stuck or back out. I went to back out when another car pulled in behind me, then another, and another. Diana told me they would be leaving soon. I had all day to deliver about two hours’ worth of stops. The people from the three cars ran into the building. Ten minutes later they came running back out and to their cars. They pulled away, and I went to leave. Diana got in her car, but it was dead. I offered to help her jump the engine, but neither of us had jumper cables. Despite it being against every company rule, I offered to take her where she needed to go. She said she was Ok and would call someone, so I was on my way.

Under normal circumstances that would have been the end of it. Another strange meeting with the public, the kind I seem to have on an almost daily basis. I went about my day delivering all my packages and heading home. I made it to the corner of Bear Swamp Road and Fixler Road when I was stopped by four police cars. They boxed me in. I had my gun and the ten pounds of weed I had in my glovebox……. Just joking I didn’t own a gun, and the only weed I have is in my yard taking the place of what should be grass. Two officers approached my car from the back on either side. The officer on the passenger side opened my door and got in while the other opened the driver side door. The passenger side officer unbuckled my belt, and just like that, I was being forced out of my car and to the back of the police car. No one said a word. The officer didn’t cuff me or read me my rights. I watched as the officer got behind the wheel of my car and drove away down Fixler Road. The police car I was in turned around and went the other way.

We drove in silence for what felt like ten years or maybe ten minutes. The car turned into the driveway from my first stop. A part of me got angry. She signed my phone and took possession of the package. Did she call the police? What kind of response was this? As it turned out, it had nothing to do with the package. Diana wasn’t sure what I had seen and was afraid I knew too much. This is what could be called a massive overreach on their part. I was never more
than twenty feet from my car. I never went in nor did I read anything from any report in her car or in the building I never went into. A call came in, and it wasn’t good news. The police took my car to the group, and they dismantled it, looking for evidence. I’ll get into who the group is later. The car was in parts with broken pieces. It was Monday, and I had a full week of deliveries ahead, but now I had no car. Diana said they would pay for any damages; I think I just shook my head in disbelief. I went for my phone when one of the officers took and broke it. Diana just gasped. She pulled the officer aside, and the two talked, or she screamed, and he stood there.

Diana said she would call a cab for me. I told her I wouldn’t have enough to pay for a cab. I don’t think what had just happened had sunk in yet. She said she would take care of all that. I said how I had to call work, but my phone had the number, but on the back of my clipboard I had the number. One of the officers said how that wouldn’t work because they burned what was left of the car. It was about that time when I said, “what the fuck is going on?” Everyone just stopped and looked at me. Diana said, “wow, it took you this long to ask?” I had no one to call or anyone waiting for me. It just never sunk in how much of my life was now burning in a field. Diana asked if I wanted to see what this was all about. I asked why she was willing to tell me now. She replied, how I was a part of this no matter what happens now. She looked behind me, and I followed her gaze to the military vehicles pulling into the driveway as well as into the growing corn. I just wanted to run the other way.

Diana took me by the hand and said we should get inside now. Her emphasis on now was clear. She knew the military was not going to be happy with me there. I say military because it wasn’t just the national guard or the army, in fact, the first to arrive was the air force. She led me through the front door into an open office with computers and a large high-def screen showing something large and dark with fire all around it. We went through another door and into the main room with a telescope inside. The roof was open, but the scope was pointed down. We went to the left past the scope and into a small room. A broom closet. She told me to stay there until she can smooth my presence over. I made the mistake of looking out a window where I saw a soldier digging a me-shaped hole.
There was a knock at the door. From the outside of the door, a voice said, “Doctor if you’re done playing grab-ass, we have to deal with the security issues as well as with what you found.” Diana smiled and whispered to me, “that’s it…… look just play along……um…. what’s your name?” I started to say my name when she opened her shirt then loosened her belt. She pushed me back, messing up my hair than her own. She whispered, “don’t read too much into this.” She kissed me. On the lips and not just a peck. I would later see she had left lipstick on my face. I was deeply confused, but a part of me just didn’t care. Diana backed away looking down. She said, “that should do it.” She opened the door leaving me with a befuddled disheveled look.

The man on the other side of the door was Major James Tanner. He said something to Diana, but I was frozen in place. To put this into perspective, it had been a very long time since I had kissed a woman or in this case, was kissed by one. Tanner looked at me than her with this smile that was far from pleasant. She put her finger on his chest and said something again. He put his hands up. Tanner walked over to the door. He said, “just stay in here and zip up your fly.” He closed the door, and I heard them walk away. I checked, and yes, my fly was open. Somehow in her kiss, she had opened my pants, and I didn’t notice. I went from being something you bury in the cornfield to a booty call. There were sounds outside of the closet and what sounded like a lot of people moving a lot of stuff.

Twenty minutes went by, and nothing was said to me. Diana came back to the door and opened it. She said, “it’s ok to come out of the closet………..” She smiled. She has a nice smile. I walked out to find her telescope was gone. She said something science that went over my head about how her special scope was the only one that could see what was coming. What do you want, I deliver packages for a living, I’m not a science guy? She asked me if I would stay there and answer the phone. I said something I just don’t remember. It was something about my car, but I don’t think she was listening. She kissed me again and the next thing I remembered I was sitting in front of a phone at a desk in the open office.
An hour went by without a call or sound. When the phone finally rang, I nearly jumped out of my seat. It was Diana wanting to know if anyone called or came around. I said no, and she said she would be back soon. The sun started to set, and I had to do something about work the next day. With no car, I had no way to do my job. They killed my phone as well as my car leaving me without the phone number. It wouldn’t be fair to my employer for me to not call so I did my best to find the number. A computer was left on a desk next to mine, and it was open. After a few fruitless searches, I found the number. I picked up the phone, and there was no dial tone. The system required a passcode to make calls out. I was shit out of luck. Using the computer and my mad search skills, I found out who Diana is.

Doctor Diana Amelia Herman was an astrophysicist with three PhDs in parts of science that were all Greek to me. I was surprised to see she was thirty. She looked far younger but had a pedigree of someone far older than her…… well…… age. She reminded me of Natalie Portman just a little taller and slightly curvier. It felt strange to sexualize someone so smart or just maybe because she looks so young and that kind of makes me feel purvey. The first kiss was to save my life, but why did she kiss me again? I wondered was it wrong to think about her. I have this tell. My face turns red when someone I am attracted to is around or just, I don’t know. My mind wandered to the closet and where my hands could have been. I daydreamed about what could have been.

The clock on the computer said it was nine at night and I had no way to get home. I had no way to call out, and I was getting hungry. It’s funny to think that a few hours ago I was staring at a man digging the hole I was going to be buried in, but a few hours later all I can think about was food. A set of headlights appeared just outside the door coming down the driveway. My first thought was they came back to fill that hole with me. My second thought was, let this be my way home. I was wrong on both. Diana knew there was no food in her office, so she ordered me a pizza, half pepperoni, and half plain. She also sent a couple of bottles of soda, both regular and diet, which is what I drink. I have never had this company’s pizza before, but it was good.
About midnight, Diana called saying she would be back in the morning. She had a couch in her office on the other side of the observatory, and I should make myself at home. I walked into the now empty observatory and found that with the doors open a couple of deer had let themselves inside. They looked at me then at the door. I walked over to the door, staying away from the deer. Despite all that Bambi propaganda deer can mess you up. One hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds of frightened, angry deer would leave an impression on you and your face. About sixty yards away from the open door were a couple of mangy looking coyotes. I picked up a large wrench near the door and struck the door and the frame echoing a metallic threat I yelled, “get the fuck away,” at the dog-like animals that could have easily found me tasty. Just as soon as they were gone, my thoughts went back to the deer and why didn’t the noise scare them. Why didn’t I just let the coyotes eat them?

Another of the deer walked out of a storage room in the back. This deer was different from the others. It had a strange skip or limp. Yes, it had a mechanical like quality to it like an animatronic character. It looked up at me. One eye was gone, and the other looked like glass. The three deer looked to each other, then to me. As I’m sure, you all know now that we found out that half of all deer, rabbit, squirrels, and Canada Geese were a part of the invasion. A male deer with three or four points walked up to me and stood in front of me while the other deer walked around the empty room. The buck didn’t have that live smell. There is this sense you get around living things you don’t get from mechanical things. These deer were fake. The doe came back to the broken deer, and the two met with the buck who just stared at me. It looked to the door then back to me in a, “open the door” look. I opened the door, and they were gone into the night. My guess is they came looking for that fancy telescope thingy.

Something felt wrong about the whole thing, so even though there were coyotes outside as well as robot deer, I stepped outside and looked up. A low dark cloud was over the building. The cloud had a pyramid shape to it. I walked about one hundred feet away from the building and turned around. As I did, the power went out in the building. I felt this presence next to me, a living thing. I looked down and saw the coyote. It was standing next to me about ten feet away, staring at the building. The air went still. There was this scent of ozone in the air like a giant
electric thing was starting. The coyote looked at me, and I swear it was like it said, “if I were you, I’d run.” It turned and ran away. I turned around just in time to see sparks coming off the building then it flattened into the ground, a twenty-five-foot-tall building flattened like a soda can. Right after it did, the cloud dissipated like it was never there.

I turned around and saw the wounded deer off in the distance hobbling its way through the cornfield. 90 to 95% of me said to stay put while whatever was left said follow. I never had that commonsense thing, so I went after the fake deer. I kept my distance and let it lead me to a windbreak. A place where farmers let trees grow to lessen the effect the wind had on their fields. Inside the grove of trees, something moved. A deer-size ship came up from the ground. It flew over the deer shining a light in a sort of scan. When it was done the deer fell apart, no it disintegrated right there all at once like a time-lapse video taken over years or something. I jumped down just as it hit the ground, so I couldn’t see what it was doing. When I did look, the drone deer melting thing was gone, and all that was left was a puddle of deer.

The wind picked back up, and so on; it was like nothing happened. Now I don’t want to get people mad or make this conspiracy theory thing, but this all happened like I said about six months ago before the events of June 10th. People knew something was coming a full three days before all hell broke loose. I sat next to the flattened building until the sun came up. From there, I walked or started to walk back to Medina. I didn’t know what I was going to do. My job was most likely gone, as well as my car, and I knew something important, but I had no way to tell people without looking crazy. I felt crazy. The whole thing was just crazy. I made it to one of the many walking paths in Medina when a black SUV approached me and followed me onto the trail. Side note, if you like the outdoors and it survived the war, I would highly recommend moving to Medina.
Chapter Three

I wonder what would happen if I use whiskey to reconstitute one of these MREs? Oh wait, this one has this heating bag rather than it being freeze-dried, so I guess not. The good news more whiskey for me. Let’s see Mongolian beef with rice sounds interesting. Place rice and beef in the pouch after filling up to the line with water and wait ten minutes. While I wait let’s see what electrolyte lemon/lime tastes like mixed with Wild Turkey…………. Trust me don’t try that. OK, where was I?

That SUV should have had a bright neon sign screaming feds. Everyone knows what a black SUV with a limo tint means. The SUV stopped, and two bear-sized men got out and walked over to me. Neither of them said a word, they just went to either side of me and carried me back to the SUV. One on one arm and the other on the other arm. My feet left the path and didn’t touch anything until they touched the inside of the SUV. We rode in silence for what felt like ten years until we stopped at a small airport along state route 18. I was escorted to a jet. Along the way, someone was saying how they had no right to land here, and their jet wouldn’t have enough runway to take off.

The jet took off, and I can only assume there wasn’t really a problem because no one was going to tell me if there was. Unlike the car ride, the plane ride was quick, or it felt quick. We touched down into what looked like a wheat field with a runway in the middle of it. The door opened, and two more men were waiting. Unlike the other men these guys let me walk to the…… well take a guess what they were driving………. Yes, a black SUV. We rode for about two minutes from the runway to what looked like an army base from the 1940s all wooden barracks and metal Quonset huts. Standing next to one of those huts was Diana.

She had a smile on her face, but she also looked tired. She walked up to me and pulled me close, kissing me on the lips. I did my best to act like this was something we did all the time. She whispered into my ear to play along, and she would explain later. An airman…… Is that
right? From what I can remember, Airman is what you call a soldier in the air force… I think? Took me by the arm only to let go when she saw the angry look on Diana’s face. Another airman and yes, I’m just going with that name came up on my other side, and the two led me into a building nearby. We went past a large room filled with desks and dust along with typewriters so old they weren’t electric. The place had this musty smell that screamed disuse like one day it was just abandoned. On one desk was a coffee cup with the words, “1939 World’s Fair.” They escorted me into a room with a desk and one of those hanging overhead lights with a metal cage guarding the bulb. Instead of a one-way mirror, there was a regular window covered by mesh-like bars.

For the next hour or two, I was left alone in this room. The light flickered on and off, and while there was a table, there were no chairs. A light came on in the next room on the other side of the window. A moment or three later, and the door opened. An airman brought in two chairs. I asked for some water, but she just ignored me. I took one of the chairs and sat down facing the window. A man in a black suit came in and said something about how good it was that I knew to face the glass like I had done this before. I said, “no, I just watch TV.” He stopped for a second like a switch went off in his head. Yes, I was just a bit rude, but I was thirsty, a little angry and in a small room with no explanation. It’s funny to think that right now I’m buried under tons of rubble, but I felt more claustrophobic in an old building made of wood. He asked me how long I knew Diana or as he called her Doctor Herman. I said how it was none of their business. Before he could protest, I said, “look I’ll tell you about the cloud, the melting deer and anything else I saw but what’s happening with Di and me is none of your fucking business.”

As it turned out calling her, Di saved my life and maybe hers. From an early age, people called her Di like they did for Lady Diana the one that was married to that royal dude back in England whose name I don’t remember. The man fell silent. He had one of those earpieces in his ear with a wire going to something in his shirt pocket. He turned to the glass then to the door as it opened, and a stereotype walked in. Doctor Jake Goody was short and from the look of him perpetually wrinkled with a lab coat covered in stains. He looked like a short Marty Feldman…… you know the guy that played Igor in the movie Young Frankenstein. Only his hairline was
further back on his head, blondish and curly. He also had on the thickest pair of glasses I had ever seen outside of the movies or TV. He told the man in black to get out, and when he was gone, Goody sat down and said, “tell me everything you saw.”

I hate to say it, but the men in black are just movies……and a comic……and a cartoon, but not real. I told Goody and yes that’s what he likes people to call him about what I saw from the deer to the building flattening cloud. As much as I told him, he told me more. I learned more from him than in the entire next week. To start off, there was no official UFO alien search in any of the official government branches. No men in black or majestic programs. The military watches for asteroids and attacks from other countries not from the stars. Goody was a Xenobiologist working for the DARPA The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency on a project to weaponize bugs. Yes, they wanted to weaponize bugs for warfare. They were using him because most Entomologists wanted nothing to do with the idiotic idea. Those are his words, not mine, but I do agree. Goody’s work with S.E.T.I Search for extraterrestrial intelligence with his other Ph.D. in Astrophysics made him the obvious choice to lead this team. Yes, he went to college for something like fifteen years to search for ET. I found ET at Walmart for under ten dollars.

About a week ago when Diana sent her information to the air force, Goody was sent from his lab at Oakridge to this closed army base with all new equipment and military personnel. They gave him a copy of her work and told him Diana, and her telescope would be there within ten hours. I didn’t want to push him on Diana’s part in all this just in case my lack of information would expose our lie, and I wound up in that hole from earlier. He talked about dark matter and how her work was groundbreaking, but not much else. That is not on her work, he wouldn’t stop talking about everything else. Most of all, he talked about his love of the actors Dr. Mayim Bialik and Felicia Day. I’m not saying anything here but if he or they made it through all this then just maybe they should consider a restraining order against him and his use of a DARPA satellite to “see” what his “girls” are “doing.”
I think I was the first person in a while Goody spoke with that could talk back because once he started, he didn’t stop. He told me about the flea army as well as the cockroach army and other nastiness I would have rather not known. He also talked about his first, second, and third wives. His current wife number five looked a lot like Felicia Day if she had straight black hair. He skipped wife number four, but I wouldn’t learn why for about a month but more on her later. Somehow, this man that looked like he was hit with a dump truck full of ugly sticks found and married five different women. Just not all at once. As he talked a black substance that smelled like coffee but tasted like rusty water was brought in along with these cookies shaped like an S. After a bite, I remembered Stella D'oro cookies from my childhood. My mom would buy these for breakfast long before the breakfast bar came around.

He talked for about two hours until a man in an officer’s uniform showed up and pulled Goody away. Before he left, he told the airman to escort me to Doctor Herman’s room. He had this smile on his face that almost made me see how he got so many women, and just maybe how he lost most of them. We went from one building to another that had been retrofitted into what could have been a nice hotel, at least on the inside. The outside still looked like an almost abandoned building. The airman showed me to a room. Inside I found a pair of gray sweatpants with Air Force running down one leg, a dark blue shirt with the presidential seal, socks, blue Nikes, and a dark gray hoodie. The sizes were my size or as close as you get with such items. Diana came in and kissed me again. I started to push back when she mouthed the words, “they might be watching.”

Diana backed away and pulled her shirt out of the top of her skirt. I remember feeling like my heart had just stopped, then I thought, “yeah, she’s just putting up a front.” Then the skirt came off. I stood there like I had no idea what to do, and I didn’t. She came over to me and unbuckled my belt for the second time since we met. She whispered, “don’t read too much into this. I just don’t want to be responsible for your death, so I need you to fuck me.” My mind heard, responsible, death and it screamed fuck me. I didn’t feel my pants fall away just her hands on my face then on my chest. I took my shirt off, and we backed toward the bed. I’m going to stop there because the rest of that is between her, the people that were watching the video feed.
and me. I will say I did my best to make it seem like we had done that before with each other. In my mind, I changed Diana to Denise and just acted like we had never split up. I would later find out everyone knew, but more on that later.

I’m going to stop here to say something. I know I’m giving a lot of detail to a story that should be just maybe one to three pages, but I don’t know if I’m going to get out of this and I just want people to know who we were and why we did what we did. I hope to not only explain my part of this story but shed light on heroes like Goody and Diana. People that worked to save what was left after June 10th. Goody might read like a stalker flake but he…… more on him later, context is key to his story. Diana should have a movie based on her story but just not one based on my writing because she deserves better. There are other heroes, but I don’t want to jump ahead and lose my train of thought. I also need to slow down on the booze. The Mongolian Beef with rice was nice, no dare I say good.

We lay there in bed, two strangers pretending to be long-time lovers wondering just how long we should stay entwined. Diana told me she was trying to prove the existence of dark matter by using a telescope she invented that did something science like I didn’t understand. Like I said I’m not Bill Nye the Science Guy. In her search, she found what looked like a smooth asteroid on its way to the earth. She checked with other telescopes, but no one else could see it. She spent a couple of days collecting information and sent that to the air force, hoping someone would check it out. Oh yeah, that package I delivered was a replacement drive for her work. She sent her older one to the air force. She turned to look at me and asked, “we didn’t use any kind of protection, did we?” I just looked back at her saying nothing. After a moment or two, she said, “well it would have looked awkward if I asked you about……, you know.” It was June 9th.

We fell asleep for a few hours. I woke to see Diana getting dressed. She said the computer was done crunching the numbers and she was needed back in Ops. I should make myself at home, they would send someone around with some food soon. I grabbed the clothing they sent for me, and I went into the bathroom. It had this shower straight out of a plumber’s
nightmare, with six heads, two wands and a rain shower as big as the shower stall. The shower was large like it was built for two, but more on that later. I took a long hot shower. The water pressure was strong enough to nearly peel my skin off, and it remained hot the entire time. I got dressed, noting how they didn’t give me any underwear and came out of the bathroom to find a cart filled with fresh fruit, crescents, muffins, coffee, and orange juice. I checked the clock, it was maybe 2am which was close enough to breakfast, I suppose. Unlike the coffee from before this coffee was beyond great. In fact, everything was great. The general in charge of this base had a personal pastry chef, and it showed in the selection of baked goods.

I turned on the TV to see the news. After some searching, I found MSNBC, but all they were playing were infomercials. I guess 2am isn’t the time to find local news. I did find out we were in Kansas. This was the furthest west I had ever been. I said out loud, “I guess we’re not in Ohio anymore.” You’ll see why that’s important later. I searched around until I found a movie, Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid. It’s a Steve Martin classic where they took clips from older noir movies and added him reacting to those clips as if they were part of one story. OK, that description sucks but what do you want I’m not a film critic. About ten minutes into the movie, Diana came back. She slipped out of her shoes and slacks and into the bed next to me, wrapping her arms around me like we were a couple. She asked me what I was watching, but before I was finished describing the movie, she was asleep.

About four hours later, I woke to find Diana staring at me. No that wasn’t creepy at all, nope. She leaned in and kissed me with one of her hands slipping down until she found something that wasn’t my hand. She whispered, “don’t jump like I said before we need to act like we have a relationship.” I said OK and lightly pushed her back, opening her shirt and well like I said before, that’s our business. Just as things came to their conclusion, a phone rang. She let it ring so we could let things continue. Five minutes later, someone just walked into the room. We were finished, but neither of us was dressed. They pulled her off the bed and out the door wrapped in a sheet while another airman collected her clothes off the floor. There I was sitting in bed naked, uncovered, with the door open and two airmen standing by. It was now June 10th, ten hours before all hell broke loose.
Chapter Four

This is the part of the story where it gets strange, and yeah, I know it’s already strange but just wait it can get stranger, don’t you worry. I’m going to talk about a few things that the general public might not know. For many people that day they saw what became known as The Deer-Apocalypse, the day the deer tried to end humanity, but there’s more to the story…… much, much more. A member of our team was front and center for the first wave where he lost his entire community, but more on him later.

The soldiers guarding me, let me get dressed in the bathroom. I came out and found they had turned on the television and had the local news on. I wanted to say, “yeah just go ahead and make yourselves at home” when I saw the news. About an hour ago, a wave of deer launched a massive assault on small towns throughout the north from Maine to Washington state. Aerial shots of waves of deer moving like water or flocks of birds running people down and flowing into towns. The newscaster talked about the national guard being called out along with a warning to people to say inside and don’t go out shooting. To underscore this, they showed men in deer blinds shooting into the herd until their blinds are knocked down and the hunters are killed.

With my watchers watching the TV I stepped out thinking I would find a base in turmoil preparing for war, what I found was a profound silence. Men and women were watching any screen for signs of their hometowns and loved ones. The BBC was showing video of deer rolling through the UK countryside mowing people down while Aljazeera showed a deer herd of about twenty million deer going from southeastern Germany on its way east. I made my way to Goody’s lab, where I found him watching satellite shots of a massive deer herd going across China. He switched to deer crossing into North Korea running into landmines. It appeared that some landmines exploded before the deer were near them. Goody cleared the image and said the news had it wrong. In front of the wave of deer was a wave of rabbits. The rabbits were cannon fodder for the mines. He switched to an airport in Canada covered in Canada Geese.
A voice came up from behind us saying how the airports are all closed. We turned around and saw the general. He was out of uniform wearing almost the same outfit they gave me. He gave Goody a code to access the classified video from a cockpit of a jet as it tried to take off. I say tried because it was assaulted by geese. Tower video showed this happening to any plane as they tried. He said the President ordered the military to go out and deal with the deer, but they were ordered to keep working. A sergeant came into the room and whispered to the general. He looked at the sergeant then ordered Goody to bring up the cameras just outside the gate. The rows of corn were gone, trampled down by what had to be thousands of deer. They just stood there as if they were taking stock of the base or waiting for orders.

The general ordered the amperage on the fence turned up. Goody started to say that’s not how it works, but the look in the general’s eyes told him to just shut up. The general turned to me and handed me his sidearm a SIG Sauer M18. He was one of the first to get the new gun. He told me to get Diana and take her to the airfield. They would put as many people on the rooftops to keep the geese away while we evacuate. He turned to the sergeant and in an authoritative tone, ordered all non-military personnel to be evacuated from the base. I didn’t have any pockets, and I wasn’t going to put the gun in the top of my sweatpants, I’m dumb but not stupid, so I carried the gun holding the slide rather than the grip like a hammer.

I found Diana downloading her files into what looked like a plastic suitcase with a port on the side. She turned to me and said, “five more minutes.” I said something I just don’t remember what so let’s just say it was something smooth and or slick because I’m cool.……. OK, I said something stupid and just maybe a little cowardly, but she didn’t seem to notice. An airman came into the room, and Diana asked about her telescope. The airman said there was no way they could take it, but they would secure it in the bunker. Four minutes later, Diana unplugged the case and said she was ready to go. On the way out she told me I was holding the gun wrong. I said, “I don’t want to shoot my dick off.” She replied, “are you sure you could hit such a small target.” She smiled and kissed me whispering, “sorry, but you made that just too easy.”
We stepped out, and the mauling herd stopped as if they were looking for Diana. A sharp electrical sound came from the fence. Something small was striking the electrified fence, and with every shot, the lights dimmed. We ran for the airfield finding those big Blackhawk helicopters waiting for us. Along with the Blackhawks were a couple of Boeing CH-47 Chinooks. You know the large ones with the double rotors and a ramp in the back, and three Apache helicopters. I was told one of the Chinooks acted like a mobile command center for a drone army that was going to fly with us. Diana and I got into a Blackhawk along with Goody and a few other people I hadn’t met yet. Over the radio, an order from what had to be the president came out telling the General to evacuate with the civilians. We waited for him. Ten minutes later, five men came around the corner, almost dragging the general with them.

The air seemed to shift before the rotors started. The soldiers on the rooftops opened fire, and geese started to fall from the sky. To the west, either the deer or the rabbits found the landmines we didn’t have because that would be wrong, and the fur started to fly. The lights surged as deer pushed against the fence. A few of the deer seemed to explode, and the fence gave way. The deer swarmed in as we took off. The general ordered the doors open, and along with the crew, he opened fire on the surging deer. Four or five slick black drones flew past us, sweeping the skies of geese. Within twenty minutes the deer owned the base. Another of the Blackhawks picked up the soldiers off the rooftops, and we were off to the northeast. The general said we were going to Wright-Patterson Airforce base in Ohio. He said the base was able to hold their own against the deer and was secure enough for Diana to continue her work.

The drones, along with the Apache, kept the skies clear of geese along with anything else that happened to fly too close. We were told we would have to land and refuel at a nearby airport. The Apache would clear the runway and take turns flying overhead and refueling while we landed and refueled. The drones would be flown until they ran out. An airman said the drones had enough fuel to fly for days. The small airport was covered in the bodies of deer and people. Mixed in the carnage were the bodies of geese, rabbits, and squirrels. We refueled and took off just as a wave of deer approached. One of the Apache couldn’t refuel, but the pilot said they should make it all the way on what they had. The pilot fired a Hellfire missile striking the
refueling station taking most of the airport as well as many of the charging deer in a fireball that was so big it left a mushroom cloud overhead.

The geese assault increased the further north we went. One by one we lost our drones until the last one went down into the Ohio River near Cincinnati. The operators were able to take control of some more drones from the airbase. Word came out over the radio that the Apache that couldn’t refuel was out and landing in The Red’s Great American Ball Park stadium. They would do their best to make it to Wright-Patterson. They landed, and we watched as they were overrun, not by animals but by people wanting someone to blame. We left them to their own fate, knowing we owed our lives to them. Diana put her arms around me and buried her face into the nape of my neck, crying. Goody later told me it was the first time our fake relationship looked real. Not long after we made it to the base.

When we touched down, they took Goody and Diana away while I was taken to a jail cell. I was told that until they could learn more about me, I was a security risk and would remain in the cell. Next to my cell was a reporter for some newspaper in Dayton, whose name I don’t remember. He had tried entering the base for more information on UFOs. Yeah, UFOs. I told him about the deer, and he didn’t believe me saying he thought I was a plant working for Big Brother to learn everything he knows. I would say that ended the conversation, but he wouldn’t shut up. He talked about the one-world government, Illuminati, Masons, and something about lizard people in the highest parts of our government. I closed my eyes, and he screamed. I was hibernating because the cells were cold. I did my best mix of Cobra Commander from the GI-Joe cartoon lisp mixed with Hannibal from The Silence of the lambs saying, “and I’ll eat the eyes right out of your head with a Pinot Noir.” That shut him up.

He remained silent for about an hour until something crossed his mind, and he started to sing…… out loud. He started with some music I just don’t know then what I think is Lady Gaga as well as some other music, all of which was off tune. I just wished they had left the gun with me. After a few hours or was it a few days I’m not sure, the door opened, and two airmen pulled
me out by my arms and almost carried me down a hallway. I remember at the time I didn’t care if I was going to that me-shaped hole just as long as it meant I didn’t have to hear any more singing. Instead, they brought me to the general. It comes to my mind right now that I never said the general’s name and I swear to god this is his name. Major General Jessie James Jackson. His father’s name was James, and his mother’s name was Jessica with no connection to the famous outlaw unless he spent some time in Jamaica. His men called him The General even when he’s not around. The General was the highest-ranked officer on the base with the base commander missing and presumed dead.

The general stood by a window staring out at all the activity on the base. He didn’t turn as I was tossed into the room. He said, “my grandfather fought in the battle of the bulge, my father was in Saigon during the Tet offensive, and I don’t care what people say we won that battle. Then there was me, I lost my post to a herd of deer. A herd of fucking deer.” I almost said, and rabbits but something in the back of my head told me to shut up. Thank you, invisible voice in my head. He turned back to me with a smile that didn’t quite look real. He said I was free to go, or I could stay and help Diana with anything she needs. He also said, “we know your relationship with her was a crock she made up to save your life. With all that’s happening, we’re going to let that slide. Too many people died today. So, will you stay?”
Chapter Five

See yea, General…… I wonder what would have happened if I had said that and ran for the door. Now, I’m not some narcissist that thinks the world would have ended if I hadn’t been there, but I think at the very least someone else would have been in that chair and just maybe it would have been someone a little less……let’s say self-preserving. Yes, I ran instead of waiting to see if the shot hit the target. I knew there would only be one shot and either it hit, and the building fell in or it missed, and they level the weapon. Self-preservation can be seen as cowardly, but that is something usually said by the people outside of the events. You might call them Monday morning Armageddonist. Are you getting this? Sorry.

I told the General I would stay, but I had a few conditions. First and most importantly, I was not going back to that cell. If I was in on all this, then I was in and not just a convenience tool to be locked away when not in use. He told me he would do whatever he needs to do to save us all, including locking me in the same cell with that reporter if necessary. He then handed me a keycard that would grant me access to Diana’s lab as well as a room set aside for us. Yes, us as in he thinks that we should keep up our pretend relationship. Looking back on it I wonder why I didn’t say anything……… No, I know why I just don’t think I can say it. I’m never going to see her again and if I have regrets that would be at or near the top. I know she got out, I made sure she did.

I stepped out of the General’s office to find my tour guides were gone. At first, that felt great until I realized I had no idea where Diana’s lab was. This base was huge, and I was kind of lost. I stepped out of the General’s building to find Goody sitting behind the wheel of a black Humvee. He was leaning back in the seat with a baseball cap on turned backward and a pair of Ray-ban sunglasses on. He asked, “so am I taking you to the gate or the girl?” I asked him if he had ever heard the Weird Al song, White and Nerdy. I think he understood. He took the hat off and sat up. I got on the other side and said, “the girl.” He leaned over with a smile and said, “OK, but I think you might have to drive. I have no idea how to drive this thing. I mean how many gearshifts do you need and where’s the start button?”
Twenty minutes later, we were on our way. Why twenty minutes? I spent fifteen minutes trying to put the Humvee in gear and five minutes looking for an airman to drive us to where we needed to go. Goody and I sat in the back as Airman or should it be Airwoman, or does it matter Jordon drove us over to the warehouse of a lab they gave Diana. I felt kind of useless while Goody just enjoyed the ride. At some point when we were waiting for traffic to clear Goody asked me, “so, are you going to tell her they know or not?” He and I got out, and the Air-person took the Humvee, which was for the best. I had no answer because I didn’t know what I was going to do.

Inside I saw her. Let me say that again, I saw her there at her standing desk staring at her laptop. Sitting here typing this, I can see her in my mind on that day just before she saw me. I hope I didn’t hurt her with how all this ended. Unlike most movies, I never promised I would be coming back. The mission was more important than her or me, but more on that later. Diana turned around and saw me. She looked weary. The General tasked her with the impossible job of rebuilding her life’s work in less than a month. She walked over to me and…… well…… we kissed like before I knew everyone knew. The thought of not saying anything came across my mind again. She whispered, “good job, it’s like we’re a couple.” For some reason, what she said hurt. I knew then we couldn’t keep going like this, our lie was becoming my lie, and she deserved better.

I told Diana what the General said and how he didn’t care. She backed a little away looking at the floor then the door. She asked if I was staying, then she said I shouldn’t stay just in case the General changed his mind, and to add to the confusion, she said I should stay with no reason. In a very Bogart, Bacall maneuver, I put my hand just below her chin and lightly lifted her head. I said, “I’m not going anywhere without you.” We connected with our eyes and stared for what felt like forever before she broke out in laughter. I was cool for maybe ten seconds. She kissed me again and whispered, “yeah, I already knew. I liked having something with another person, even if it was based on a lie.” Diana told me how she had a hard time being taken
seriously as a scientist and romantically as a woman. She said, “*some think I’m too hot to be smart and too smart to be hot.*” I didn’t know what to say. She was the kind of woman I would have never approached being both hot and smart.

With everything up in the air, Diana went about talking on what she needed to do. Her first telescope took her most of her life to build, but she did that on her own both physically and financially. The General found her twenty of the best engineers he could find on such short notice. While she called this a telescope, it didn’t have any lenses. It somehow used radiation and radio waves in a science thing that as a delivery driver, I just don’t understand. A component of her device needed to be grown. Some sort of crystal that would take two weeks. She hoped they would have most of it ready when the crystal thingy was grown. I kept my mouth shut and let her talk. From what I could tell while the others would take her orders, none of them would talk to her, and she needed someone to listen. I needed and energy drink, but we can’t always get what we want.

If I remember right and this part of my story is just like that an “I think it went this way” kind of memory, Diana needed to do some coding and watching someone type is less than thrilling. I was also a distraction to her. Goody wanted a distraction after losing contact with his most current wife, and that was what he called her his current wife, so he found one of those four-wheel Jeep replicas, and we took a tour of the fence. I guess I should mention he only needed his coke-bottle glasses to read, but the glasses took away from that whole Marty Feldman thing in his face. He knew this, so he wore those Ray-Ban sunglasses to keep people from staring. We passed a couple of men digging a hole near the fence. Just outside to the south, a team of men was planting what Goody called Smart Mines. A type of mine that can be operated by remote and shielded so they can’t chain react when one goes off unless they detect a reason. They would plant the mines then active them when they were done.

We went to the western gate to find it open and unmanned. Inside the guardhouse, we found a guard that looked like he was mauled by something small. The strange thing was it
looked like he just sat there as whatever it was, killed him. Goody hit the gate alert as I turned the key and closed the gate. Within two minutes, we were surrounded by armed, angry men. The first officer on the scene ordered a search of the surrounding area for the missing men. Three Humvees went outside of the gate and separated. As we stood there waiting for the General, the two men digging that hole showed up shovels in hand. The officer asked them what they were doing when they struck him with their shovels. Before they could be stopped, they had beaten the officer to death. I didn’t know his name or rank, and I feel bad. I never took the time to learn anything about him. Goody ordered the two men sent to his lab. As they were taken away, the General showed up, and we were ordered off the crime scene.

Goody and I took the long way going around the fence going north on the east side. As we drove, we saw a kid on a dirt bike, and he seemed to be following us. He had a rifle in one of those saddle scabbard holster things on the bike as well as a backpack. Behind him were a heard of deer slowly getting closer and what looked like squirrels on the back of some of the deer. The kid's name was James, but most people, including me, called him Jimmy. He had something he found on the road that would change everything, and the deer wanted it back. At the time we didn’t know any of that all we knew was this kid was in trouble and heading for a freshly planted minefield. The alarm went off, and the sound spooked the deer, or that is it spooked most of the deer. Some of the deer ran away while the more robotic deer sped up. The mines were turned off as a group of soldiers opened fire on the deer while letting Jimmy inside.

A soldier clotheslined Jimmy off his bike. The bike kept going for about twenty feet until it fell over. Jimmy hit the thing in the bag on the back of his head and was knocked out. Goody said to the soldier, “good job, dumbass.” A guard searched Jimmy taking anything that looked like a weapon. I mean everything, they took a pen he had in a pocket. The guard opened the backpack and said Goody should see this thing. It was a six-sided box about a foot across from any side, about nine inches thick and made from what felt like a black stone. The center of what must have been the front of the box had a matching silver hexagon. I remember all this because Goody kept repeating it for the next four hours as I helped him catalog everything about the box.
There was a strange electrical reading. It seemed to hum giving off a measurable ultrasonic sound.

As we studied or he studied, and I stared at the box, a strange sound came from outside than an explosion. Goody looked at me, and I got the hint went out to the lobby of his lab. Have any of you ever played the old Nintendo game Duck Hunt? The outside looked like what the backside of that game would be like if you had a chain gun, and the dog never cleaned up after each round. Yes, I know they where ducks and these were geese but there where geese-chunks everywhere, and more geese in the air. I mean hundreds of geese. Goody dropped the box, and the humming stopped. When it stopped the remaining geese dispersed. Somehow the box was either controlling or influencing the geese.

I left Goody to geek out over the box and all the fresh geese guts and went from his lab back to Diana’s lab. I passed a woman that could have been Felicia Day’s clone with long straight black hair. She smiled at me as we passed each other and that thought went through my mind wondering just how a man like Goody could get such a beautiful looking woman. Looking back on my judgmental attitude, I was acting like an asshole judging both on their looks. I mean I’m no Brad Pitt or Ryan Reynolds who am I to judge. Later that night she said they met online and she fell in love with his mind long before ever seeing him. Also, she said he was great in bed, which is something I could have lived without knowing. But something important happened, and I’m getting ahead of my story.

The rooms we were staying in had a common room with the only television in the building. The cable news networks were all down as were all social networks. I first thought about all those people staring desperately into their dead phones until I realized most of those people are probably dead. On a coffee table in the middle of the room, there was almost every kind of alcohol you could think of. A refrigerator nearby was filled with many varieties of beer and soda. Most of the hard liquor was confiscated from airmen over the last three months. I wasn’t much of a drinker…. Here is where I pause to open a bottle of Wild Turkey and drink
right from the bottle, now back to the story. I poured a little of some clear liquor into a glass with some sort of cherry soda with ice.

The TV was off, and I was enjoying the quiet when Goody came into the room. He poured a can of beer into a tall glass then he filled it the rest of the way with tequila. His wife came in and poured herself an entire glass of vodka with no ice. She finally spoke, and to my surprise, she had a Scottish accent. She said her name was Doctor Sophie Laird, and she was a medical doctor working for the World Health Organization or WHO. She came in and sat next to Goody on a couch stretching out with her head on his arm and her free hand in his lap. Yeah, I was thinking about leaving.

I looked at the drink I made, and after thinking about it, I dumped it in the sink and pulled a diet Coke. Of all the people on the base, I am the one with no real value, so just maybe getting drunk was a bad idea. We sat there in silence until the booze started to work on Sophie. She started to talk about how she and Goody met and their work together. She also spent way too much time talking about how good Goody was in bed. A door opened, and Diana came in. She first passed us until she saw me sitting there. She took a Diet A&W from the fridge and sat next to me on a seat built for either one or two people that know each other well. She would later tell me she didn’t drink while she was working. We sat there entwined with Goody and Sophie staring at us. No, not creepy at all, nope. To add to the creepy, Goody told us he had erased all the footage of us as he put it going at it. The look Sophie had on her face said something different, like that night they would review that footage again.

Sophie said she thought we would separate just as soon as we knew that everyone knew. I didn’t know how I felt. It had been about six days or so since we met, but Diana already had an answer. She told them it didn’t matter whatever comes next will come, right now we have this, and it’s good. Looking back on it I think I would have added something, but I just don’t know what. The General came past the common room and to a door. Goody said, “and now for a show.” The General came out with a half-dressed teenage girl pulling her away by the arm while
saying something about her mother, and she was in deep trouble. Jimmy came out of the same room in a pair of sweatpants and a tank top. He had this canary-eating cat look on his face. It was clear what just happened. He opened a soda of some kind and sat down. I said, “so the general has a daughter.” He just looked at me until Goody and Sophie started to laugh.

We sat there in silence until I realized Diana was asleep. Jimmy slipped away looking at Goody and Sophie who had moved from simple touching to something I just won’t put here…… or try and think about ever again. Diana didn’t want to go to bed. She was waiting for a test to finish, and that test would guide her work from there. Goody and Sophie finally went to their room, and I mean finally. It was like watching a network TV version of softcore porn, dirty but still within the boundaries of broadcasting standards. While we slept, the General sent some men to recon Columbus as well as rescue this man Jimmy met along with the people he was protecting.

The General came into the room and sat down in front of the table of booze pouring what he called three fingers of bourbon. He downed it in one go then poured another. He told me that the men were back, and it wasn’t good. Jimmy was right, and Columbus was under the control of someone other than the feds. The house the boy described was burned down to the studs with a few charred remains inside. He said, “it’s like people were ready for this. Somehow they knew it was going to happen and were ready.” The way Jimmy described how the other animals acted around the box made me think. I said, or I think I said, “maybe like the animals, some people can fall under the influence of those boxes……. That would fit some of the things we saw like how that guard just lay there after opening the gate and let the tree rats eat him, or the men digging the hole…… the ones that killed that officer.”

The General said I should stick with sticking it to Diana and leave the speculation to those that know what they are talking about. I know that sounds mean, but all he was saying was that speculation without facts was dangerous. A military man wants the facts, not speculation. Diana spoke up, saying she thought I might be right, and they should test this with those men in
lockup. The General took another drink. He said, “that will be difficult. Private Drake killed Private Stann then he killed himself by biting his wrist open. No, he nearly bit his own hand off.” Diana got up and kissed my cheek. She said she was going to go see the bodies. Along the way, she stopped and knocked on Goody and Sophie’s door telling Sophie about the bodies and how they should do an autopsy. I looked at the General who was looking at Jimmy’s door with this look that only a father who found his teenage daughter with a teenage boy could have. Luckily, he didn’t see Jenny peak around the corner. She was on her way to see Jimmy until she saw him. I just shook my head no.
Chapter Six

The lights keep coming on than going out. From what I can tell, I’m in some sort of control room. Most of the controls seem to be from NASA back in the 1960s. Long dead monitors and a glaze of yellow and brown over everything with the delightful smell of fifty-year-old smoke. In the back of this museum piece was the computer setup I found and using to make this message. The General said they had a backup control system just in case the main was destroyed. It’s a strange dichotomy of old dirty tech and the gleaming new. Maybe it’s just the alcohol talking. Speaking of that, I think I need to see if I can find a bathroom or I don’t know a bucket. OK, I just found a lime-green toilet in a yellow daisy room. The good news is the toilet works, and the walls were so bright I didn’t need a light to see.

I can’t say I remember much about the next few days. Watching paint dry or grass grow is as about as exciting as watching people do research. I spent those days sitting there and waiting for something to do. As bad as it was for me, Jimmy found the waiting to be murder. Against all logic, the General told Jimmy what his men found back in Columbus. Now I know he wasn’t stupid, and he knew if he stayed, he would also be dead, but knowing, and understanding are two different things. The General gave Jimmy his rifle back, and he promised to show him how to shoot. Jimmy told him his sniper father was instructing him from the age of…… um, I don’t remember the age, but it was young. Seeing an opportunity to take Jimmy’s mind off the end of the world, I asked him to show me how to shoot.

The General gave me a rifle so old it had to be from before World War One. Jimmy told me it was a Springfield M1903, and yes, it was older than the words World War or at least before those words were put together. This was about the time I learned that a magazine was the detachable box that holds ammunition while a clip holds ammunition together so they can be loaded into the rifle. Apart from the M1 Garand, most clips are just used to load and are tossed away while a magazine stays attached, feeding the ammunition into the gun or rifle. So there’s that bit of info.
We were on an outdoor range, and I know that sound stupid, but everyone was armed. He showed me how to adjust the iron sights and aim for distance. I loaded the gun, took aim, and disengaged the safety because while I’m stupid, I’m not that stupid and fired. Jimmy told me he had no idea where the shot went. I aimed and pulled the trigger and nothing because it’s a bolt-action gun and needs the next round loaded using the bolt. My next shot hit right in the middle of the target next to mine. The airman whose target I hit wasn’t thrilled with my aim and said so in words to that effect. I tried again, and by the time my ammo was exhausted, I was hitting near the center on my own target.

The guy next to us was laughing, saying how I needed a ten-year-old to show me how to shoot. Jimmy, defending his age, said he wasn’t ten he was fourteen. This just made the man laugh harder. I said, “say…… I bet this young man can outshoot you.” He replied, saying something about what would he win. I said, “if he wins, you shut the fuck up, if you win, you shut the fuck up.” Yes, I know I only remember our parts of the conversation. Jimmy said, “if you win, I’ll give you my rifle. When we win, you have to take us to the armory and let us build him a rifle that will suit his needs.” The airman said something about how they didn’t have a magic gun, but he liked Jimmy’s rifle, and the bet was on. Now I’m going to skip past how Jimmy schooled this fool but let me just say it was epic and he was deflated.

I ended up with an M4 carbine with a vertical handgrip, a red dot sight, and a suppressor. Jimmy told me I should leave the sniping to my strange quips and let the shooting be done by people who know-how. Nice. We also liberated a few handguns with accompanying magazines. Later, when the General saw what he called my rig, he just said a good job…… to Jimmy. The handguns were the newly issued Sig Sauer P320, also known as M18, and I only remember that because I still have both guns here with me. Jimmy was right, the smaller size and lighter weight along with the suppressor and grip made this a good rifle for me. I kept the rifle on safe and would only use it in semi-automatic or three-round bursts staying away from full auto because that is just a waste of ammo.
Three more days went by with nothing. Jimmy, the general’s daughter Jenny and another airman and I were playing cards when Sophie came in and told us Jimmy was right. Most of the deer were some sort of clones. It was unclear why at the time but from what I know now the alien probes sent to turn our own wildlife against us failed to educate the animals in enough time, so they turned to clone deer that were controllable enough to use as weapons. She figured the robotic deer were to be the generals leading the charge while the real deer would be cannon fodder. The airman chuckled over the idea of a general leading a charge. Sophie said how she thinks the aliens designed a protein in the clone deer’s DNA to act as a poison. She said she would have to do further tests, but she thought this protein was designed to only work with human DNA.

The airman left to go back to his patrol, and the two kids went into Jimmy’s room to do something that was none of my business. I sat down in front of the TV, staring at nothing when a news broadcast came on. The Armed Services Network came on with what looked like a news broadcast. The show looked a little more like one of those radio-based news shows with cameras in the studio, but it was something. That something was just simply horrifying. The program talked about whole cities being gone, millions of people were dead in America and just maybe billions across the world. Whole countries in Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa were gone. A General ordered the firebombing of cities to try and stop the deer causing more death when a few secure cities were bombed.

I turned and saw both Jimmy and Jenny staring out his open door. She was in his shirt and nothing else. She looked at me, looked down, and slipped back into the room. A minute or two later, they came out and joined me in watching how much of the world was gone. It was about this time when the newscasters mentioned the information from Wright-Patterson and Major General Jessie James Jackson was helping to save lives. A banner running along the bottom told people to not eat the deer. Some video showed communities filled with the dead after eating the deer. They also had video of both the boxes and the spheres. Another video confirmed what Sophie thought. It showed a sphere scanning a deer as a copy of that deer materialized next to it, then another and another.
Video from the international space station showed the spheres moving into orbit. They showed how the spheres moved in on the satellites attaching themselves to them. The last image was one of the spheres approaching the station. This was about the time the image started to break up. They speculated that the spheres were taking control of the satellite networks. The last thing said was, “*God help us all.*” I turned and saw the nearly empty room was now filled with people, most of whom were stunned into disbelief like it wasn’t real until they saw it on TV. The image was gone and would possibly never come back. I turned just in time to see Jimmy and Jenny disappear back into his room. My first thought was of Diana. She was in her lab and was most likely unaware of what just happened.

Of all the images stuck in my warped head, I think what I found in Diana’s lab will be one of the best. I didn’t want to interrupt her with bad news. There is a hallway of windows running alongside her lab, letting her see out and others to see in. As I passed this view, I saw her dancing around to music. The walls and glass are soundproof, and it was hard to know what she was dancing to. That is until you got near the door, and the sounds of AC/DC’s Dirty Deeds bled through the door jam. She told me she found a best of cd and was blasting it as loud as she could trying to stay awake, but she seemed to know the words, so her story seemed off just a bit. I didn’t want to ruin this moment for her, and god help me. I didn’t want to let this opportunity slip by. We started to kiss and do a little more when I mentioned the windows. She said, “*so what it’s not like they haven’t already seen this before.*” Not knowing I was going to say it, I’m pretty sure I said, “*God, I love you.*” She looked at me, not saying a word. I think our show went on unnoticed, I think.

We lay in our room watching a recorded video of the broadcast on her laptop. She grew mad when she found out the General had contact with the outside world. I wasn’t a part of the conversations she had with the General asking about contacting other scientists or just the outside world and him saying they needed to keep their project safe and secret. I knew I couldn’t stop her from going to the General, but I hoped I could convince her to do it away from his
soldiers. I remember saying how going against the chain of command might force him to do something to establish him as the person in charge. It was late at night, and I think she started to see confronting him wouldn’t change anything, and just maybe it was something I said. No, I think she just saw it wouldn’t end well. Before we went to sleep that night, I’m sure I heard her whisper, “I love you too,” but I might just be drunk.

The next day a soldier came and got Diana. I found out later that night she was brought to the General and given access to a special network set aside for the military so she could speak with other scientists in other military bases across the country. I came out to find the General sitting on the couch with his daughter. She was dressed in a man’s long-sleeve button-down shirt and only the shirt. I know this because she was hugging him, and her ass was hanging out the back. She got up and went back to Jimmy’s room. It was left unsaid and unasked because I’m not stupid, but the General basically gave his consent to his daughter to live with Jimmy. He looked to the now-closed door, and I swear he sighed. If it had been my daughter, I would be through that door dragging her out and away from the dead boy I just killed, but that’s just me.

I went to bed and lay there sleeping, or I think I was sleeping for an unknown time. I only remember this part because it was the first time I remember ever seeing Diana break. She came into the room, changed her clothes, and got into bed. She didn’t say a word at first, but I could tell there was something wrong. No, I don’t have Spidey-sense and let’s just say my ability to read women is underdeveloped. She had been crying, and it showed. I could tell she didn’t want me to ask or maybe I didn’t want to ask, and I was projecting my selfishness on to her, or maybe it was something bad. As it turned out, it was both. She rolled over, and I moved in, putting my arm around her. I didn’t say a word I just held her until she started to talk.

Diana was on a video conference with a scientist she knew at Los Alamos the place they built the atomic bombs if I remember my John Cusack movies right. She called the other scientist Hasty. I would find out later when I spoke to Goody, she was Doctor Helena Speck, but they called her Hasty as a joke because she was slow in everything from her speak to her
mannerisms. Hasty liked her nickname and didn’t mind when her friends used it. Diana was running scans on the box sending data to Hasty and a few other linked scientists. Diana said they had some new findings, but she didn’t elaborate proving once again that there was a need-to-know list and I wasn’t on it. Well, at least I’m not on a list of people to make go away. After some silence, Diana said they were all gone. As she spoke with Hasty, she could hear they were under assault, and just before the picture pixelated, she saw deer bashing their way into Hasty’s lab. She tried to find others in the service, but every other site was disconnected. She told me she felt like we were truly alone, and this was the end. Even if we could somehow stop all this, we could never go back to what we had before. This was the end.

I was about to say something epic that would change her outlook and help her find a new purpose in life when we both heard a sound. A thumping sound that was all too familiar. The lights flickered as more of those thumping sounds happened. We quickly got dressed and went into the common room. I grabbed my new rifle. We met up with Goody and Sophie, along with Jimmy and Jenny. Soldiers ran back and forth with guns. One had a fire ax. The big window in the common room told the story. The morning sky was filled with geese, and the fences were electrified with the smoking remains of deer. Wave after wave moved in setting off mines and striking the fence. An Apache helicopter tried to take off, but it was assaulted with suicidal geese forcing it down. The geese controlled the air.

I gave Diana my handgun, and we planned our way to her lab when an explosion rocked shaking the ground. Hers and Goody’s labs were gone, just piles of timber spread across the ground. A wave of deer came around the corner face-to-face with airmen who tried to stop them, but it was like trying to stop a wave from hitting the beach with a pellet gun. The animal wave turned to us. We ran for the stairs blocking them as we went up hoping the deer couldn’t find a way past. The top floor had bars on the windows. The General was adding the bars after the geese attack, but the lower floors were unfinished. Another explosion rocked the building. Geese were bashing into the bars but not making it past them. All we could see for miles were wave after wave of geese and deer.
A long thin object came from the west traveling fast. It struck the deer exploding sending fiery death and deer chunks across the quad. The deer shifted away from the flames. Another missile struck then another. A fourth missile hit a garage filled with diesel fuel. The flames and fuel became like napalm as flaming deer, both real and robotic ran from the camp. The wave of geese shifted away from the base and to the east. As they cleared a flame shot out from the other side of a building, then another. Four men with flamethrowers came out shooting flames into the deer. The smell was horrendous. About fifteen minutes after the attack started, it was over. The fence was gone along with most of the soldiers. All that was left was fire, rubble, and death.

One of the torch bearers lifted his mask. It was the General. He waved us down. We had to use a fire escape because like the deer we couldn’t get past our barricade. He put his fire out and let his torch off his back. Jenny ran and hugged her father. To all our surprises, the General waved Jimmy over and added him to their hug. He said something to them, and they went into the building the General came from with his flamethrower. We would find out later the General was working on a project and he was sending Jimmy and Jenny along with a protective guard to that project. Partially to be safe and partially to make sure it was finished. The General took off the flame-resistant suit and gave it to an airman who put it on and went to the southern gate to clear a way for the kids.

The General told Diana and me that we did all we could and if we wanted, we could step away from the war and find a place to wait it out. Before I could speak, Diana told him the war wasn’t over, and we were a part of it. She said she still had her original prototype in a warehouse in Akron, Ohio and we were going to go and get it running. My first thought was, “we?” He said there was a backup plan, but if we wanted to do this, he would help as much as he could, but we would be on our own. Just a couple of hundred miles between us and there, oh yeah and millions of animals who wanted us dead. What could go wrong?
Chapter Seven

I don’t know if I believe in love at first sight, I don’t know if I don’t believe it. I remember hearing from somewhere that all that we know is distorted by our memories. Our minds want to believe in something so our minds change our memories so we can know what we want to know changing events to suit our personal narrative. In this way hindsight isn’t 20/20 and looking back we only see what we want to see. I remember the first time I fell in love, and it was at first sight. I don’t know if it was love or something else. I was young, so I don’t think it was lust, but over time, my mind made it into something more. All that I know is that she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen but let me start at the beginning.

Going back before my father died, my parents would take a week off in the summer to take a family vacation to Cleveland. Yes, you read that right, Cleveland, Ohio. We would spend a day going to the museums, a day on the lake going from island to island fishing for walleye, a day at the Cleveland Zoo, but best of all we would go to Sandusky. To anyone that loves a good rollercoaster, Sandusky Ohio is where the amusement park Cedar Point is located. We would spend two days in the park. At night we would either camp nearby or like one year we slept in a van my dad borrowed. When dad died, we kept going to Cleveland just cutting the trip to four days and skipping the island-hopping fishing day.

I don’t remember how old or young I was. My memory of that time changed what happened so much that it could have been when dad was still alive or years after his death, but it was before I saw girls in that way. I remember walking around, looking for a new ride. Back then, newer was better, and I wanted the newest in everything. Over in the distance, I saw her. She was about my age, I think, with strawberry blonde hair and the palest blue eyes I had ever seen in a human. Her eyes seemed to glow. This is where my memory fucks with me because I am not sure about the rest of her. In parts she looks all curvy and just wow, and in others she is just a little girl as I was just a little boy, but I just don’t know what to know……… you know? If there was something that I know was real, it would be her eyes, she had mesmerizing eyes. I
remember thinking about how I can see why people kissed like I didn’t understand the concept before seeing her.

Like a stalker, I followed her around with her friends as they went from ride to ride. They laughed and carried on like I wasn’t there, and to them, I wasn’t. I never got close enough to get her name or god forbid, talk to her. In my faulty memory, she looked directly at me and smiled a smile that straightened every short hair I had, but I’m not sure just how factual that memory is. Memories are a funny thing. In my head we talked, then when I got a little older, we kissed and just before it was time to let go of childish things, we did more than kiss, but none of that happened. What happened was I followed a girl around too afraid to talk to her. Somehow, I got off-topic.

Diana and I searched around a motor pool looking for the perfect vehicle. Something we both could drive that would go off the road if the need arose. In the parking lot, we found a new Jeep Wrangler with a special off-road package, including the snorkel. A quick search in the base records showed who owned the Jeep and we found her body, well parts of her body near the motor pool. Diana stayed behind to pack the Jeep while I went for the airman’s keys. It felt all kinds of wrong being in this dead woman’s room searching her stuff. She had a picture of herself in a dress uniform with two stern-looking people that had to be her parents. I wondered who outlived who, were they still alive in hiding wondering if she was ok, or did she die never knowing they beat her to the grave? After I got my head out of my ass, I found the keys and left.

The General never said what he was going to do, and we didn’t ask. Diana grabbed some MREs, water bottles and a S.A.W. a squad automatic rifle. Yes, a machinegun. How many women do you know place a machinegun ahead of blankets and or other basic needs when planning a trip? My memory tells me I was in love with her from first sight, but I know that isn’t the case. I was doing my usual head up my ass day thinking about something else when I dropped off her package. My only thought about her would have been to just try and not act like a spaz around her and get away as soon as I could, but now typing this I seem to not be able to
think of a time where I can see her face and not be in love with her. She packed a grenade launcher and three mini-drones. The trip to Akron was about one-hundred and ninety-three miles, but that would take us into enemy territory, there was a lot of deer in Ohio. Before we left, we went into the stores and changed into military gear from a sort of uniform to what had to be the best pair of boots I had ever put on my feet. I remember these movies that talked about Army boots as being the worst, but these felt like a second skin wrapping around my ankles, giving them a strength, I never felt in my feet. I am wearing those boots now and who knows maybe in a couple of hundred years when someone digs this place up, they will find them wrapped around my bones.

We tried to stay off the roads as much as possible while also avoiding any woodland areas. We wanted to see if any deer or anything else was coming. The Jeep was new and good on gas, which surprised us both. About twenty miles away from the base, we found a mass of squirrels. They covered the road just standing there surrounding what looked like a broken robotic squirrel toy. The squirrels just stood there, staring at the broken thing like they were waiting for something that I hope would never come. We gave the squirrels a wide berth and were on our way to Akron. I remember this theory Goody had about the squirrels not being able to retain their gained mental factors so they and other smaller animals would need the robots to act like an external hard drive guiding them while maintaining their newfound intelligence. It sounded like a wild booze-filled theory at the time, but after seeing that, I knew he was right.

We turned northeast in the direction of Akron trying to bypass Columbus. The General was told that the city, along with a few other cities across the country had fallen into a sort of anarchy with a new government taking over. With no word from Washington or any sort of federal response, we were on our own. Columbus was being controlled by someone who was killing people they didn’t deem worthy of their protection. Jimmy suggested maybe Neo-Nazis because many of the dead were people of color. Jimmy didn’t like talking about what happened after he found out that an elderly African American that had helped him was killed by these people. It’s funny looking back on what we knew knowing we didn’t know shit.
Twenty miles away from Columbus, we picked up a tail. An Army style Humvee was following us. The morning was still dark, and it didn’t have its lights on so we couldn’t see the driver. We went another ten miles before it flashed its lights and we stopped. Diana slipped into the back, taking hold of the S.A.W. while trying to remain concealed. I got out and put my hands up, hoping to show we weren’t a threat. The driver-side door opened, and an African American man stepped out. He had to be in his seventies if not older, but he had a good stance and a steady walk. James asked, “you from Columbus or the Alien Army Base?” I was in a military uniform even though I wasn’t in the military. I said, “we’re from Wright-Patterson on our way to Akron.” Diana whispered, “why the fuck did you say where we’re going?”

I took a chance, “are you James Jones, Jimmy told us about you……. we thought you died in a fire…….. wait…….. Jim Jones?” James smiled and lowered the large revolver in his hand. He said most people called him Mr. Jim, and he remembered the boy as he was fond of calling Jimmy. I told him about How Jimmy found us and was now on his way to Atlanta. Mr. Jim spat on the ground and said, “fuck the Falcons and that cracker Turner.” Mr. Jim and a few others were on their way looking for a safe place to wait out the end of the world. Diana spoke up saying we were on our way to Akron and if he wanted, they could come with us. Mr. Jim jumped when she spoke, but he quickly recovered. He asked, “is it safe?” I said something I regret even though it was and is still accurate. I said, “it’s about as safe as anywhere else is.” Logic aside, we were better together, so he agreed to join us.

We drove for about two hours before finding a place where we could stop for a short rest. Mr. Jim had a mother with three children, one was not hers, a baby Jimmy found on his way to the base. The long car ride was hard on the small children. We set up a sort of camp in an abandoned factory with a thick, strong gate. I knew if another wave of deer came, we wouldn’t have a chance, but why worry about things you can’t change. In a three-story open part of the plant, we built a fire using broken furniture and company files. The plant was a victim of the times, a once-great rubber company that had moved to another country to escape labor costs. The
factory was stripped of anything valuable and was now just an empty shell filled with the ghosts of the past and the smell of curing rubber. Mr. Jim told us about how they were almost dead when two dogs came out of nowhere and saved them. He said he was certain one of the dogs had spoken to him saying in a sort of Scooby Do voice, “good luck.” Talking dogs sounded a little crazy but, I’ll get back to that soon.

We planned to travel at night using the night vision goggles Mr. Jim found in his Humvee. We were close to Akron just on the outskirts of Canton, but we didn’t want to take any chances. Mr. Jim had with him a young couple named Hector and Belinda Gomez and a nurse from Columbus named Li Hu. She was a naturalized citizen from China. She joined us in the Jeep to get away from the kids. Don’t get me wrong, she didn’t hate children, she just didn’t want to be in such a small place with three crying children. Li told us about how she was in line trying to get back into Columbus when she saw two men pull an elderly Chinese man out of his car and hack him to death while screaming racist epitaphs at him. Knowing it wouldn’t end well for her, she had pulled her car over and snuck away from them, eventually finding Mr. Jim.

We drove past the Football Hall of Fame on our way out of what was left of Canton. Much of the city was gone with what looked like an aerial bombardment. Diana said it was an improvement, but I just posted that as the whole Canton vs. Akron rivalry bullshit and let it go bye. Around one in the morning, we were in Akron, Ohio. The town looked like it hadn’t been touched. The streets were empty, but it just looked like a town at night. The only thing that was wrong other than no people was the absence of power. No lights or signs of life. We didn’t see the drones following us or feel the snipers as they also followed our progress. We went down East Market to Main Street near the Orangerie Mall across from the Main Library.

To those that don’t know the Orangerie Mall is a mix of office and commercial spaces offering everything from food to a lawyer to help you sue after eating said food. All the doors and many of the windows were boarded up. The library was a mess of broken windows and plywood, but someone was taking care of it. This was about the time I saw the first of the drones. It was a
small consumer model with what looked like an AR-15 duct-taped to the bottom. Another one was about twenty feet in front of us. On the roof of the library was a person with a long gun. Looking it over we didn’t have a chance. The Humvee had a soft top and out Jeep was a civilian model. A hatch in the ground opened, and a man in full bomb disposal gear lumbered out and towards us. In between many of the buildings in Downtown Akron are a series of tunnels and bridges to make it easier to get around in the winter. The man in the suit said, “we mean you no harm unless you’re here to start something. Welcome to Akron.”

The man in the suit was named Mitchell Mann, but everyone called him Michelin. I remember it because he said his mother named him for the Michelin man because of their last name and how fat he was when he was born. Yeah, I know how nice was that? Great mother. Michelin was the official greeter to anyone that made it past their centuries. He didn’t say it at the time, but well I’ll talk about the people that didn’t make the cut a little later. He tried to disarm us, which seems to be a trend, and when we said no, the scene became a little tense. Taking a chance that I knew we had to, I told him where we were going. Some radio feedback came from Michelin’s suit. A voice said, “the two of you can keep going, but if the others want to stay, they are welcome. The old America and its armies are not welcome here.” I would say we weren’t in the military but looking at it I would have been wrong.

We just met Mr. Jim, and this would be the last time we ever saw him. He told us to tell Jimmy to keep his head down and to stay determined, a man on a mission. With the help of a few people, Michelin took the suit off. Underneath the suit, he was short, skinny and Filipino. He told us he would guide us to the warehouse. I say told because it was hinted at that we wouldn’t leave Main street alive without him, so yeah, he came with us. The entire two-mile drive he did nothing but talk, and when I say talk, I mean complain. His biggest complaint was about America and how he regretted leaving the Philippines. For some reason, he felt that all this happening was a direct result of our wicked ways, gay marriage, drugs, porn, and I swear he said, loose women. I could feel Diana’s anger grow as he talked.
When all hell broke loose with the deer then the geese many people fled to the library. When it was assaulted by the geese, they moved to the mall. When I say mall, I don’t mean the large shop 1980s type mall. The Orangerie Mall is more like a couple of office buildings connected by a few small shops in an open inside courtyard. A place where the office workers could get lunch without going out into the snow. Michelin worked as a night janitor and was on his way home when he said he saw military jets and yes, that’s how he described them, firebomb Second Street in the falls. For many people, Second Street in Cuyahoga Falls is their main street. People in this area use the falls to refer to Cuyahoga Falls even though there were many places in North East Ohio with falls in the name. Everything people know about the Falls is on or near Second Street. He was on his way to his third-floor walkup apartment when he saw a wall of flames engulf the city. When he came back to work, he found it filled with refugees. Together they set up the makeshift society or living arrangement that greeted us.

We passed a few cars with bodies. Michelin said how they weren’t welcome. One car had what looked like a family with children. Michelin grumbled something about Chinese aren’t welcome in his world. We made it to the warehouse, and to our surprise, it was still standing. We were out of range of his snipers as well as the drones. Oh yeah, the drones were fake. Someone taped toy guns to them to make people think they were armed. It was clear that Michelin was more concerned with the people than the deer. Looking back at the show The Walking Dead, I can see why he would think that. He said, “OK, here’s your warehouse, now get out of my Jeep and go.” Before I could say anything, Diana had her gun out and underneath his chin. She told him he should get to walking or she would shut him the fuck up. While I wanted to say the same thing, I didn’t want to lose any support from whatever was left of Akron.

Diana opened the door and reached for a light switch with no power. She took out a key and unlocked a backup power supply turning on the lights. As per our usual luck, the warehouse was empty. Whoever took her work not only took all the hardware, they also literally swept the place clean. We pulled the Jeep in and searched, but there was nothing. They even took the toilet paper from the bathroom. Thinking about what just happened, I suggested we should move. Michelin would most likely be back with some men to take the Jeep. With no reason to stay, we
should go. Part of me wanted to see what was left of the falls, another part wanted to just keep going. Diana was just lost. This was her last hope. We got into the Jeep and drove off. About a block away, we heard gunfire. I’m not sure, but I think Michelin was back with some backup and was storming the warehouse looking for the Jeep we never offered to him.

Diana fiddled with the radio until she got a hold of a soldier who connected her with the General. He told us the firebombing of a city like the Falls would never happen. We should try and get to either Cleveland or just start on our way south to Atlanta. We made our way into the falls when the way just open. There was nothing for miles. The entire city from Route Eight and out were ruins level with the ground. Even now, I can smell the smoke. The fire was so hot it melted cars in place. It was hard to tell where the streets were. From the Cuyahoga river out was nothing. We pulled over and took as many pictures as we could. Diana started to cry. She told me her family was in the Falls. She grew up here and knew this place well. Using the radio, we got a hold of the General and told him what we found. After some silence, he told us to stay away from Cleveland and just head south.

The trip south would take us through Akron again unless we take a detour. We would be visible to Michelin and his people for a part of that trip, but a detour would take us into unknown territory. The General said we should avoid populated areas and any questionable military. I didn’t know how we would know who was questionable, but I could tell he didn’t want too many questions. He had to cut off our communication, and he told us not to try and call for three days while he relocated his command. He sounded like he was in a hurry and what we didn’t know at the time was he was in a hurry, but more on that later.

We decided to just take a chance and take the Akron Audubon. A part of Route Eight mainly the part that runs through Akron on the way to its end at the central interchange was known for how people drove whatever speed they wanted including college students on their motorcycles. The sun was setting, and if we used the night vision goggles, we got from Mr. Jim we could make it through without being seen, so we waited for the sun to set then turn to night.
We made it through Akron, unnoticed, or so we thought. The sound of what we thought was a pebble hitting the side of the Jeep turned out to be a bullet striking the false, empty gas can on the back. The can was, in fact, a roadside assistance pack with a jack and sign that now had a bullet hole in them. We drove for about twenty minutes going slow until we got to Arlington road. Using this hand siphon Diana packed, we took some gas from an abandoned station near a car lot that had been destroyed by something. The Walmart down the street was on fire, and the Target was an empty shell. We packed for a possible long trip, but just in case we decided to ration out what we had. This turned out to be a good idea. Speaking of which, let me open another bottle. I think I’m starting to sober up.

Canton in the morning hours was heartbreaking. I liked to give grief to the town with all the Akron/Canton crap, and part of me had thought about how someone was using napalm to do some urban renewal, but nothing about what was left of Canton was funny. From an elevated part of 77 South, we could see the impacts of what had to be a heavy bombing. Someone bombed Canton out of existence. At the time, it didn’t make any sense, and with time and knowing what I know, it still makes no sense. We passed cars riddled with bullet holes. A school bus filled with people was burned, leaving the charred remains of adults and many children. War crimes on their own people.

About twenty minutes later, we were on the open road with nothing but hills and country all around us. Neither of us spoke for miles. Seeing just how bad things had gotten in person was hard to put into words. It’s like how the people after a natural disaster or a devastating war have this thousand-yard stare having been given a glimpse of Hell. We found a barn near the highway and pulled inside for a break. At this point, I had been driving for more than a day, and I was tired. We got in the back and slept. The next morning, Diana took over driving for a while until we got to the border with West Virginia. This is the kind of truth I, as a man would never say out loud, but she was a better shot and having her holding the gun while I drove just made sense. The main bridge was blocked with cars.
We left the highway and went east looking for a way across the river. There were a few tunnels coming, and neither of us wanted a tunnel, we both saw 28 days later, and no thank you on the tunnels. This left us with a very long drive on some of the most beautiful back roads I had ever been on. We would drive seeing valleys open in front of us in that purple mountain majesty that was beyond words, then we would pass bodies and death so horrendous they too were without words. Most of this time was a blur, or maybe that’s just the whiskey. I remember how we went for a full day without talking. Looking back, I don’t know if that was a good thing or just a necessary thing, but I think it brought us closer together.

On the third day, we found ourselves on the border between Virginia and North Carolina. Diana spent the morning working the radio trying to get a hold of the General. We had many backroad miles between where we were, and Atlanta and our rations were starting to run out. We needed supplies. As if on cue, the radio came to life, and the General spoke. He told us about a secret supply depot near the town of Chapel Hill. I tried to say how Chapel Hill was a mall back in Akron, but no one was listening. He gave us a code and said how we should find some MREs and other supplies. When we got there, we should radio him back, and he would tell us what had happened while we took our vacation.

I guess I should mention the deer. Goody was right, the fake deer weren’t eating. Maybe they couldn’t eat, or maybe they weren’t programmed to eat, it didn’t matter. The clone deer were dropping dead. A body can only go so long without eating or drinking, and the clone army was finding its limits. I guess their order 66 was more of a do-nothing than anything else. The further south we went the less deer we found. About a mile outside of Chapel Hill, we found the dirt road the General spoke of. To the passersby, it would look like a service road, but it really was a path to a secret bunker. A place where our government could hide in case the world ended.
Chapter Eight

I think something The Walking Dead got right was how the dead themselves weren’t the real threat, it’s the other people that you must look out for. When I was younger, I would have said that outside of such people like Hitler or Stalin, there was no such thing as pure evil. Of course, that’s from the perspective of a person that never left his small town and only knew those people around him. When the world ended, we thought all we had to do was worry about the deer and what was coming from the sky, but that was much like my feelings about The Walking Dead, I was wrong. I was also wrong about mixing this lemon-lime electrolyte mix with bourbon. Is it possible to drink enough so you can see your own voice? Taste colors?

Something history seems to get wrong is that truly evil people aren’t seen as evil while they are doing evil. Take Hitler, he was evil, but to the people, he was almost a savior. He led his people out of a depression and onto the world stage as a world power that many feared. No one after the war would admit they supported a genocidal monster, but just go back and watch the footage, many regular people were behind him. Hitler used poverty, anger, hatred, and bigotry to rally his people into a war they had no chance of winning, and they almost won. I mention this because today we had this leader that while pretending to be our savior was, in fact, working against us. No, I don’t mean the orange man. True evil exists, but more on that later.

I don’t know if it’s my time here in this dark room under a pile of rubble, the bourbon, or the just not knowing if anyone is still alive, but I just feel so alone. Maybe I am, and this record will go unread? I think my time is running shorter than I thought. I think it’s raining up there somewhere and that water is running into the ruins causing them to flood. There is this line of condensation that is slowly running up a door that seems to say I’ll be underwater within the next four or five hours. There is nothing but broken, twisted metal beams and fragments of concrete past that door giving me no way out. If the roof doesn’t cave in, or I run out of air, drinkable water or food, then I’ll drown.
The bunker had its own power supply from a series of batteries and a natural gas generator being supplied by its own gas well. We pulled the Jeep into the oversized door and closed it. At the time, we thought it would smell bad and be covered in forty years of dust. For the most part, we were wrong. Someone had been there within the last two months. The MRE’s were recently boxed, and there wasn’t nearly as much dust as we thought. The facility had this strange mix of steel and wood with the 1960s and 1970s flare. Bright colored walls with steel grate catwalks, hardwood floors, and shag rugs. A picture of President Carter was on the wall suggesting that while people cleaned, they didn’t do anything else.

We found several VHS tapes but no player. There was a projector and several movies. This is where I learned that Diana had never seen a movie made before 1997, and she never saw a single black and white movie. She never watched movies growing up, and her family didn’t have a television. She spent all her time working to become the world-saving doctor she is. If I had to choose what was the best time of my life, I would have to say this short time we spent in that bunker was it. We sat and watched every watchable movie, some of the film wasn’t sealed properly and had rotted in their cans, we drank what had to be some very pricy wine and ate MREs. We also did other things that are none of your business. We were alone, away from a world ripping itself apart, safe, secure, and together.

A few hours became a few days. At the time, we had planned on just staying until night, but the quiet of this place along with the safety of blast doors that could survive a nuclear war, made it hard to leave. Thinking about it, I know why we didn’t stay, but it still seems like a mistake. About a week into our playing underground house, a call came across a built-in radio system. Every bunker built by the Government was connected to allow the government to function after a war. That first day we tried to call out, but there was nothing. By the time the call came in, we had slipped into something a little less than professional. That is we were waking love in the main room with The Sound of Music playing on the screen. Let me tell you this was one of my new favorite things…… sorry.
I remember looking around Diana as she sat in my lap and seeing the Von Trapp family was replaced by The General who was looking up and Goody who was smiling and shaking his head. The General coughed then he said, “OK, I guess you two didn’t know you had the intercom on…… God, I hope you didn’t know. This system connects the other bunkers both with audio and video so yeah…… could you two get dressed.” Goody said, “it never gets boring with you two.” Behind the General were four dogs. A German Shepherd, some sort of Rottweiler mix, a Bison and a Great Dane. Just out of frame was a tiny Pug. For those that don’t know, this part of the story is going to get weird but trust me, this is just starting to the weird. Goody looked to the dogs and acted like they said something to him. For those that do know, yes, there are talking dogs, but their speech is more mental, and that mentalism didn’t work across ancient phone lines.

In the movies, this would be known as an exposition dump where a character talks about important parts of the plot that might not be coming across or just to recap the story. Many stories rely on this idea to express a concept that might not be clear or have a character that just seems to know way too much like all those kids in the Gammera movies. Or is it Gamera? We did our best to cover ourselves up while The General waited. I swear the Great Dane was laughing. He told us about the week we were out of communication as well as what was up with the dogs. Looking back, I think he was just way too calm about talking dogs, and bears.

A few hours after we left, the General evacuated the base and was on the road when a series of bombers came overhead and leveled Wright-Patterson to the ground. The planes were ours. He left a few men behind to watch for anything unusual, and boy did they find that. The General moved west to another of the secret bunkers. Along the way, he watched as the planes bombed cities and small towns. Two days in, his men caught up with them. They had the five dogs and a story that seemed strange. He didn’t talk much about that story, but it had something to do with a bear, deer, and a series of strange events. He said the dogs were going back east to find his missing daughter and the key.
We had thought he sent Jenny and Jimmy east to someplace safe, but he really sent them on what had to be the most important mission in the world. They were missing. The General sent someone out after they didn’t check-in, and they found the ruins of the armored car and bodies of the men but not the kids. She had a key to a weapon system I just used a few hours ago, but more on that later. The key was important but not the only way to use the weapon. The General had faith in his daughter and her ability to see things through, no matter what came along. They say faith can move mountains, it could also blind people and make them trust way too much. He also thought that Jimmy wouldn’t hesitate to lay his life down for Jenny.

This is where Goody and Sophie told us about the deer. As he suspected or Jimmy told him, the clone deer weren’t eating. This might have been a design flaw or a safety measure making sure their invading army died before they arrived to claim the earth. Sophie thought that the deer and other animals around the world didn’t work as efficiently as the aliens wanted, so they made clones, but the clones design meant that they had to be replaced as the old ones died. She was able to determine it was a protein in the deer that when eaten by people reacted with our DNA turning other proteins into acids and other nasty stuff killing the one who ate the deer. This was why only humanity was unable to eat the clone deer, and the animals like the dogs were ok.

She talked about the other animals, including insects around the world, killing people. There is a large type of ant in Africa that was devouring people in swarms. Billions of ants covering villages, towns, and cities. The most important part of this was the squirrels. How the dogs told them that without the boxes and or alien ball probes, the smaller animals couldn’t retain any of the knowledge the aliens provided. They were just not big-brained enough to remember. Think about the goldfish and that three-second memory thing. Goody said, “if you can stop the boxes, then you can stop the smaller animals and just maybe the war.” I’m trying to think back. I know they said something else, but it’s just not there in my head anymore.

The screen went dark, and we were alone again. We didn’t know it at the time, but this would be the best time our lives together we would ever have. Together in a sealed bunker away
from all the world’s problems, with alcohol movies and a less than necessary need for clothing made this like a honeymoon of sorts. We went back to the room we were sharing to get dressed. Inside, Diana turned around and kissed me. I ran my hand up her arm and down her side. Soon we were back to doing what we were doing before the General called. About the time I……I…. I entered her, the General’s voice came across the intercom saying, “if you two are going to do that, then you should turn the system off. Not everyone wants to watch you two fuck.” I looked to Diana who looked back, and yes, we are kind of nasty people because we didn’t turn the system off until we were done. After all, we had an audience for much of the time, we were together and…… OK, I can’t justify any of that. We’re just nasty people.

The General gave us a mission. We needed to get to Atlanta just in case his daughter needed help. I thought we should look for the kids, but he had this faith in Jenny that was unstoppable. He told us we should meet up with a Doctor Faith Saunders, and she would help us with the weapon. Goody had this look on his face, I think it was fear. Saunders was once Doctor Faith Saunders Goody, his fourth wife. The one he didn’t mention when we first met. If she were anything like his other four wives, she would be a Brainiac supermodel with bad eyesight. Goody looked like a blonde Marty Feldman, but he somehow married five beautiful insanely smart women. It’s like in those sitcoms were the dumpy man is married to an attractive woman or how that Dax Shepard guy married Kristen Bell.

We left the uniforms back in the bunker, thinking about how they would draw the wrong kind of attention. If we were looking for unusual military, then others were doing the same and let’s just say we didn’t look very military. This was most likely a good idea. We drove for about nine miles before a wave of geese went overhead. A shot rang out than another. Whoever was shooting wasn’t aiming for the geese, but a few of the floating balls among the geese. When the balls went down the geese scattered as if an unseen tether was cut. They knew what they were doing. We turned around a corner past a few homes built into a hill with no signs of life. Over the next hill, we saw them. A bright orange Humvee. The kind of orange I would have bought for Browns games. There were two men with 50-caliber Berrett Rifles. They were in uniform but
not any uniform I recognized, black slacks, gray shirt with a maroon beret. A flag on their arms was divided evenly between blue and red with one white star in the middle.

They waved us down, and we stopped because of those rifles. The guy looked us over, staring first at the jeep then at Diana. The first man who I’m calling Bubba said, “why you look like that there Natalie Portman.” The other man let’s call him Jeb said, “I hope she isn’t. That Portman’s a Jew and we don’t need any of them around here.” Diana wears a Star of David her grandmother had when she was a child in a concentration camp in Poland. It was all that was left of her mother’s family. She kept it hidden in a place that must have been very uncomfortable. In her life, she never met up with such bigotry. She had more than one fellow scientist dismiss her for her age or sex, but no one had said anything about her religion. The star was tucked in her shirt. First, they wanted to search the Jeep, then us. Bubba wanted to take us in while Jeb wanted to deal with us. Yes, another me-shaped hole.

A call came over their radio calling them in. Bubba told them about us, and the possibility Diana was Jewish. The voice over the radio told them to come back and leave us alone. The voice said, “don’t worry about killing them one at a time when the President has a plan to end them all in one go.” I felt ashamed I didn’t say anything. I know that it wouldn’t have helped, and Diana had said as much but still staring into the face of evil made me rethink what true evil was. Jeb took my sidearm, and Bubba took a roll of aluminum foil, why I don’t know or want to know........OK, maybe I do. They didn’t search for very long, and they didn’t find our rifles. While they searched, Diana looked at the radios they had seeing the frequency. They left us, and we left listening to them and the others.

At first, communication was basic. Whoever Bubba and Jeb were working for had them searching for survivors. We enjoyed listening to Bubba and Jeb being down dressed for shooting the alien balls........ Alien balls. I need to grow up. The voice over the radio said, “we don’t shoot our allies.” From there the radio communication was mainly sightings of the alien balls…… and the boxes. From what we could tell, they thought the coming Aliens were coming
to cleanse the earth of the unclean and guess who that was supposed to be. A ship-full of alien Nazis. We are sure they are wrong, but more on that real soon. We went on passing more dead deer. About an hour after we met with Bubba and Jeb, they changed their frequency, and we lost our ability to listen.

We headed south until we came to the Uwharrie National Forest. We found a shed big enough to hide the Jeep and spent the night inside. When we woke, we heard something outside, there had to be three hundred identical deer. An alien orb was hovering over one deer. Another larger orb was split into two and in the middle was the skeleton of a deer. We watched as the deer was built from the inside out. The process took three minutes and was just as gross as it sounds. We counted at least ten of the orbs, and each of them was making a copy of the deer the small orb was scanning. The aliens were rebuilding their deer army, and we were right in the middle of their staging ground. If the deer could smell us, then they didn’t see us as a threat, and after a full day of cloning new deer, the aliens and deer left heading west.

The national forest turned into farm country with open fields. Somewhere around the border between North and South Carolina, we came across a strange style of palisade made from steel posts with thick barbs and barbed wire strung between them. The fencing looked new, but something like this would have taken planning. I mean someone had to build all the steel posts. We passed another of those red and blue flags with one star. Next to it was a sign saying, “From the ashes, we will build our utopia, on the bones of our enemies, we will build our future.” another sign said, “All hail, President Boon. Savior of the New America.” The fence went on for miles until it turned away from the road. Diana took pictures of as much as we could see. She also made a note of the latitude and longitude of where the fence started and where it cut away from the road. Oh yeah, we had to take the road with the fence on one side and all the signs saying, “Minefield stay away” on the other.

Sometime around us passing that palisade, we picked up a tail. Our pursuers were using a mix of all-terrain vehicles and small drones, and I mean small. One of the drones was no bigger
than a swallow. The European kind, not the African. It had landed on the soft roof of the Jeep and became both a tracking and listening device. We went over a bridge, and this is when the bird drone thing came to life and tried to get in front of us. I say tried because it had damaged itself and fell away onto the ground. I saw something fall and not thinking about it, I stopped and went to see what it was. Think of a black box with four arms and rotors coming out from the corners, no feathers or coconuts. We looked around and saw a dune buggy like vehicle about a mile behind us. Using binoculars, we could see the gray and black uniforms, the strange flag and most of all the twin 50-caliber machineguns mounted on the top. We knew we couldn’t out four-wheel-drive them or even outrun them. What we could do is try and evade them.

We came into a small town……um…… I don’t remember the name. It was Any Town America with one Main Street. No buildings were higher than the typical two-story brick buildings with mom and pop shops and an actual pharmacy with a soda fountain inside. All that was missing were the 1950s kids fresh from the sock hop…… or any people the town was empty. With an open one-street town we would be an easy target but so were they. We found an alley with a good place to hide the Jeep. Diana took the long gun, and I took two of the spare M4s we had in the back. I don’t know why I took it, but for some reason, I didn’t want to use the rifle that was made for me. Looking back, I think we should have just hidden and let them pass by, but at the time we wanted to see who they were. We also didn’t know what we know now, and damn it’s crazy.

We got on top of a two-story building that gave us a good view of the street. Diana went to the front while I watched from the side where I could see down the alley. Ten minutes later, two dune buggies with twin fifty-caliber machineguns came down the street. We watched as they slowly made their way down, and at first, it seemed like they were just going to pass on bye. I say at first because they stopped right in front of the building, we were in. Their angle and our placement were against us, so we went to leave the roof for another roof. That’s was when we saw the micro-drone. Another one of those sparrow-sized drones. They knew where we were and what we were armed with. The sniper’s rifle was just going to be a weight, so she dropped it taking one of the M4s, and we were off to the races.
The drone followed us from rooftop to rooftop as did the buggies down on the street. If we shot the drone, we would become more of a danger than a curiosity. Of course, I know now we should have just shot, but there's a lot we didn’t know. Near the end of the rooftops, the drone operator clipped an ancient antenna sending the drone down to its death in the street. We took this opportunity to take a door and go down one story. From there we doubled back using a series of fire-escapes on the back of the buildings until we got two buildings down where we went inside again and down to the street. We found ourselves in a department store of some kind. Something like an ancient Kohls with a professional look but just not as chichi. One of the buggies went past the doors rushing to the end. We figured we had maybe ten minutes before they found us.

A thunderous chatting sound came from outside. The building started to shake as the glass broke from the top down. The soldiers were firing into the second floor with their fifty-caliber machineguns. The two buggies met in the middle, just outside where we were. We ducked, and just in time, they opened fire into the shore where we were in cutting down the mannequins destroying someone’s hard work at displaying items for sale, that would never be bought. We stayed low as they decimated the interior with most of that landing on us. They said something just out of our ability to hear them then they pulled away. We waited for about twenty minutes just in case.

We left the store and made our way down an alley and through an abandoned field to a farmhouse of sorts, I say sorts because it was close to the small town and not on a farm. The back door was gone and what we found inside was just horrible. The world was over, and to many, the end of that world and life they knew was more than they could handle. We found four children sitting in front of a long-dead TV with game controllers in their hands. Diana said it looked like someone had poisoned them. In a bedroom in the back, we found what was most likely the parents, one murdered, one suicide. They thought they couldn’t survive in a world without what they knew, so they decided to see what was next, or something like that I don’t remember.
everything from their note. Someone came in and looted the house of any food and booze, leaving the bodies as they were.

Some people are glass-half-empty, while others are glass-half-filled. The battle between the pessimist and optimist. I’m more of a forget the glass, drink right from the bottle kind of guy. While Diana could see the abject horror in this senseless act, she also saw that someone was still alive and looking to survive. I saw six people that should be buried and knew we couldn’t. No matter what, we couldn’t stay in the family murder house. We looked outside and looking back this was just so very stupid; we left the house and went into the open. Those trigger-happy gunmen called in backup and had flooded the area with the sparrow drones. We ran, and a mass of drones followed us down an alley and into a Sherman William Paint store. They didn’t follow us inside. They didn’t have to, they just surrounded the building and waited.

The building had a back room filled with paint bases and the various mixes to make any color you would want. It also had a roll-up door that went out onto a loading dock. A convenient escape except the back was uncovered and filled with drones. A large truck pulled up, and about twenty men got out, all in that strange uniform and armed. Two more trucks arrived, and soon we were surrounded by about forty men. I say men because...... well I’ll get to that soon. We had no choice, no chance for escape, and no idea of what was going to happen next. Diana leaned over and kissed me. She said something, I just don’t remember what she said. What I do remember is what happened next. We put our rifles down, took off our jackets. I went out with my arms up, palms out. The clicking of guns was almost deafening. Diana came out, and a gasp went over the crowd. One man said, “the prophet is here, great and merciful God, the prophet is here.” The man who had tossed me to the ground searching me stopped and went to his knees as did the rest of them. They bowed to Diana chanting, “Casandra made flesh, the prophet has come.”
Chapter Nine

Ten years ago, General Nathanael Everette Boone stepped out of the race for the presidency after an aid came out saying he had sexually assaulted her while they served at a base in Kuwaiti. She gave explicit details on how he forced her to see him while his wife was back in Kentucky with their children. Her accusations went away just as soon as he dropped out and two years later, she told a newspaper she made the whole thing up to keep him out of office. She had said her word and name were worth loosing if it kept a warmongering crazy man away from the nuclear weapons. Boone was a favorite son of Kentucky and won a seat in the Senate, one that he kept up until the world ended. In the science, technology, and military world, Boone was a player and the man you need to know if you want government funding. This was where Diana had met him.

There is this reoccurring joke about how villains will monologue about their plans to the hero. They give great details about how they plan to take over the world and how to stop them. This sounds crazy, but crazy is thinking you can survive and win a war with an advance species, so I guess we’re all crazy now. OK, I’m getting ahead of myself again. The pseudo soldiers took us from the shop to a windowless van. Inside we got matching pillowcases over the head just like in the movies or on TV. We went only about a mile or so until the van came to a halt and we could hear a gate being opened. Judging by the amount of time we drove; we were back at that strange palisade. The doors opened, and we were separated.

Diana was taken to an office where they stood by watching her offering her coffee and other niceties, while there was no coffee for me. I was taken into a large shower room. I was stripped, searched and yes, probed for anything I could shove up my ass. They gave me an orange jumpsuit with prisoner on the back and a number on the front, P225697. They took my picture, fingerprints, and samples of my DNA. From there I was tossed and yes tossed is accurate into a windowless cell with a toilet, a sink and nothing else. During this time, I was never asked any questions. During the search, a liquid was dumped down my throat, and it turned out to be a
super laxative, so guess how I spent the next four hours. Think that scene from Bridesmaids, you know the bathroom scene.

Diana told me what happened to her, along with what she was told. The office was straight out of a movie set of a big game hunters office with large-bore rifles and the heads of various large animals on the walls. This included the head of a white tiger and two elephant tusks. They gave her a cup of coffee in a fine china cup with just the right amount of cream like they knew how she liked to drink her coffee. A door opened, and a man in a white Nehru jacket and matching pants came inside. She said he looked Indian like an Indian George Clooney dark and handsome. His name was Sagan Anand, and he was the body man to the president. He told her the President was on another mission, but when he got back, he would see to her, but in the meantime, she was to be afforded all the luxuries of her status.

Anand brought her to what she described as a gilded cage. A room filled with antiques and silks with bars on the windows. Anand left, and three women came in. One was in a flowing white gown, and the other two were in bathing suits. They brought her into a bathroom, gently stripped and bathed her in rose-scented water using a rose-scented soap. From there she was dressed in a similar white silk top with an exposed mid-drift under a red Sarees. She couldn’t get past all the Indian-style trappings. She said she felt like she was in another country. She was brought back to her cage and sat there waiting for about an hour before a call came, and she was told the President would see her in the morning. The woman in white and two new servants came in changed her clothes to a nightgown and put her into bed. One of them gave her a small shot of something that smelled like gin. She shot it down and was asleep within minutes. About the time she was sleeping between silk sheets, I was emptied out and lying on a cold concrete floor.

I don’t know just how much time had passed. The jail had no windows, just florescent lights and of course no clocks. They picked me up and tossed me back into the shower room, hosed me down, and took me back to my cell. I was hungry with severe pains in my gut from hours of intense diarrhea. The servants woke, bathed and dressed Diana in the same fashion as
before, and she was brought into a large dining room decorated in a French baroque style as if she went from India right into the French palace at Versailles. The walls were lined with men dressed in black Nehru jackets. Sagan Anand stood at one end. A woman led Diana to her side of the table. In the seat at the head of the table was a man she knew all too well. Senator Nathanael Everette Boone. They were both dressed in Indian cultural appropriation while surrounded by fine French trappings, and they ate what could be best described as an English breakfast with blood sausage, canned beans and some sort of ham bacon. She drank a jasmine tea while he drank something alcoholic. She said the smell of whatever it was filled the room.

They ate in silence for about an hour. Boone picked up a bell, but before he could ring it, his servants were in motion taking the food and Diana away. She found herself back in the office. Boone walked in and out of reflex, she stood up. He smiled as if he was happy to see she stood in his presence. He sat down, and she did the same. He said, “my dear, I’m glad to see you’re alright.” Diana didn’t know what to say. He smiled and said, “it was foretold that you would find us, and together we would rule the world. You as my seer and me as their God.” She said he smiled again and poured a glass of that strange alcoholic smelling stuff and drank it not offering any to her. It was a fermented yak’s milk called Kumis. This is where she met crazy.

Several years ago, Diana was going from committee to committee looking for funding. In one committee she met the senior senator from Kentucky Nate Boone. He had told her to call him Nate. The meeting was abrupt, as was his sudden departure. Boone told her he investigated her work to see if it could either become a weapon or something that could be built in Kentucky. Part of his research was his appropriation of her prototype from Akron. That answered the question of what happened to that. He had twenty of the best MIT researchers finish her model as well as look for ways to weaponize it.

One of his researchers was a man named David Cocks, and he was the first to see the aliens ten years ago. He traced the movement of something as it entered the atmosphere. It broke up and separated into large and small spheres and boxes. One of the boxes was brought to
Boone. He told her how the box talked to him, promising him the world if he helped them. He said they were on a quest to save planets from themselves. To help civilizations develop away from barbarism. He told her how they promised to cleanse the earth of the unclean and rebuild a new civilization in his image. He also told her that she was to be his Eve until he found out she was Jewish. He told her she was his prophet for bringing him this device and showing him the future. He finally said, ‘while I can’t save your people, I can make you comfortable and safe in the knowledge that you will be the last of your kind.’

While this was happening, I was tossed into another cell with two beds and a man that had been beaten near to death. He told me his name was David Cocks, and he was locked up for trying to warn the world about Boone and his nightmarish plans. Cocks had learned the boxes were talking to Boone, and together they were making plans. The boxes told Boone about the cloning process and their way of destroying worlds with their own fauna. Using this information, Boone made plans including the palisades and the extensive weapons his new army would need. He also built a cult around the boxes and himself. Cocks said how paid soldiers might question orders to kill civilians, while the devoutly religious will kill without hesitation. Using his connections just before the first wave struck, Boone made sure the nation’s military wasn’t prepared to defend itself in time.

Cocks was locked up because he knew too much. The men took turns beating him because they thought he was a traitor and a heretic. He also told me how one of the boxes had said how the whole thing was a lie to get a human to turn traitor making their invasion easier. Boone’s mad dream of him as a new God was just a smokescreen to cover an invasion that would most likely finish what they started about a month ago. Cocks was in and out of it talking then silent then talking again as if he never stopped. He was about my age, but he looked years older, thin to frail with deep bruises and more than a few infected wounds. I don’t think he could have survived to try to escape or even being moved. I got into bed after I don’t know how long on a hard floor and fell asleep.
I awoke when something jostled me. I was in the back of an open-bed truck. Next to me was the body of David Cocks and a shovel. A man was up near the cab. He was dressed in all-white. Although he never said I’m sure this was Sagan Anand, but at the time I didn’t know that name. He was sitting on buckets of lye and charcoal. We rode out to near the palisade wall on the west side. From there I was instructed at gunpoint to dig a David Cocks size hole. About halfway into the digging, I was told to make it big enough for two. It’s funny how my life seems to come around and back around to digging a hole big enough for myself. As it turned out, I needed a hole big enough for four.

I got down about six feet when the guy in white or Sagan Anand told me to stop. I looked up just as he tossed Cocks body into the hole. He said, “don’t worry, your Jew whore will burn tonight as we celebrate our victory while burning the witch.” Anand’s head jumped at a strange angle and something red shot out. That was parts of his skull, brains, and blood. He fell into the hole just as a report came downrange. Three more shots rang out. I looked out and saw the two men from the cap on the ground missing some head meat. A small drone flew overhead and dropped a radio. A voice said, “I’m Captain Matt Gray with Army special forces. The General asked if we could trace back where those missiles came from when we saw you and thought you could use some help.” I told him who I was and about our mission. He said, “let’s go get your girl.”

Boone, in his attempts to destroy Wright Patterson, had, in fact, saved us from the geese. I’m sure that wasn’t his plan. The General had dispatched several units to track down the missiles and look for any survivors. Gray had picked up on our tracks and followed us to that town whose name I can’t remember. As Diana was pampered and I was emptied, he and his unit made their way into the base. He gave me what had to be the best-tasting cereal bar I had ever eaten, and an M4 one of the men had in the truck. I checked it and was ready to go. Gray wanted to wait until it was darker to help us sneak in.
Boone told Diana he was going to have a bonfire in her honor that night. He didn’t tell her she would be in the middle of that fire being burned alive. Part of his new religion would call her a witch and they burned witches. He told her a part of his new world would be a return to the status quo as in men on top and women as servants. No women leaders, no women soldiers, and no woman talking out of turn. Boone foresaw a misogynistic utopia where he would rule as a God-King and his progeny would rule forever. To do this, he had ten wives ranging in ages from twenty-three to fourteen. Boone was sixty-four. He told her any woman that would speak out of turn was either whipped or had her tongue cut out. He said, “my new America will be a paradise, a city upon a hill for all to admire.”

The sun started to set with an eerie reddish glow covering the camp. In the center of this camp was what could be called a modern-day pyre. A twenty-foot round hole with a metal grate and a metal pole with a bar across and chains hanging down. She was to be chained hanging by her arms and set of fire without any wood. Along the way, we found a few of Boone’s men that were willing to donate their uniforms to us. Anything, including a dead man’s clothes, would be better than that orange jumpsuit. We left four men to act as snipers, two men to go and secure the gate and the rest with us. Gray’s mission was to destabilize the camp, and mine was to get Diana. Two men came out a building with Diana dragging her to the pyre. Gray stopped me from running to her. He and I waited while two of his men went and commandeered two dune buggies. They planted explosives on any other vehicle they could find.

The metal pyre was built over a pit filled with what looked like water but was really gas. The whole thing worked like a gas fountain with the gas being pumped up inside the post and down over the victim. The mist and vapor would catch fire burning the person alive. From the look of it, they had already had a few fires. Diana struggled against her captors. Gray and I came up and said we would take her. I put my hand on her chin to keep her from speaking while letting her know it was me. Her eyes said more than she could say without giving us away. I took one side, and Gray took the other. I told her to struggle to her right. She saw the dune buggy slowly creeping in on us and understood.
The first of the men to fall wasn’t seen and didn’t know he was dead until he was dead. No one saw their sentries on the rooftops fall as Gray’s Navy Seal snipers snipe their way through them. About the time the buggy was next to us, one of the men following behind us head snapped back as his face was shot away. Quicker than I could ever explain it, we were in motion pushing Diana into the buggy and driving off. Someone screamed, “kill the witch.” Gray handed his detonator to Diana, who quickly pushed the button. All six vehicles exploded, sending shrapnel into the crowd of angry men. The flames caught the gas fountain on fire, and the explosion rocked the ground sending a mushroom-like cloud into the air. We saw building fly apart. Two more buggies joined us, and we were off to the gate. At the gate, we found eight dead men and two of Gray’s men setting charges. They blew the gates open, and we were off into the night.

We turned back to see three small drones take off. We were a long way from being safe. We had no idea who was flying them or if Boone had any other men out on patrol. We would learn later he had sent fifty men to Wright Patterson, but they died at the hooves and antlers of the deer. The drones were being operated by teenagers he had taken in for their gaming abilities. We would find this out when the camp was raided, and they found eight teens under the age of sixteen in a dirty cell filled with pot smoke and Red Bull cans. He was using drugs to control his teen army much like they did with those kid soldiers in Africa and Asia. We had radioed in what just happened and who was responsible. Diana told the General that Boone had her prototype up and running somewhere in Kentucky. The General sent out as many men as he could to deal with Boone. She told him to take him alive so they could find the telescope.

The general told us he heard from Jenny and Jimmy and they were being escorted to Atlanta by what he called an army of dogs. He didn’t offer any other information, and we didn’t ask. Sitting next to him in a matching desert camo uniform with the cap and I swear matching aviator sunglasses was this small pug. The pug and the general looked a little alike and not just in their matching attire. As per usual, we couldn’t hear the pug’s thoughts. A soldier behind the pug
or Buster acted as a translator. General Buster told us about his friends and their mission to build a dog army while searching for Jimmy and Jenny. The dog army was now over ninety plus dogs including what he called the fifty chihuahua army and a pair of Irish Wolfhounds. They found the kids in a farmhouse with Anette Funicello, Julie Newmar, Sandra Dee, Elizabeth Montgomery, and Tina Louise Smyth on the Smyth family farm. Jimmy had been hurt but was getting better, and soon they would go to Atlanta. The pug was tiny, cute, informative, and articulate. Yes, that creeped me out.

The General gave us new orders. We were to start on our way to Kentucky. When his men had persuaded the location out of Boone, they would call us, and we would go there with Gray and his unit to take control of the scope and finally have some good news or see just how screwed we were. We didn’t know then that Boone was already gone on his way to another palisade he had built in Florida. He had used billions in taxpayer’s money to build himself several bases to recruit for his cult army. The scope of that army is something we will find out later. Once again, much like the TV show The Walking Dead, it’s the humans that are more dangerous than the zombies.

We made it back to our Jeep, and it was just where we left it. Instead of driving off we got in back and went to sleep. Gray got behind the wheel and drove. I woke up several hours later just as the sun started to rise in the east. Everything was moving fast. I looked up to see we were doing about eighty miles an hour. Up above us was a drone. The three drones had found us and were attacking. This was before the kids were found in the drug-filled bunker. I picked up my M4, as did Diana. We opened the back of the top and fired, striking the drone. Behind us, we could see three dune buggies firing at the other drones taking them down. We were missing a buggy. A drone had struck our flank without warning killing two Rangers and our Navy Seal snipers. A few hours later, we learned about the raid and the kids behind the deaths of Gray’s men. There was this rumor about what happened to those kids, but I don’t think it’s true, but I also just don’t care.