

THE NEW WORLD

EPISODE ONE: BEST LAID PLANS

Tommy Clark



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THE BEGINNING

Kaleb was pissed. At the last minute three of his friends bailed on him when they had all planned to go fishing that night at Buchanan Lake. He tried to call them, they didn't answer. He even drove by Brent's house. He wasn't home. He couldn't find any one of them. So he sat, alone, on a boat. He had a cooler full of beer. He had been fishing for several hours when he noticed the storm clouds rolling in. The boat was an older model, his dad's. It was a rough shaped pontoon. He didn't worry about the rain though. He would simply pull the canopy over and slowly make his way back to the dock. He wished though that his friends were here. It would be easier to put the boat on the trailer with a buddy. Less time spent in the rain. He stood up to unzip the

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canopy when he tripped over something. He crashed to the floor of the boat. He turned back to an aching pain in his ankle. He had tripped over his shovel and cut his foot. More angrily he kicked over the worm bucket. He grabbed a bottle of water from the cooler and wiped the cut clean. It was minor so he didn't worry about it. He went back to the canopy.

Earlier that day, he had brought the bucket and shovel to dig for worms. There was a remote location back in a cove that he found. It was a great place to dig for worms. Someone else had already dug there before which is what gave him the idea. The marks of shovel to earth did not lie. He came across several dozen quicker than he thought he ever would.

He managed to get the top over so that he would be protected by the already sprinkling rain. He slowly made his way to the shore. He was a ways out so he had to endure the wet for quite some time. It took him close to an hour to make it in. He could see the boat ramp. The sun had almost completely left the sky. It was definitely dusk, that was for sure. Aside from a young couple Kaleb suspected of arguing, the docks were empty off to his right. He slowly ran the boat in and tied one of the ropes off to the dock. He left the engine running; he was going to be just a minute as he started the truck. He stepped off the dock and started for his truck. The girls muffled cries broke out in a slight scream. She was waving her arms and beating the man on the chest. This was one of those couples, Kaleb thought. He chose not pay them any more attention as he started for his truck. The truck was a bit old, but still new to him and the body was in great shape because he took care of it. His father helped him get the truck three years ago

while Kaleb was in college. Kaleb had quit school since then. He pulled his truck keys from his pocket as he started down the dock in the direction of where he left his truck.

The rain was heavy now and in the distance several larger guys moved among the shadows. Kaleb stopped. He was not necessarily a big boy and he wasn't one to fight so he watched as the guys stayed to the shadows of the tree line. They were looking for trouble. He thought that maybe he could call his dad but of course, he left his cell phone in the boat.. Kaleb turned back to the boat then stopped. He could see the young couple now, dimly lit by the bug infested lights under the boat dock. The man held the girl under his arm as he helped her off the dock at the other end. He was huge; the lights gave him a green tint. The girl gave out a scream and pulled away. The green man yanked her back in to his embrace. The green man? He was green.

“What the hell is that?” He said quietly to himself. The thing quickly turned to him. Kaleb ducked behind the bait stand so not to be seen. He planted himself against the building, hoping that he managed to get down quick enough that the thing didn't see him. He laid flat on his front and crawled to the boat the best he could. He didn't have a weapon to speak of, aside from his shovel and the boat was merely fifteen feet away. As he crawled along the bait stand, all the sounds that he never paid any attention to were now his enemies, determined to give him away. The sound of the boards creaking, he paused; the water smacking the dock as weight was distributed differently, he paused; the sound of that cursed diamond-plated steel plate that sat from one part of the dock to the other-it slammed back in place, he paused. Finally, he managed to get to the boat, the engine was running,

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that was a blessing. The blood curdling scream of the woman told him that there was no helping her now. The only sounds left were those of Kaleb rushing away.

He reached over from his prone position to untie the boat from the dock. It occurred to him that for once, his lazy antics were going to play to his benefit, he hoped. He lightly released the rope onto the deck of the boat. He slivered in and quietly reached the driver seat it was then that he noticed he was almost out of gas. No matter, his goal was to disappear into the center of the lake and call his dad. He would come and help him.

He pushed the throttle forward, ever so slightly. The boat started out slow as he turned the wheel to turn out and away from everything. He looked up at the boat ramp and saw several more of those green things were coming toward the water. He quickly glanced back to the “couple”. That green thing looked back at him but Kaleb didn’t notice and he kept pushing on the throttle. The girl screamed out and reached an arm out for him. In the dark, most everything was pitch black; though the moon gleamed off her face, showing her terror. The green man was dragging her off toward the woods. Kaleb shrugged it off-it was too late for her. He pushed the throttle as far forward as he could.

“No-wake-zone-my-ass.” He screamed as the boat took off. He glanced back to see that several green things made it too the water and immediately waded out into it. He turned back, he would get the boat to the center of the lake, surely they wouldn’t find him there, and he would call his dad. He would help.

The rain pelted him heavily in the face but he didn’t care as he rushed to the center of everything. With the darkness engulfing him he

couldn't see the shore in any direction so he dropped the anchor and grabbed the phone. He dialed his dad's number. There was no answer.

“Dad. Come on dad, answer.” He dialed the number again.

“You reached.... I can't....phone.....message and I.....get a second.” His dad's voice cracked through the poor service. Kaleb forcefully slammed the phone down and slid down on the deck beside the driver seat. He crawled over into the corner by the bench and cried. The rain fell all around him. He lay there, curled up, crying until he fell asleep.

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THE RUDE AWAKENING

Kaleb woke up. For the briefest of moments he didn't know where he was. Everything came to reality and he remembered, he remembered the green guys and the girl at the dock, the poor girl. He stretched; he had remained in the fetal position the entire night which caused a kink in his left side. He could hear the sound of crickets in the distance. It was still early morning.

Quickly he dropped back down to the deck of the boat. The shock of what he noticed scared him. The boat was resting against the shore engulfed in trees in all directions. He managed to float back into a cove or something. The water was raised, but he still sat in a shallow

area. “How did this happen?” He asked himself. He had dropped the anchor. He could only guess that with the rain, perhaps the water rose and raised the anchor off the floor of the lake. Then he drifted with the wind until he landed in the cove. He tried quickly to come up with a plan. He scrambled to the driver’s seat and turned the engine key. Nothing happened. Kaleb recalled the gas gauge the night before. It had been low. Maybe in his frantic drive out from the shore he forgot to turn the engine off. He needed to find a safe place, but where?

“The phone.” He said aloud as he remembered it. He searched the deck of the boat. He remembered slamming it down somewhere the night before, he found it in the crack of the seat. He pulled it free and hit the power button but it didn’t work. Upon looking closer he could see that the screen showed water damage. The rain must have gotten to it. He silently cursed himself as he tossed the phone back into the seat. He sat down and leaned back in the seat so that the nearest shore was in front of him. This way he could at least manage an escape should he need to.

His dad would be mad at him for damaging and leaving the boat stranded the way he did. Maybe not, maybe he would understand the circumstance. Surely his dad would believe this. By now there had to be some witnesses out there and there would be news on the matter. He would look into it when he got home, before he told his dad about the boat. He would try to work his way around the lake, back to his truck. That was step one. He checked his pocket for his keys and wallet. He wanted to have everything that he would need before going. They were there. Wet, but there. His clothes were still damp from the rain the night before. Good thing it was warm this morning, he

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thought.

He gave the entire boat a quick over look before stepping off. He had his backpack that he used as a tackle box with tackle still in it. He took several bottles of water from the cooler and placed them in the bag. Kaleb was unarmed when he stepped off the boat. If those things came back, he would need something to defend himself. He reached back into the boat and grabbed the shovel he remembered seeing. It wasn't a preferred weapon, but it gave him a sense of security. He started off, not looking back at the boat. He didn't know exactly where he was, but he did know he was on the east end of the lake. Kaleb decided to start in one direction to make his way around the lake. He would stick near the water until he knew he could find a road. Once he made it to a road he could follow it around.

Starting out slowly, he was scared to death. It was like walking around a lake, after encountering a snake. Even though the snake was long gone he would still walk on egg shells thinking that there was going to be another one. This was different, but still the same. These weren't snakes. These were large-green creatures. He still chose to be cautious while working his way back to his truck.

Kaleb Walked along the water line, covering land clear up to the tree line. He wanted to stay near the water until he could figure out where the road was. Finally, he got to a point where the water line raised up into the trees. He would have to go through the trees for a bit. This would be his first obstacle. He took a step up into the tree line. It was the only way to get around without having to go back, or wade in the water. He chose not to do that, he didn't want to slow himself down in any way. He would have to go through this batch of

trees, he had to do it. He had to keep telling himself that. Sweat poured down his brow and along his jaw line.

Kaleb stepped down and his foot sunk in the mud, he had forgotten about the full night of rain. He pulled his foot from the mud with a slurp, lost his balance, and planted his back into the trunk of a nearby tree. His head smacked against something hard as he fell. He quickly dropped the shovel and grabbed the back of his skull. He winced in pain. His trudge through the trees had begun.



ROADS LESS TRAVELED

Kaleb stepped through the last few trees. The water line was up enough that it forced him to remain in the trees longer than he originally expected, and longer than he would have wished too. He saw in front of him a small gravel turn around area that was a path used to park a car near the water. This drive should eventually lead back to a road. He had been through a lot in the first few hours of the day and he deserved this little break. He stepped out from the cover of wood cautiously. He thought that the woods were going to cause problems,

aside from the initial dilemma with the mud, he couldn't have been more wrong. Kaleb now found that being in the open was more frightening. In the simple gravel road, those hidden in the trees, should there be anything in there, would now have the advantage of tree cover. It would be harder to notice one of those creatures hiding in those trees. The green and brown surroundings would provide ample cover for them.

Perhaps Kaleb was over thinking it. Maybe his eyes played tricks on him. Maybe the things looked green at dusk when they simply should have looked dark. Surely he was making something great out of something that was not so great. No. He remembered it. He did not drink that much the night before. He was still of sound body and mind. He did see them, they were green, and they did exist.

He started down the road, now standing center gravel, so as to give him some advantage, his shovel at the ready. He kept sweeping his gaze back and forth from one side of the road to the other, he could not see anything. Kaleb was still nervous though; he was travelling alone down a vacant road, around a rather large lake, and had no idea what might be lurking in the trees. By sheer fear alone, Kaleb picked up his pace. The road turned a slight corner as he followed it around.

It was still early in the day and at that moment Kaleb had time on his side. He needed to make his way around the lake, get his truck, and make his way home. He peered up the road in both directions; Kaleb noticed in the direction he was heading a highway. Now, with motivation, he picked up his pace and moved quicker. He was almost at a slow jog. A quick slip on the gravel brought him back to reality. He remembered the green beasts. He didn't want to fatigue himself,

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should he encounter another one. He forced himself to stand and continue at a slower pace. He would get there eventually so he paced himself. He took his time and walked cautiously toward the road realizing he would get there in a matter of minutes anyway, he didn't need to be in a hurry. Once he reached the road, he could see a sign on his left; it was a highway sign, now he knew where he was. He took a cautious scan of all directions before starting off on the deserted highway. He watched the sign, with the occasional scan of the tree lines, as he slowly got closer and closer.

The sign read Dorbandt Rd. He knew instantly where he was. It was a small two lane road with no center stripe that was rarely driven. To see a car within a half-hour would be unheard of. He was now heading north and would soon run into 29 Highway. Once there, Kaleb would walk back west until he could hitch a ride back to his truck. With yet another break, he found it hard not to get excited. He threw the shovel over his shoulder and let both wrists rest over it as he walked up the road. If he was quick he could probably be back at home by night fall.

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HITCH A RIDE

Kaleb made it to 29 Highway and started down it toward the west. He knew that if no one had even come he would arrive back at his truck, maybe in a few hours. He walked at a brisk pace and kept going, tired or not. He had stopped a couple of times in open areas to relieve himself and aside from that, he didn't stop. He was afraid to remain in one spot too long. By now he had slowly began to revisit the idea that those things were not real. He wasn't going to let them catch him off guard but began to think that maybe he did have a few too many beers.

Behind him, Kaleb heard a slight hum in the distance. He glanced

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back to see a vehicle coming up the road. He was relieved. A car was moving, so maybe it was all in his head. He had too much beer, passed out, and woke up in the boat. The rain ruined his phone. Everything that happened the night before was all in his head.

His ankle hurt. He stopped and knelt over to see blood soaking through his jeans. He pulled them up and noticed the cut. What happened? If the cut happened, what else happened? He slipped his pant leg back and stuck his thumb out. The vehicle was an older truck, maybe an 80's model. Kaleb was not much of a vehicle guy. The truck was going very fast. Afraid that the driver would not have seen him, he stepped off the road a bit, and stuck his thumb out that much farther. He dropped his bag and shovel to the ground so not to seem like a drifter.

The truck came to a quick halt ten feet past him. It was an old Chevy S10. Kaleb smirked at the coincidence. He reached down and picked up his pack and shovel then started for it. Quickly a door flew open at the driver's side. Kaleb stopped in his tracks. A forty or so year-old man with a cheap wicker hat stepped out. He raised a shotgun up and let it rest on his right shoulder.

"I got thirty seconds. Get in the back." He said and stepped around the front of the truck. He sat his gun on the hood of the truck and unzipped his pants, he glanced at Kaleb, who hadn't moved, and turned away.

"You some sort of fairy or something?" He said as he spat at the ground.

"No sir." Kaleb replied.

"Then stop admiring the goods and get your ass in the back."

Kaleb snapped to attention. He tossed his pack in the back and sat his shovel down casually. He crawled into the bed of the truck.

“Thanks for picking me up.” Kaleb said to the older man as he came back around.

“No worries. The name is T.C.” The man said.

“Kaleb.” Kaleb reached his hand out. T.C. took it into his hand. T.C.’s hand was dirty.

“Glad to meet ya.” T.C. got back into his seat and put the truck in gear.

“Same here.” Kaleb said. He slid up to the front of the bed. He saw T.C. reach up and slide open the window to the cab. Kaleb could see a hound dog lying in the passenger seat, which is why T.C. didn’t offer him the cab.

“So look here fella, I am heading west to my sister’s. Where are you heading?”

“I am heading over to my truck, down off Hi-Line Drive.” Kaleb replied.

“Down off 100?” T.C. asked with a sense of concerned confusion. He spared Kaleb a glance through the rearview mirror.

Kaleb was worried about T.C.’s tone of voice and cautiously replied, “Yeah.”

“I can’t get you down in there. There is no safe way in or out of there.” T.C. responded frankly as he put the truck in gear and started to pull off.

“What do you mean, no safe way?” Kaleb asked.

“You don’t know?” Kaleb’s expression answered that question for T.C., He continued. “The orcs.”

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Kaleb was thoroughly confused now. “What is the orcs?” he asked.

“Where the hell have you been boy? There are these orcs in the area.” Kaleb still showed a baffled expression. “They came in from the base last night. They are literally everywhere around here. You had to of heard about them.”

“Sorry. No.” Kaleb replied.

“Bottom line. It is not safe down that way. Where do you live?” T.C. asked.

Kaleb wanted to be mad-wanted to scream because he couldn’t get to his truck, then the memory of the night before rushed to his mind and he reluctantly let it go. There was no way to get to his truck-and he wouldn’t press it. “Marble Falls.”

“Now I can take you there. My sister lives in Meadow lakes. She and her kids are going to follow me north, away from those beasts.” Kaleb turned his back to the cab. He rested against the window. How could this be? It was all true but at least he wasn’t crazy. He would get home and talk to his dad. His dad was always a smart man and Kaleb was sure that he would know what to do

As Kaleb rode silently in the back of the truck, the reality of what had happened set in. If these large green creatures, orcs, were really here then the world would be in trouble. They were large. If there were more than the small group he found then it would not be a good day to be in America. Surely these things were only in the states. Surely they weren’t across the seas or anything. That is what he would do, work his way east and then find a way overseas, where it was safe. The toll of the day weighed on his head. A headache started to form in the

front of his skull. He pulled his pack up into his lap and laid his head down on it. The harsh wind threw his short curly hair around as he slowly fell asleep.

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HOME SWEET HOME?

“Wake up. We are here.” T.C. shouted back through the window. Kaleb startled awake. He quickly looked around. They managed to arrive at Marble Falls. The streets had a simple, small town feel. The streets would still be busy, since it was along 281.

“Thanks.” Kaleb used the palms of his hands and wiped down his face. He was so nervous. He didn’t know what to do.

T.C. looked back at Kaleb, “Which way?”

“Excuse me?” Kaleb noticed T.C.’s face in the truck window.

“Which way from here?”

“Turn right at the stop light.” Kaleb replied.

“You got it.” T.C. turned and hit the gas again. Kaleb turned and stuck his head in the vacant window. “Keep in mind. I have no intentions on stopping. When I get near your home, tell me. I will slow down and you can jump out. I have got three little kids counting on me getting them away from this wretched place.” T.C. tried, unsuccessfully, to fight tears. Kaleb remained quiet for a long moment. He didn’t know what to say.

Kaleb was curious as to why T.C. was so intent on going north. Still pondering what he would do Kaleb asked, “So, T.C., Why are you heading north?”

T.C. quickly responded, “It’s the opposite of the direction of those orcs. Hopefully, by the time that they can get as north as we are heading the military can do something.”

T.C.’s plan seemed like a good one, Kaleb thought. Maybe instead of trying to go overseas he would get his dad and head north too. None the less, Kaleb owed T.C. for his kindness and willingness to give him a ride. Kaleb graciously replied to T.C., “I see. Well, I must say thank you, should I not get another chance to say it. Just for you to pick me up, I appreciate that.” T.C. stopped the truck, and then turned at the stop light.

“This way, right?” T.C. avoided the subject. It was apparent that he had enough emotional stuff going on right now. Kaleb decided to let it go. They turned down a side street where they were surrounded by businesses on each side. To the left there was a lumber yard, a liquor store and to the right a veterinarian. The liquor store’s windows were busted out. Leave it to “small town” Texas to raid a liquor store at a time like this.

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Typical! Kaleb thought. T.C. reached across the truck and patted his dog on the neck.

“His name is Steve.”

“The dog?” Kaleb had never heard of a dog with a conventional human name.

“He’s my best friend. Heck, he’s my only friend.” T.C. rubbed the dog behind the ears. “Been through a lot with this fella...”

Out of nowhere, Kaleb saw a person slam into the side of the truck. T.C. quickly slammed on the brakes. The person fell off the hood and rolled onto the ground just in front of the truck. They were covered in blood.

“Did I do that? Did I make her bleed?” T.C. uttered with shock in his voice. Kaleb couldn’t tell it was a girl.

“No, she was like that when she hit, I think.” Kaleb was now gripping the handle of the shovel.

“There’s one of them.” T.C. reached to his floor board and pulled up his shotgun. The green beast paid no attention to them. He was still focused on the helpless victim on the ground. He knelt down beside the girl and leaned in toward her. T.C. opened his door slowly and lowered his shotgun down between the door and truck. He lowered the barrel toward the orc. He pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot echoed between the buildings. The orc fell to its side.

“Are you okay?” T.C. directed toward the victim on the ground.

“No...” was all she could muster. T.C. opened the door a little more. The woman had gashes across her entire body. There was no saving her. Kaleb thought back to the woman at the lake. Both of these ladies were completely helpless. Did the creatures single out

females for their victims, seeing them as easy targets? Did they only attack single victims at a time?

As if to answer his question, the orc sat up and looked to the truck. He stood and stepped toward them. T.C. pulled the trigger again. Once again the orc fell back, this time to his knees. The sound rang out again, filling the small street. T.C. stared down at the orc. After a brief moment, the orc stood up and wiped a large hand down his chest. The holes that should have been there from the shotgun pelts were not there.

The orc snarled at T.C. and began his way. The orc grabbed the door and ripped it completely off the truck. T.C. cowered back into the cab of the truck; Steve instinctively stepped down into the floor board. Kaleb didn't know what to do; the beast was getting closer to T.C.'s throat. A whimper escaped T.C. as he sat, motionless. In a moment of desperation Kaleb brought up his shovel and whirled it around at the large green beast. The shovel point grazed the orc's arm. What was he thinking? If the shotgun couldn't hurt the orc, the shovel wouldn't do anything. Much to Kaleb's surprise, it was quite the opposite. The orc stopped in a wild shift and grabbed at his arm where the shovel slit ever so slightly. The shovel must have hit the beast at an opportune angle. The beast reared back and focused his attention on Kaleb.

Kaleb almost fell off his feet as the truck took off. Apparently T.C. had taken advantage of the hesitation from the beast. The truck swerved around the girl. In the heat of the moment, Kaleb couldn't see her breathing. It didn't matter, at that moment she was as good as dead anyway. If they attempted to save her they would have died right along

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side of her. He pulled the shovel in toward his chest and sat against the window again. He watched as the orc turned and stared in his direction with a confused grin, as if to make a mental note of his face.

When they were far enough away from the orc, T.C. began. “Where too, boy?” he shouted through the window. With the door missing, yelling through the window was a mere habit. Kaleb turned and rose up to see over the cab of the truck. The girl’s blood still smeared across the hood.

“Turn left at the next street.” Kaleb shouted down. He was filled with a flux of emotions. He was excited to see his parents and be home, but he was frightened at the same time. Frightened of what could be waiting for him when he reached his home. He couldn’t think like that. At the moment there was one thing to think about - Survival. He would check his house over for his parents, try his best to locate them if they weren’t there, then he would be on his way. He would find a safe place to hide out until the creatures were under control.

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“It’s right here.” Kaleb shouted. He pulled his backpack’s strap up over his shoulder. T.C. slowed down to a near stop and Kaleb jumped out of the bed. He turned back. T.C. was taking off, but spared him a glance and nod.

“Take care kid.” T.C. shouted.

“You too, T.C., you too.” Kaleb didn’t bother shouting. To be honest, he was afraid to be too loud. Kaleb quickly rushed to the house. He noticed that his dad’s truck was gone. A rush of panic took him over. He walked up under the patio and into the garage.

The garage was dark and Kaleb could only see because of the light coming from the back window, still it was dark enough to be worried. He locked the door behind himself and started for the kitchen door. He reached out and grabbed the knob. It was locked. They never locked the kitchen door. Kaleb pulled his keys out of his pocket and unlocked the kitchen. Maybe his mom locked the door because of all that was going on. The door swung open with a slight squeak. Kaleb stepped into the kitchen. From where he stood to his left was the kitchen table, to his right was the counter top and the cupboard.

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“Mom? Dad?” Kaleb shouted through the house. There was no answer. He stepped around the counter and went through the doorway behind the kitchen. He stood in the office, the television was off. The lights were all out. No one was here. His mom usually had the TV on in the background while she did her cleaning and house chores. His dad could have simply been at work. Why would he work in all of this mess though? Maybe the orcs weren’t as common in town yet. Maybe his parents just stepped out for a bit. Maybe they were looking for him.

Kaleb turned back to the kitchen. The house phone sat on its receiver on the wall just inside the kitchen. Kaleb retrieved it and began dialing his dad’s cell number. As the phone rang he walked through the house to check for everyone.

“You reached Glenn. I can’t answer the phone. Leave me a message and I will call you back when I get a second.” The message came from the phone. Kaleb opened his bedroom door.

“Dad, its Kaleb. Give me a call, I am at home.” Kaleb turned off the phone and sat it down on the desk inside his room. He went down the hall to his parent’s room. He opened their door. There was no one. He returned to his room and grabbed the phone and dialed his mom.

“Hey, this is Diane. Leave a message. I’ll call you back later. Bye.”

“Damn it.” Kaleb said as he turned the phone off. It hit him. He needed his cell phone. This way he could check his messages. Maybe his parents left him a message.

“Where is...” He started. He dropped to his hands and knees and pulled a shoe box out from under his bed. He lifted the lid. It was his old cell. It was an older flip model. He was given his new cell phone for his birthday just six months ago. He pulled the phones cover off

and popped out the battery. He pulled his SIM card from his new cell and slid it into his old phone. Kaleb pressed the power button. The phone did not turn on. "What the hell." He growled. He plugged the phone in to charge. He thought that he would give it a moment to charge while he used the restroom.

In the bathroom, there was hair in the sink. His mom was going to be pissed. His father must have done it. Kaleb turned the knob and washed his hands clean. When finished he bent down and splashed water on his face. Kaleb stopped when he noticed the glasses on the sink. They belonged to his dad. He had recently been prescribed glasses for small things such as driving, working and reading. Kaleb now wondered where his dad could have gone without his glasses. Kaleb returned to the kitchen where he noticed a pot of coffee full. Why would his parents take the time to prepare a fresh pot of coffee then leave it? They must have left the house in a hurry.

Kaleb went to the living room and turned the TV on. The station was a news channel, the reporter continued, "...This is not the first encounter reported. In Austin several boys saw these green beasts. The boys described them as 'Orcs', a humanoid figure from the popular table-top game Dungeons and Dragons. We strongly urge you to take cover and remain hidden. These creatures have proven regenerative abilities. Local law enforcement from Wimberly has seen this first hand. We have documented footage expected within the hour. Do not try to fight these creatures. Many people have already flooded the major highways in search of safety from neighboring military bases. Do not... I repeat, do not do this. Stay in your homes and wait for further instructions. Please keep your TV on this network and we will

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continue to update our feed for you. Stay in your homes... and may God watch over us all.”

The screen went to the National Broadcast Signal. An air-horn sounded for a long moment before the program started over.

“Hello America. This is Heath Teffer. We as a country have been invaded. There have been reports of large green....” Kaleb shut off the TV and sat back on the couch.

“What is going on?” He thought aloud. It was then that Kaleb realized that he hadn’t eaten since the evening before, his stomach reminded him of the long amount of time that he’d gone without food. He started for the kitchen. As he walked past the garage door he noticed movement in the dark room.

“Mom?.. Dad?” He pushed the door further open to allow a bit more light into the room. Kaleb found himself staring into the large black eyes of an orc. The orc stared back. He glanced to his right arm where the cut bled. The orc brought up his left hand and touched the cut, the pain was still there. The beast looked back at Kaleb. Kaleb understood now that the orc was the one from the street before, the one he cut with his shovel.

The orc looked back at his arm in amazement. The orc started to reach for Kaleb. Instinctively, Kaleb reached over to the side of the garage door and grabbed the shovel. Kaleb held the head of the shovel out in front of him. As the orc brought his hand in closer, Kaleb took a quick jab at it. The orc withdrew his reach and pulled the finger back. Blood dripped from it. Both Kaleb and the orc watched for a moment as the blood ran down his finger and then dripped from his wrist to the floor. The orc, now angry looked back to Kaleb. Kaleb looked up

to meet its gaze.

The orc snapped out at Kaleb, his palm reaching for Kaleb's throat. Kaleb pulled back and stabbed again with the shovel. The shovel made a thud as the tip stuck into the upper abdomen of the green beast. Kaleb pushed harder. The beast, that seemed to be a large-strong beast, was quick to retreat. The orc slammed into the minivan. Kaleb pulled the shovel away and thrust again. The orc slowly slid down the van to the garage floor. Kaleb stood still, holding the shovel. The thought of the news cast rang in his head. "These creatures have proven regenerative abilities..." Kaleb used the shovel to nudge at the body. It seemed in every respect a human. The beast stood on two legs and used his arms. He had a human form. The orc did heave its chest, though not any more. Perhaps it was in fact dead. Kaleb slid back along the linoleum floor until his back rest against the wall separating the hallway from the kitchen. He sat there for a long moment; afraid to look away for fear that the beast wouldn't be there when he returned.

When Kaleb was sure the orc would not get back up he decided to go back to his room. He checked the phone. It had a slight charge to it so he turned it on. When it powered on he dialed his mom. Her familiar voice left him a message saying she wasn't able to answer her phone. He hung it up and sat on floor against the bed. He pulled his knees in to his chest and crossed his ankles. He dropped his head into his knees and rested his wrists over them. The phone sat limply in his hand as he let out a wary sigh.

A sound came from the phone. When he flipped it open he could see there was a voicemail. He raised the phone to his ear to listen.

"...You have 8 new messages. First new message."

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"Kaleb. It's mom. Give me a call. There are some strange things happening all around. I just want to know that you are safe. Love you."

"End of message. To delete message please press seven. To save press nine."

-click-

"Message saved. Next message."

"Kaleb. The news said to get together and stay together. Give me a call back."

"End of message..."

-click-

"Kaleb. Please call me. You have me worried."

"End of..."

-click-

"Kaleb. We are heading to the lake to check on you. If you get this message call me back."

"End.."

-click-

"Hey Kaleb. Sorry about tonight. My dad said I needed to stay home and help with some stuff. Give me a call tomorrow." It was John. He had bailed on the fishing.

"End of message..."

-click-

"Kaleb. Where are you?! We're at your truck. Call me.... Hey Glenn, what is that?"

"I am not sure." Kaleb heard his dad in the background. "Get back into the truck"

"Why? What is it." Kaleb could hear shuffling followed by panic

and the sound of the doors slamming.

"I don't know what those things are." His dad continued.

"Go! Go faster.!" Kaleb listened as it seemed his mom forgot about the call.

"Are you still on the phone?"

"Oh the phone. Kaleb..."

"Let me see that. Kaleb, it's dad. Call me the second you get this. I don't know what is going on... We're heading to the Base. Come there when you get this. We love you son. Be safe."

"End of message. ..." Kaleb presses the function to save the message.

"Message saved."

Kaleb flipped the phone shut. Obviously with the orc able to get in through the garage it wouldn't be safe to stay home alone. What if one came in when he was asleep? He would be defenseless. He had to find a way to get somewhere safe. His parents were on their way to the Air Force base. He could go that direction and attempt to find them.

It didn't take Kaleb long to get ready. He tossed a pocket-knife into his backpack; along with several shirts, a pair of shorts, the phone charger, and a lighter. He then picked up his shovel, slid his phone into his pocket and started down the hall. He stopped by the bathroom and absently grabbed his toothbrush and toothpaste as well as his deodorant. As he stepped back into the hall he started to question the importance of the hygienic products at a time like this. When he came to the end of the hall, before turning into the kitchen, he reassured himself that the orc still lay on the garage floor against the van.

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Kaleb went into the kitchen and started loading his backpack with stuff he may need. He placed the can opener and several canned soups into the backpack. Kaleb prepared several cold meat sandwiches and bagged them up. The last he immediately took a bite from and crammed the others into the pack. Kaleb opened the fridge and took a can of Pepsi. Who's to say how long it would be before he would get to grab another soda. Worst case scenario, soda could slowly become obsolete. He grabbed the keys from the hook on the wall then stepped out into the garage. Kaleb cautiously stepped over the beast and around the van. With the beast blocking the driver's door he didn't feel comfortable trying to move it. He slipped into the van's passenger door and climbed over to the driver's side. He placed his pack in the floorboard of the passenger seat then slipped the key into the ignition. He turned the key and the van started up. He reached up and hit the garage door button. The garage door rose, slowly letting light fill the garage. The orc stayed put. Kaleb put the van in reverse and backed out of the garage. The orc fell over to the side and to the garage floor. As he backed up the drive he noticed the gas gauge. He didn't have but an eighth of a tank. His mom's voice came to him.

"Make sure to put gas back in the tank when you are done," she would say.

A slight chuckle escaped him. He backed out into the street and started off. His entire neighborhood was extremely quiet. He thought out his path to the gas station, not wanting to drive up where he and TC encountered the first orc. As he drove he noticed that many of the cars were gone. The ones he did see he knew from experience that they were parked because they couldn't run. He turned a few blocks up

from his house so to avoid the area from earlier. No matter. This new path had its own grotesque scenic view. Among the carnage was a small white car stained red, with a body lying bloody on the hood. Several younger men lay together on the ground. They appeared to be slammed up against the outside of a house. Blood stained the white siding in a series of vertical streaks. Farther up the road a man sat in a rocking chair on his porch. His hands held a shotgun and his head was missing. The blast from the gun sprayed his brain along his house and up into the roof of his porch.

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RUNNING ON EMPTY

Kaleb pulled up to the main street where the gas station stood just across the street. Cars were parked along both sides of the street, several cars took up space in the parking lot at the pumps. Kaleb pulled into the street where he parked. He didn't feel that he would be a nuisance to traffic. What traffic? The gas station was a small town gas station, Phil's Gas Fast. Kaleb worked there the previous summer. He grabbed his shovel and stepped out of the van. He watched the street, both ways, as he crossed just like his mom taught him so many years ago. This time he wasn't watching for traffic, but instead for orcs. He

stepped to the curb and started for the doors. He noticed the car at the first pump. The keys were still in the ignition. The handle was in the car's tank. The pump screen read "wait for attendant". Kaleb understood this. It meant that the person picked the pay inside option and was waiting for the gas station attendant to approve it. They would be waiting a while by the looks of it. Where did the driver go? Kaleb crossed the lot toward the doors. He noticed something moving inside the store. It was then that he noticed the glass in the doors had been shattered. He gripped the shovel handle tightly and dropped to a crouch. Maybe the beast didn't see him and he could sneak in and get the upper hand. He quickly checked his courage and stepped slowly and cautiously toward the doors.

The window shattered with the sound of a large blast from a gun. Kaleb fell to his stomach on the pavement. He grabbed the shovel and rolled up against the building. Was the shooter aiming for him?

"I suggest you get the hell out of here!" A man's voice came from inside.

"My name is Kaleb. I just came to get gas and I will be on my way."

"Pumps are broken! Piss off!" The gruff voice returned sharply.

"They're not broken. I used to work here. I can get them to work." Kaleb stayed against the building. He could hear whispers from inside.

After they stopped, the voice came back. "You turn on the pumps. You help me gas up. Then we both go our separate ways."

"That works for me. I'm not looking for friends right now anyway." Kaleb said in an apathetic tone.

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"Alright, Get in here and get this done." Kaleb stood and picked up his shovel. "You can leave that shovel outside." Kaleb was in no position to argue so he laid the shovel against the window to the side of the doors. As he pulled the door open he felt dumb, what was the point with the glass shattered out and all? No matter. When Kaleb looked at the man he could see a woman with him. The man was middle-aged, forty maybe as was the woman. He was taller with sun-dried skin and looked like he could be a construction worker or city worker. He obviously worked in the heat. The woman was pretty in a conventional way. Her hair was a mess but otherwise seemed attractive. Her long dark-brown hair curled in large waves, her face showed absolute fear.

"What are you waiting for?" barked the man with the shotgun.

"Sorry. It will take just a minute." Kaleb stepped over to the register. He noticed the screen was off.

"The machine is off." He uttered.

"Yes. There was a beeping. It drove me crazy." The man said.

"I will have to go around and turn it back on." Kaleb nodded to the door behind the man. The man glanced at the door then turned back to Kaleb. He nodded in approval. Kaleb stepped through the door and went to the register. He plugged the register in.

"It will be just a minute while it boots up." Kaleb said. He turned back to see the cigarettes were all but gone.

"Alright." The man said. His wife had already started through the store toward the booths near the window. She sat there, watching out the window.

"What's with the shovel?" The man asked.

Kaleb thought about the man's question carefully. His response could result in the man forcefully taking the shovel from him. He simply responded, "It's the only thing I had."

"Have you seen any of those news casts? The ones that talk about those creatures." The man asked.

"The orcs? Yeah. They sound pretty mean." Kaleb returned.

"They are. We have encountered several already."

"I've came across a few myself." Kaleb said as he recounted the encounter he just had in the garage.

"This isn't a pissing contest." The man said absently. He grabbed a fountain cup and walked around the isles to the shattered window. Kaleb heard the beep of the register powering up. He glanced down at the screen. It was on the sign in screen.

"uh-user. "Kaleb thought for a moment. He didn't notice the man at the window glancing back at him. Kaleb lifted the keyboard to see a small piece of yellow paper.

usr : JFranklin

psw : 1234

"Typical Jeff." Kaleb said to himself as he typed.

"Excuse me." The man said.

"Oh. Nothing." Kaleb said. When the register completed the boot up the beep returned. Kaleb pressed the approval button.

"Did you get it?" the man asked.

"Yeah, I think so." Kaleb assured him.

"Babe!" The man called out. She turned. "Get the kids. We gotta

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go." The woman disappeared behind the snack bar. After a moment, two little kids came out and around the snack bar with her. They both appeared to be between ten and twelve. She led them to the booths where there were several cigarette boxes. She handed each kid a box. The kids each took their box and started through the store, throwing chips, snack cakes and candy bars into the boxes.

"Please grab some things with a bit of substance." She called out to them as she started filling her own box.

"Karen. When you and the kids are finished, be ready but stay inside. I am going to fill up the tank." The man called to the woman. He grabbed two gas cans. "Kaleb, is it?"

"Yes." The man handed the can to him, and then grabbed two more.

"Let's get this done." He led Kaleb out toward the pump. As they stepped through the doors he went on, "We can watch each other's backs as we do this." The talk of protecting each other reminded Kaleb about his shovel. He reached over and took it. The man took a quick glance at the shovel.

"There's blood on your shovel." He said. Kaleb understood that he wasn't just stating the obvious. He was questioning it.

"Yeah, from the last encounter with an orc."

"And..." The man was clearly looking for more information about Kaleb's encounter with the green monster he killed.

"I killed it." Kaleb said matter-of-factly. The man stopped and turned back to Kaleb.

"How did you kill it?" Kaleb could sense the skepticism in the man's voice.

"I don't know." Kaleb stepped around the man and walked to the car. "Is this your car?" The man asked.

"No." Kaleb pulled the pump out and started the flow into one of the cans.

"I stabbed the orc in the abdomen, several times."

"How did you puncture it's skin?" The man's voice turned to more of a curious tone than skeptic.

"I don't know. It just did."

"And you're sure it died?"

"Yep. It is laying on the garage floor of my mom and dad's house." Kaleb noticed the amazement in his eyes. "I know. I didn't believe it myself. I checked... a lot. I remembered that news cast. Where they said that the orcs had some sort of regenerative abilities."

"That was my understanding. I shot one at point-blank range. It fell back but stood up almost immediately. We were able to get into the truck and take off, but it still managed to chase after us for several minutes." Kaleb took a can from the man and started to fill it.

"The name's Troy. My wife's name is Karen. Kids, they're Sam and Johnny." Troy stretched out his hand. Kaleb shook it.

"It's nice to meet you Troy."

"So, where are you heading?" Troy asked. Kaleb started on the fourth can.

"Uh, I don't know exactly. My parents were heading to the Air Force base. I thought I would start that way and go from there. What about you?"

"Since this all started down here in Texas, we thought we would head north. The wife's parents live in Rushville Missouri-up on a hill.

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We thought it would be a good place to hide out and it could be easy to fortify."

"That sounds good." Kaleb admitted. There was silence between him and Troy now, simplifying the already dead quiet environment around them.

"It sure is quiet around here." Kaleb stood; the fourth and final gas can filled.

"We have noticed that too. It's a very uncomfortable silence. These beasts are scary during the day, but I wouldn't chance an encounter with one at night. They seem to have an affinity for night."

"Maybe it's a comfort thing. They are different. Last night I was at the lake and paid no attention to them at first. Then they came at me. I barely saw them under the dock lights but they were horrifying." Kaleb remembered the woman on the dock who must have let her guard down.

Kaleb glanced around at the cars. There were only three in the way of the pump.

"Let's check something out." Kaleb said as he walked over to the next car. The keys sat in the ignition. He then walked down to the third car. The keys were missing. "Troy, you wanna help me with this." Troy stepped up to Kaleb. Kaleb slipped into the driver seat and placed the car in neutral.

"Just give it a push." Kaleb called through the door and pressed against the pavement with his left foot. He and Troy managed to get the car out in the road and out of the way. After Kaleb put the emergency break back on he got out and looked at Troy. He nodded to a light-blue truck just behind them.

"Is that one yours?"

"Yeah." Replied Troy.

"Why don't you get in and when I back these two cars out you can pull in. We will gas you and me up and then we can take the cans as well."

"That's a good idea Kaleb." Troy started for his truck. Kaleb backed both cars out and parked them out in the street. Troy pulled his truck in and they filled it up. Once it was full Troy backed it up and went in the store to get his family. Meanwhile Kaleb pulled the van to the pump and began to fill it up. He watched as Troy and Karen loaded the van with their plunder and gas. The kids climbed into the back seat and Troy sat his shotgun down in the front seat of the vehicle. He returned to Kaleb's side. Kaleb pulled the handle out of his tank and returned it to the pump.

132.47 Please Pay Cashier

Kaleb slid the gas cans into the back of the van through the sliding glass door. He stepped over to meet with Troy; he held the shovel casually over his shoulder.

"I'm glad we met here today, Kaleb." Troy said.

"Me too, Troy. Me too." Kaleb took the outstretched hand once again.

"If you find yourself near Rushville, look for me." Troy added.

"Sure thing. Drive safe." Kaleb said. Troy started for his truck and Kaleb turned back to the van.

The beast stood just behind the pump.

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"Fuck!" was all Kaleb could say. He dropped the shovel from his shoulder only to have the beast grab it just below the metal. The orc stepped into Kaleb only to have Kaleb step backward alongside the van. The orc used his other hand and reached out. It took Kaleb by the throat. With its other hand it jerked the shovel out of Kaleb's hands and dropped it down beside it. Kaleb reached up to grab the massive paw gripping his throat. One hand went nearly around his throat. Kaleb was mere inches from the orc's face. The deep Black eyes with a slight green tint to them stared back into Kaleb's own. He definitely had human characteristics: Two eyes, a nose, two ears and a mouth. Where the orc differed was the two tusks erupting from its lower lip. The orc's breath was horrible as well. Kaleb could describe it as the meat that rotted there. Kaleb could feel his consciousness slipping. He tried to determine if it was from the breath or the hand choking him, if not a bit of both. From behind, someone shouted at him.

"Kaleb. Do you see breasts on that thing?" Troy shouted. Then Kaleb heard the horrifying sound of a shotgun slipping a bullet into the chamber. Kaleb didn't hesitate. He brought back his leg as far as he could, then with as much force as he could muster; he brought it down and his knee up. The orc loosened its grip on him and grabbed at its groin. As Kaleb hit the pavement the shotgun was fired, and the orc fell back. When the orcs heavy body made an even larger thud on the pavement Kaleb was reminded of Troy's story of before. He knew his shovel would keep it down. He reached over and took the shovel in his hand. Kaleb stood and raised the shovel high above his head. The orc was still in pain but seemed to worry primarily for his groin.

Kaleb didn't let it slow him. He brought the shovel down and let

the edge land straight against the large-green beast's throat. The shovel buried itself several inches through the neck before coming to a loud stop at bone.

"Holy shit! You weren't kidding about that thing, were you?" Troy shouted in excitement. He knelt down near the orc. It was not breathing. He took the shovel from Kaleb and nudged the orc for himself. Satisfied with the motionless body he placed his hand on the orc's chest and wiped across and down to its side abdomen. Where the green muscular front now had a pale green scar tissue cover where the shotgun spread apparently made its impact.

"Damn." Troy stood. "I think I need to pick up a shovel."

"There's a hardware store down the road there. Turn left up at the four-way." Kaleb wiped sweat from his brow.

"I think it is time to go." Troy said.

"Me too. I might run in for a drink really quick. Would you mind?" Kaleb asked. He held the shovel out for Troy. Troy took the shovel and nodded to the building.

"Make it quick." Kaleb ran inside. He stopped at the bathroom quickly, so to avoid having to stop along the way. He looked at himself in the mirror with amazement.

Kaleb, master of the shovel.

He took a quick lap around the store, grabbing beef jerky, sunflower seed, his fountain drink and anything else that sounded good. He grabbed a box from the back and stuffed it in then filled the remaining area of the box with bottles of water. He returned to the parking lot where Troy stood just outside the truck door.

"Thanks." Kaleb said as Troy handed him back his shovel.

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"See ya later." Troy said.

"Yep. Take care." Kaleb returned. He went to the van and backed out of the parking lot. He followed Troy out of town, after their stop off at the hardware store to grab shovels; Kaleb grabbed a second one for himself, Kaleb followed Troy for several miles until he found the sign for 35 Highway. As he slowed down he watched as his new friends kept going their own way. With the blinker signaling his turn he silently waved goodbye to his friend.

His drive up the highway toward the base seemed to be extremely lonely. He had been alone all day, but now he realized just how alone he could be. With no traffic and trees to each side he felt as if he was the only person in the world. He started thinking of his next step. He would find his mom and dad at the military base; hopefully. Everyone he has spoken to had mentioned going north, but what was north? There was plenty of country that way. Perhaps just going in that direction would take him to a safer place. If these beasts were as ferocious as everyone says, could he ever truly be safe. He managed to kill two now, with a shovel. They can't be that bad-could they?

- 8 -

AT THE GATE

The cars lining the road weighed on Kaleb's heart. Maybe the cars have been parked along the road because the base wasn't allowing them in. Kaleb could see where that could be the case. So he kept driving. He would drive until he couldn't anymore and then he would walk the rest of the way to the base. If he came across another one of those orcs he had his shovel.

It didn't take long before Kaleb had no choice but to stop. The road had become blocked clear across both lanes. There were vehicles bumped smashed into the cars ahead of them. Others had pulled off

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the road to avoid the wreckage. Doors had been left open; trunks left up, all vacant. Kaleb sat in the van for a great deal of time. He was weary of getting out, as if the cab would keep him safe from whatever might have been outside. He laid his forehead against the steering wheel.

The passenger door flew open and Kaleb nearly pissed himself. He stared, unbelievably, at the woman pulling the door shut. She looked back at him. She wore an Air Force uniform.

"What's the matter?" She asked. Kaleb tried to answer but only stuttered. "Get a hold of yourself." She flicked her hair out of her eyes. She had these piercing eyes that seemed to stare through him.

"I – I'm sorry. I just wasn't expecting anyone to be here."

"Well, I haven't seen anyone all day. I was trying to get to work when I noticed these vehicles. I pulled over to check them out and; can you believe it, there is no one around."

"So you haven't been on the base yet?" Kaleb asked.

"Not yet. I received a call a bit earlier from a friend who told me to stay away. I couldn't quite catch the whole message because of the commotion going on, but he mentioned green beasts. I am reluctant to get too near the base."

"My parents called me and said they were heading that way. I was on my way to meet them." Kaleb told her.

"You are heading to the base. Maybe I will walk with you."

"I can't let you do that." Kaleb replied chivalrously.

"Are you intimidated by a woman in uniform?" The women retorted.

"No it's not..."

"I'm busting your balls. I am going that way anyway, with or without you-providing I get the nerve. At least walking together will give me a distraction." Kaleb said nothing. "Look, you could claim your just escorting me."

"You mean as a protector." Kaleb added.

"Sure. A protector." The woman pulled a gun free from the sheath and pulled back the clip.

"What is that?"

"It's a gun. A Smith & Wesson M&P. Standard issue. It's my own though. Military won't let you take your issue home-so I bought my own." Monica cocked the gun in a way of showing off. "I keep it in my car."

"It won't do any good against those things." Kaleb warned her.

"Why do you say that?" Monica asked, almost insulted by Kaleb's remark.

Kaleb knew that she wasn't going to be easy to convince. Monica seemed like the tough, independent type that was out to prove that women were just as tough as men. Kaleb confidently replied, "I have seen one of those orcs take a shotgun blast to the chest and wiped it off."

Monica rolled her eyes and in a condescending tone remarked, "This thing took a shotgun blast and lived; and you're still standing. How did that happen?"

"I cut it down with a shovel." Kaleb retorted. The woman chuckled and reached for the door.

Monica wasn't buying Kaleb's story.

There is no way a shovel cut down one of those beasts and a

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shotgun was useless, she thought to herself. She looked at Kaleb with a look that made him suddenly feel like he was an idiot for saying anything and responded, "I may do better on my own." She stepped down out of the cab.

"Wait!" Kaleb opened the door and stepped out to move up to the hood of the van. He stopped at the front of the hood. The woman whipped around toward him.

"What?" She stared at him, but Kaleb wasn't looking at her. He stared about thirty yards behind her. The large beast eyed him.

"Get in the van." He started, not taking his eyes off the orc. The orc continued to stare.

"Why? What is..." The woman turned to follow Kaleb's gaze as she turned to see the orc. "What is that?!" She raised her gun. The beast recognized the motion as a threat and advanced. The woman pulled the trigger and placed four shots directly in the beast's chest before putting another two in its head. The beast fell over. When the woman turned around she saw Kaleb wrapping the vehicle around so it faced the direction they came. He stopped and jumped out once again.

"Are you leaving?" She called. Before Kaleb could respond a growl pulled her attention back to the green creature, now directly in front of her. "How in the..."

The Beast dropped his jaw and screamed, drool slipping down his jaw; the saliva that didn't clear the distance to her face. A thud sounded as the orc directed his attention to the kid with the shovel.

"I told you so." Kaleb pulled the shovel back and jabbed at the orc again. The gash caused the orc to retreat back a step.

"You have got to be kidding me." The woman slowly stepped back.

"Get - in - the - Van!" Kaleb and the orc circled one another, sizing each other up. The beast snapped at Kaleb. Kaleb retaliated with a side swipe and cut the orcs wrist. The orc reached out with the other hand and snatched the shovel handle. Kaleb was worried. Now what would he do. The orc gripped the handle and slashed it down at Kaleb. Kaleb ducked under it and jumped on the exposed back. He wrapped his arms around the neck of the green monster and held tight. He whipped back and forth as the orc thrashed. The orc dropped the shovel head low to the ground and brought it up quickly. The shovel hit Kaleb hard in the head. He fell to the ground, clenching his head. The orc stepped above him. Kaleb looked up into the orc's eyes. Could this be it?

The orc shifted a bit. It was then that Kaleb recognized the sound of a thud, much like the one he just experienced himself. The orc fell down beside him. The woman stood above them both.

"Oh, by the way. The name's Riley; Monica Riley." She raised the shovel head the thrust it down. The blood splattered all over Kaleb as Monica nearly cleaved the orc's head clean off.

#

The road became more of a clutter as they approached the side gate of the base. No guard stood watch; no cars moved, there was no sound at all.

"Do you hear that?" Monica asked.

"Hear what?"

"Exactly! Base is never this quiet." Monica started for the guard

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shed before Kaleb grabbed her by the elbow.

"What do you think you are doing?" Kaleb asked

"I'm going to check things out." Monica said matter-of-factly.

"Like Hell you are. You don't know how many of those things are in there!"

"And just what am I supposed to do, Kaleb? All off my friends are in there. I can't just sit aside and hope everything is okay."

Kaleb knew she was right but also knew that there were only two of them and maybe dozens of those green beasts. "You're right, but we can't just stroll right through the entrance. If you walk straight down that street you are just broadcasting to these beasts that lunch is here."

"Fuck!" Monica pulled her arm away from Kaleb and stomped off into the grass nearby by the fence line.

"Now where are you going?" Kaleb called out with a failed attempt at a whisper.

"What are you-my father? I have to go pee. Damn, Kaleb... Of all the vans to get into..." Her voice trailed off as she stepped behind a bush. Monica was now clearly annoyed with Kaleb.

Kaleb stood alone, staring in the distance across the road leading up into the base. Far in the distance, he saw it; it was another orc, grunting as he dragged a large make-shift sword on the pavement behind him. The weapon shot sparks as it skidded across the ground.

Kaleb ducked behind the nearby vehicles and leaned against the tire of an old-rusty truck. His hands wrung the handle of the shovel he held over his knees. Sweat beaded down his temples. Fear took him. He knew that he would never get use to this feeling. In the grass back in the direction he and Monica came he saw movement in a bush.

Sparing a glance at the bush where Monica disappeared into he reached his feet, carefully remaining as low as possible so to not attract any unwanted attention from the military base. He scattered over to the bush and raised the shovel up over his head.

"What are you doing?" Kaleb heard Monica call from behind him. He turned to see her, bent over a log and her pants pulled down around her ankles. Kaleb was speechless once again. He lowered the shovel, forgetting why he was in view of her in the first place. "Who's that with you?"

Kaleb turned his head to see a rather large guy staring back at him. He had a predominate brow from which his eyes perched beneath. He looked back at Kaleb, startled and furious at the same time. Instinctively he reached out and slugged Kaleb in the face.

#

Kaleb was lying on his back. When he got to his feet, his face throbbed in pain, otherwise he seemed fine. He looked over at Monica. She was rubbing her knuckles, wincing by the pain. He looked down at his feet. The large guy was lying with his own problems. As he sat up blood gushed from his nose and dripped over his lip.

"You broke my nose." He cried from beneath his hands.

Curious, Kaleb looked at Monica and asked, "What happened to him?"

"I hit him." Monica replied sharply.

"Why did you do that?"

"He hit you." Monica never took her eyes off the guy.

"Look, I'm sorry-whomever you are." The guy started. "You just scared me, that's all."

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“What were you doing in the bush?” Kaleb asked. The guy glanced at Monica then he turned his head down. “You’re sick!” Kaleb added.

“Listen. I am truly sorry. I wasn’t going to act on it or anything. It has just been a pretty damn scary day. I didn’t know if I would live to see anyone else again, let alone such a pretty girl.”

Kaleb stood and reached out a hand. Hesitantly the guy took it. Kaleb noticed the blood now on his hand but didn’t let it bother him. He realized that with everything going on currently he had to make a choice as to who he was going to be. At 22 he had done nothing favorable with his life. He fished, hunted and went to college. He never played sports or joined boy scouts.

“The name is Kaleb. This is Monica.”

“Lawrence. But my friends call me Larry.” Kaleb looked at Monica. With a reassuring nod from her he turned back to Larry.

“Larry. If you keep your eyes and hands to yourself, Monica will do the same. There is a lot going on here and I believe we could stand a better chance if we stick together for the time being. What do you say?”

“Listen, I am not good at much. But I would be happy to just be with someone.” Larry nodded.

“Alright, we will work on that. For now let’s get you cleaned up.” Kaleb led Monica and Larry back to the van where he opened the back hatch.

“What’s with the shovels?” Larry asked.

“They’re the only way I know how to kill these things so far.” Kaleb rummaged through a duffle bag, and then pulled out a grey t-

shirt. "Here, wipe your face. I have some water too, give me a second." Kaleb slipped his hand in the box from the gas station.

"Okay, so you seem to know what you want to do. What do we do next?" Monica grabbed the water bottle and poured a little on the shirt. She dabbed it slightly on Larry's face. He whimpered at the touch. "Stop being a baby." Monica barked.

"But it hurts." Larry responded with a whiney voice.

Kaleb was now taking the role of the leader, "I'd say we go on base. We need to see what is going on in there. There are a lot of cars out here heading in that direction."

"It's pointless." Larry added.

"Why is that?" Kaleb asked. He was not in the mood for resistance. His parents were most likely on base.

"That is where I came from. I live-uh-lived on base with my dad. He came home yesterday and told me to get out and leave base. I tried to ask why but he said not to ask any questions and to do as asked. My mom lived south of base in Pleasanton. I was heading there. I took the car but had to quickly leave it. You think the cars are piled up out here, you should see what it's like in there." Larry explained nodding toward the entrance of the base.

"Did you ever figure out what it was?" Kaleb asked.

Larry thought for a second and responded, "Well, I would assume it is those green creatures."

"Did you see any of them?" Monica quickly asked.

"No, but what else could it be?"

Kaleb shut the hatch to the rear of the van and leaned against it. "We need to figure out what is going on. It's obvious they are on base.

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I heard earlier from the news that they were sighted all over.” He walked around the side of the van and slipped in the driver seat. “Why hadn’t I thought of this before? They have been talking about them. Maybe there is more.” Kaleb turned the key slightly just to give power to the vehicle. He turned the radio on. The station was immediately discussing the “Green creatures” known as orcs and their invasion on the United States.

“Stay inside your homes and lock all doors.” The voice came over the speakers in the vehicle. “If you feel the need to go outside do so at your own risk. Do not report problems to the authorities. The green creatures are to be considered dangerous and are not to be approached. The military base is not safe. Please avoid the main populous.”

“That’s what I was expecting to hear.” Kaleb turned the key to the van, killing the radio. He looked at Larry whose jaw stood agape. He simply stared at the radio.

“The military isn’t going to do anything? But there are other bases. Why aren’t they coming to help?” Larry was noticeably panicking. Monica turned and took several steps away. Kaleb couldn’t help but wonder what she was thinking. Larry was not much younger than Kaleb, he appeared to be in high school. That didn’t stop him from towering over the college student.

“I am sure it’s just a matter of time before they regroup. We just need to hold out for a few days. We need to find shelter, somewhere to hide out.” Kaleb paused to listen. He thought he heard something. A glass shatter or metal clang.

“What is it?” Larry asked.

“We need to get off the streets. We’re sitting ducks here.” Kaleb grabbed two more shovels and handed one to Larry. He grabbed his backpack from the back of the van and emptied some of the contents back into the box of foods.

“What are you doing?” Larry watched Kaleb.

“This way we have food but there is room to take other items we may need.” Kaleb handed the third shovel to Monica. She took this shovel passively with an empty nod of appreciation.

“So, what’s with the shovel?” Larry followed Kaleb and Monica. They kept low to avoid detection and ran along the side of the line of cars. Kaleb started for the side entrance to base.

“You’ll see.” Kaleb said with a smirk.



SUPPLY RUN

Kaleb stopped.

“What is it?” Monica asked, glancing around to see what caused his abrupt stop.

“I forgot the van keys in the ignition.”

“So, I am sure no one is going to steal the van.” Monica sarcastically said.

“I guess you’re right. There, the gas station.” Kaleb led Monica and Larry to the shoppette. The parking lot was littered with cars, as

was everything else on base. They hadn't seen but a couple of the orcs far in the distance. Kaleb was quick to lead his ragtag group in the other direction. That led them to the cluster of vehicles around the convenience store. As Kaleb turned the brick corner of the store he saw it. The gore was enough to gag George A. Romero. The bodies were strung across the front of the sidewalk and led in through the door. They had to be careful not to slip on the blood and entrails.

"What exactly are we doing here?" Larry asked.

"I collected supplies back at the convenience store in Marble Falls. I didn't take into account that I would come across anyone other than my parents. We might want to plan ahead a little." Kaleb pushed the door open. The bell ring startled him and he lowered closer to the blood smeared across the floor. He remained in a crouch and crept along the shelves of goods. He heard the crunching of wrappers. He spun on his heels. "What are you doing?"

"Getting supplies." Larry was stuffing bags of chips down his shirt.

"I was leaning more toward water and granola bars. You know - things that can last a while and are helpful."

"I agree. We don't know how long this will all last. We should plan for the long term." Monica offered Kaleb some relief in her agreement. He couldn't help but smirk. Was she intending on staying with him through this? Kaleb was never one considered as a ladies' man. He has had the occasional girlfriend but he still found himself still blushing at Monica's remark. He was sure she didn't mean anything by it. Why was he looking so much into it?

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Kaleb focus, he told himself. He had to keep his mind clear and make preparations. He steered straight to the coolers where he put several liter bottles of water in the backpack until it was full.

“What about food?” Monica asked.

“They have plastic bags behind the counter for that. The bottles are heavier. They would be easier to carry in the backpack.” Kaleb was impressed with the things he remembered and was able to apply to this situation from the days of boy scouts.

Always be prepared

Kaleb and Monica slipped behind the counter and grabbed several plastic bags. They stuffed granola bars, trial size pain killers and water flavor packets into them and stacked several nearby the door before going back for more. Kaleb stopped and looked at Larry. He was slipping glass bottles into his pockets.

“What are you doing? Why do we need alcohol?” Kaleb asked.

“I figure... you never know.” Larry slipped another bottle into a cargo pocket.

“Necessities; alcohol is not a necessity. Go grab some nuts and maybe a couple of those chilled sandwiches; they should be good for dinner tonight or something.” Kaleb turned back to Monica. She was back at the register. Kaleb watched as she slipped a lighter into her pocket. He turned back on Larry. “Think like you are going camping. What would you take camping?” Larry nodded and slipped back behind a shelf. Kaleb was shocked at how easy it was to overlook the bodies. Just thinking about them again made his stomach queasy. He knelt down and leaned against a rack of cheesy Texas themed shirts. He was so caught up in it all that he startled when he noticed Monica’s

hand on the small of his back.

“We should probably keep moving.” She said.

“Okay.” Kaleb stood and walked to the front of the store. He then noticed that they had placed ten bags of things at the door.

“We’re not going to have an easy time carrying these out of here.”

“So let’s stash some until we can come back and grab them.”

Monica offered.

“Alright, where?”

“What about the dumpster?” Kaleb and Monica both turned on Larry. He was standing behind them, eating a bag of chips. “You want one?” He offered the bag to them.

“No.” Monica answered.

“Why would you suggest the dumpsters?” Kaleb asked.

“I’ve seen a few movies. Why not place items you want to hide in a place people wouldn’t care to go? It makes sense if you think about it.” Kaleb did just that. He too has seen enough zombie movies to know that stores are quickly raided. The dumpsters did seem like as good a place as any to store the items. With that new fire he grabbed more bags and began to load them with anything and everything that would fit.

“What are you doing?” Larry asked.

“May as well fill the dumpster up.” Kaleb never stopped bagging up his items. Monica and Larry were quick to join in. Larry slipped back into the cooler and pulled out crates of soda, water and beer. He ran out the back and checked the dumpster. It was close to empty so he climbed in and tossed the trash out onto the ground beside it. The privacy fence hiding the dumpster allowed some safety from whatever

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was nearby, none of them cared to guess. They brought items out to Larry who began to stack them as neatly as possible. When the dumpster was nearly full, they slipped back in the convenience store toward the front where they came in. Kaleb didn't want to scale the fence out back because he didn't want to damage the fence in any way or draw attention to it. If these proved to be the last days there would be enough food in there for them to survive a long while as well as maybe have enough for trade.

So they slipped across the floor of gore and out into the still quiet streets. "Now where?" Monica asked. They stared up and down the streets.

-10-

The infiltration of the base was easy. It was quiet as Kaleb worked his way in and around base. After the shoppette, they had entered near the housing and found no resistance. He wasn't naive enough to think they were alone but he also knew anyone in the area were most likely hiding away and wouldn't come out to the streets to bother them.

He kept on. His goal was simple, cover as much base as possible. He wanted to make every attempt at finding his parents before he gave up. He was looking for his dad's truck, knowing that it would be the best clue that they made it. So far he and his most recent friends had been sneaking around base for several hours.

"It's beginning to get late. The sun's going to go down soon." Monica stated the obvious. Kaleb was just thinking that he was running out of time.

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"We need to find shelter for the night." Kaleb replied. He was exhausted. He was sure Monica and Larry were too.

"Pick a house. I'm sure the residents wouldn't mind." Monica looked around. It was base housing, so each house looked like the one beside it. It made no difference. Kaleb turned and approached the nearest house. He stopped in the drive and scanned the area. The drive was empty, so the car was gone. Maybe no one was home. He looked; the lights weren't on. That wasn't enough. If Kaleb was here hiding from those orcs he wouldn't have lights on either. He walked to the front door and knocked.

"What are you doing?" Larry asked.

"If there is someone in there I don't want to frighten them. I want to be as civilized as possible." Kaleb opened the door and stepped in. "I have no interest in being shot today."

"Fair enough." Larry replied. Monica was in the back. When Kaleb looked back toward her he noticed she was watching the street and yard before she decided it was safe and she shut the door.

"Everything alright?" Kaleb asked.

"Yeah, I saw the drapes across the road move."

"Do you think they will be a problem?" Larry was already checking out the hall.

"No. They're doing what we're doing." Monica checked the drapes in the living room that she and Kaleb were in. Kaleb followed Larry out in the hall and helped to check out the rest of the house. There was no one home. On his way back to the living room Kaleb stopped in the hall. A family photo caught his attention. It was of a married couple and their son. He wasn't much younger than Kaleb.

“So now what do we do?” Larry asked.

“We get comfortable and sleep. We will get back to things tomorrow.”

#

With the need for being unobtrusive they kept the lights out and noise low. They had the radio turned on low to keep up on the news. They ate food from the kitchen, sandwiches, and packed away a couple of canned goods for their packs. Larry slipped into a sleeping bag from the garage and was asleep in the son’s room. Kaleb and Monica were in the parent’s room. Kaleb insisted that she take the bed and he would sleep on the floor.

“So, what is the plan for tomorrow exactly?” Monica said as she let out a long yawn.

“I don’t know. I hadn’t really thought about it. My only thought was for me to find my parents. As long as I think I can I can’t just leave. They said they would be here.”

“And what if you find that they aren’t here?”

“Do you mean not finding the truck, or do you mean...?” Kaleb couldn’t finish the question.

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be negative.”

“No, don’t be sorry. It’s not negative; it’s honest.” Things quieted down for a minute. Kaleb began thinking about what he would do if he couldn’t find his parents. He couldn’t look forever. At some point he would have to make the decision he had yet to accept. “What about you? What are your plans?”

Monica thought for a moment, “Um... I think I would like to head north.”

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“What is north?” Larry chimed in. Kaleb and Monica both startled. Kaleb couldn’t help but wonder how long he had been standing in the door unnoticed.

Monica continued, “I am from Minneapolis. I think that if I get anywhere close to there I will be happy. If I get there and it isn’t safe I will keep moving.”

“The radio said that these things aren’t that north; yet. I worry that they won’t stop, but north does sound good for the time being.” Kaleb sat up to look at Monica.

“You’re welcome to join me- you and Larry.” Monica knew that she couldn’t travel alone and Kaleb was starting to grow on her.

“I tell you what. Tomorrow, we can look for my parents. If we can’t find them after tomorrow we can come back here and sleep. The following day we can look for a truck or something. We will fill it with the stuff from the dumpster to get it off base. Then we can take the van and head north.”

“That sounds great.” Monica smiled. Kaleb once again saw the beauty in this girl. He smiled back at her then lay back down. He needed to keep his mind clear. He couldn’t let feelings for Monica surface. He had an agenda, a plan. He needed to figure out why the shovel was able to damage these beasts, but guns couldn’t. He needed to figure out where they came from-and where they were not. Before he realized what happened, he was sleep.

#

Startled, Kaleb sat up. Sweat beaded across his brow. He turned to see Monica sitting back. She must have been trying to wake him.

"What is it?" He asked, wiping sleep from his eyes.

"It's morning. We better not waste the day."

"What time is it?" Kaleb sat up and stretched his arms to the air.

"It's early. Now get dressed and let's get going." Monica stood and left the room. Kaleb tousled his hand through his hair and stood up. As he walked down the hall he could hear the sizzle of grease. Then he heard Larry laughing hysterically. He turned at the end of the hall and saw Monica standing at the stove. She was cooking pancakes.

"How long have you been awake?" He asked as he stopped in front of the coffee pot. He poured a cup and turned, leaning against the counter.

"Not long. I heard Larry from down the hall." Monica nodded her head back, gesturing at the table. Larry was jittery in his chair. In front of him, spread out across the table was a variety of handguns and switchblades. There must have been close to a dozen guns and twice as many knives.

"Kaleb, look what I found in the closet." Larry recklessly swiped his hand across the table, scattering the weapons. He jerked a hand back quickly and gripped it tightly with the other. "Ouch!"

"Did you cut your hand?" Kaleb asked. He took a sip of his coffee.

. "Fuck! Yeah." He yelled.

"You have to be careful. We can't afford you to be getting hurt." Kaleb looked at the weapons. He wondered if the knives would have the same effect on the orcs as his shovel had.

"I know." Larry began to cry. "I saw them in the closet and thought..." His words were lost in the whale of cries. He had leaned near Kaleb and laid his head down on the table.

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"Are you drunk?" Kaleb stood and stepped back from the table. The smell was overwhelming.

"I thought I would try some of the whiskey. I thought it would help me relax."

"Stupid! That is just stupid." Larry nearly fell out of the chair. Kaleb was furious. They couldn't afford Larry to not be at his all, not now. They had to get through base and if they didn't find his parents they had to get back to the house.

Kaleb stood and filled another cup with coffee. He slid it over to Larry. "Here, drink this."

"What is this supposed to do?"

"Sober you up a bit. We need you focused." Kaleb slipped down the hall to check his pack. He stopped when he heard someone at the door.

"When I woke up he was like that." Monica stood leaning against the door jam.

"Well, he can't be doing that and think he can stay with us. That makes him a liability. He could get someone hurt."

"I get that, but we can't just send him away; not while he is like this. He wouldn't stand a chance."

"Then he can stay here at the house while we take a look around." Kaleb was trying not to snap at Monica but he couldn't help but be angry. Kaleb slipped his pack over his shoulder. When he turned he saw Larry standing behind Monica. "Larry..."

"I heard ya. You don't want me tagging alone."

In the most fatherly voice Kaleb could muster, he looked straight at Larry and reprimanded, "You made this choice when you decided to

get drunk. You can't do that and expect to survive against these creatures."

"Fine. I'll wait here." Larry replied like a teenager being reprimanded by his father. It was fitting since he was a teen, just a few years younger than Kaleb.

"We will be back by dark. Stay inside and keep a low profile." Kaleb slipped past Larry and started down the hall. "Maybe get some sleep." He added as he walked away.

"You got it!" Larry followed Monica and Kaleb back into the kitchen. Kaleb grabbed a couple pieces of toast and checked the window to the back door. When he was satisfied that he didn't see anything out of the ordinary he opened it and slipped through it. Monica shot Larry a look before chasing after Kaleb.

#

When they came around the side of the house Kaleb stopped and knelt by a bush. He watched the road for a long moment. It was clear and quiet.

"Can you remember how to get back here when it is time to come back? He asked.

"Yeah, I think so." Monica said.

"Alright, and we're still in agreement. We will search today, and then tonight we will come back here and sleep. Tomorrow we will head north-if we don't find evidence of my parents.'"

"Agreed. Now let's get moving." Monica stepped cautiously out in the street. She glanced at the house across the road in time to see the curtain slip back into place. Kaleb stopped beside her. "Did you see that?"

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“Yeah. Let’s hope that you are right-that they don’t want trouble.” Kaleb followed Monica’s directions to head toward the front gate of the base. They found no trouble as they strolled down the road of the housing of base. The homes were as the ones the night before, quiet. Every once in a while Kaleb would stop, claiming he heard something. Monica would listen and ultimately decide she hadn’t heard it, and then they would move on.

“What was that?” Kaleb asked, sure that Monica didn’t hear it again. He looked in astonishment as Monica’s eyes were wide and her jaw was agape. “You heard it?” He was dumbfounded. Up until now he assumed his mind was playing tricks. Maybe he was starting to go crazy.

But if Monica heard it...

“Quick-Get down.” Monica pulled Kaleb down behind a bush. They were at the end of a parking lot to a large brick building. Kaleb glanced out from behind the bush to see a large pack of the orcs standing at a door to the building. They were having an aggressive, or what Kaleb assumed was aggressive, conversation. These beasts seemed to always be aggressive.

The largest orc, by mere inches of the other estimated seven-foot creatures, stood in the front. He waved his arm in different directions as his gravel voice belched grunts, coughs and growls to a pack of six orcs. They stood straight, their arms out to their sides due to their torso size not allowing them to rest against their sides. They bared their bottom teeth from under snarls. As they started off into the building the next six stepped up and stood in the same fashion. After several minutes of the leader ordering these men in the same way

another group walked up. This group was much larger and walked in a smooth formation. They were obviously their own brand of military. A large task Kaleb wagered. These creatures didn't seem easy to tame. When the group was close to the leader they parted and amongst them was a small group of humans. They were chained at the wrists and ankles then tied together from them. Some wore the camouflage uniform issued to them when they joined the service, others were in civilian clothes.

“Do you see your parents in there?” Monica asked.

“No, I don't”

“Then it's not...” Monica stopped.

“What is it?”

“That is Tim. He's in my unit. I work with him here on base.”

Monica and Kaleb watched the group. Tim knelt, presumably to tie a shoe. When he stood Kaleb could hear a muffled wail escape Monica's lips. He watched as the man began to stand. He had a knife in his hands. He looked around; Kaleb assumed to decide his escape route. Kaleb froze. Tim was looking at him and Monica. He slightly cocked his head in bewilderment. With a flip of the wrist Tim cut the ropes binding his hands and attached him to the person in front of him in the line. He juked to the side and started for the bush Kaleb and Monica hid behind. Monica watched Tim as he closed the gap. The grunts became louder and Kaleb saw fear creep onto Monica's face. He reached out and grabbed her, pulling her back behind the building. Just then Tim hit the ground beside them. His eyes were locked onto Monica. He had a large crude bladed weapon protruding from his spine. He coughed and blood spilled from his lips. He reached out in

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their direction just before he exhaled and went limp. Hearing the approaching footsteps, Kaleb pulled on Monica.

“We gotta go!” He said in an exhausted whisper and pulled on her until she was able to turn and run with him. They slipped around behind the building and into a doorway.

“We can’t stay here. We have to get out of here.” Kaleb said. Monica was in tears. She stared blankly through him at the brick wall behind. He grabbed her by the shoulders. “Monica. It is very important that you listen to me now. We need to move. We need to get away from these things.”

“Okay.” She said absently. “Okay.” Kaleb stared off across the yard. He could hear that the grunts hadn’t increased any more. They must have stopped at the body of their prisoner. He and Monica were safe, for the time being. Unless something came out this back door they were safe, for now.

#

They sat in the doorway for a long time, until Kaleb knew nothing was coming after them. He held his shovel up in front of his face, waiting for the opportunity to react first. He wouldn’t let them get the jump on him. He feared that if they took initiative he wouldn’t get a chance to take a swing. He peaked out from their hiding spot and glanced in both directions. Satisfied that there was nothing, Kaleb stepped out and turned the corner where they came from. Nothing was there. No orcs and no bodies of fallen military.

“Let’s go. We need to get out of here.” He took Monica’s hand and they ran off across the yard to the tree line. Once there, they slipped through the first line of trees and took cover. Kaleb scanned

the building. The orcs were nowhere in sight. Where could they have gone?

As if she could read the puzzled look on his face, Monica said, "That is the barracks." They were sleeping there. They lived in there.

"They were taking people as prisoners. I wonder why."

"I'd rather not stay and find out." Monica admitted. She was starting to get herself back together.

"I think that is a good plan." Kaleb admitted.

"What about your parents?" Monica looked up into Kaleb's eyes. He fought the tears down.

"If they are collecting people as slaves then I have a chance. As of right now I am not confident we will make it off this base if we don't go now." Kaleb knelt down against the wall and scanned the area for danger. "I think it is clear. We need to get back and grab Larry." Kaleb took a hesitant step out into the yard; then another. After several of the frightening steps he paused to wait. When no shout of detection occurred he motioned for Monica to follow. She was less hesitant than Kaleb with her steps but stopped just behind him, afraid to take the lead. Together they quietly walked across the yard until they encountered a tree. They paused for just a moment. Kaleb glanced back to the barracks. There was nothing. No orcs, no people, no fallen Tim. They ran.

#

It was close to seven when they arrived back at the housing area. When they saw the house where they left Larry the fears began to subside. Kaleb slipped through the front door, followed by Monica.

"Larry, we need to..." Kaleb stopped. A man sat at the kitchen

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table. He let his hand rest on a silver pistol. Kaleb turned to look at the door. As if to answer Kaleb's question, the man said,

"You're in the right house, don't you worry about that." The man's face was hidden in the shadow of his fedora. With the sun setting the dim light in the window didn't help matters.

"Is this your house?" Kaleb asked.

"No. The folks who lived here were off base immediately-or so they said. I am not entirely sure they made it. The cars leaving base piled up. I'm sure that made them all an easy target for those... those, things."

"If this is not your place, and the previous occupants are most likely dead, what is it you want from us?"

"Why do you think I want something from you?" the guy tapped the gun with his fore finger.

"Well, you see, we saw the curtains move last night. I assume that was you." The man nodded. "Then what do you need from us?"

"My wife was out shopping when those creatures arrived. She called me on the cell phone. Have you ever had to hear someone you love die and not be able to do anything.?" The man raised the gun from the table and whipped it to emphasis his story. "She said she was at the BX then screams started. In a matter of seconds they were on her. She cried out. She told me to stay put-for the girls. She said they were green. She cried out, "it hurts." The man slammed the gun down on the table. "It hurts. It hurts. That's the last thing I heard my wife say. Then there was the sound of meat ripping from bone. I heard Tendons snapping, and the unpleasant sounds of the beast devouring my wife."

"I'm sorry for your loss." Monica sat at the table across from the man.

"Thank you." The man sniffed and wiped his face with his coat sleeve. "Anyway. I need to get my girls off base. I saw you guys come in and leave without thinking twice."

"We thought about it more than twice, that's for sure."

"Regardless. I thought you would be able to help me get my girls out of here. We won't be any trouble and we can go our separate ways once outside the gates."

Kaleb stood and walked to the window. He gazed out at the neighborhood. There was no movement. Things were quiet in this side of base. They could just move over and jump the fence, but then what about the entire stash of goods he had in the van at the entrance he came in. He also had the stash of goods nearby there at the shoppette.

"We can help you-if you help us too." He turned to the man. By now Kaleb could see that he was worn out; like he had been up all night watching... and waiting for the creatures to come back.

"What do you have in mind?" the man asked somberly.

"Tonight, we rest. You guys can sleep here, this way we can split up watch. It looks as though you could use some sleep and you haven't let yourself get much."

"I appreciate that." The man nodded.

"Tomorrow morning, we find a truck-whatever truck we can grab, and then we make our way to the shoppette. We have the dumpster full of water and snacks. There's enough for all of us to share. Then we leave base and take the van with us. We head east a ways... Monica, you mentioned north. Are you still up for it?"

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“Yeah. But what about your...”

“My parents are either dead, prisoners or not on base. I have to focus on getting out of here. You saw what happened earlier. We almost lost everything.” The silence in the room was enough for Kaleb. “So tomorrow, we head north.”

“Sounds good.” The man said.

“One question-if I may.” Monica started. “Where’s Larry?” The man shuffled in his chair.

“He’s been passed out in the bedroom for hours. I figured I would sit and wait for you while I kept guard for him. My girls are in the other room playing a board game.”

“Good deal. We need to do something about him and that alcohol. We can’t take the chance of him drinking too much and doing something stupid.” Kaleb took another look out of the window. It was quiet. “I’ll take first watch, then Larry, if we can wake him up. Then Monica you take third.” Kaleb looked at the man in the chair.

“Jim. My name is Jim.”

“Jim, you can take fourth if that works for you.”

“I’ll do what I have to.” Jim replied gratefully.

“Alright, then go relax. Play with your kids. Get to sleep as soon as you can. Don’t worry about a thing.” Kaleb reached over and turned out a light. It was still light outside, but there was no reason to draw any unwanted attention to the house as it darkened outside. He sat in a chair near a window and kept a steady gaze on things outside.

Everyone had disappeared to their respected areas of the house to rest up. Kaleb let his mind wander. Where did his parent’s go? With all of the cars out leading into the base maybe they never made it in. But if

that was the case where did they go?

#

Two days ago Kaleb was loading up the boat and heading to the lake to catch some Blue Cat. Now he watched out the window as the night slip by-just hoping he didn't have to wake everyone up.

"How are things?" Kaleb startled. He looked back to the hallway to see Monica standing in the room behind him.

"Quiet." He responded. He had to concentrate to take a deep breath. His pulse was racing. Monica sat on the couch near him and tucked her legs under her.

"It is lonely back there, if you don't count Larry's drunken snoring."

"I'm sorry. I had a hard time sleeping last night too. Did you get rid of Larry's alcohol?"

"I think. I found several bottles of whiskey. You would think that he would have at least grabbed better quality." Monica held out a bottle of a cheaper brand of whiskey. Kaleb took the bottle and tipped it up to take a drink. It burned. This was the style he and his friends would buy to mix just to get drunk. It was not, as his dad called it, sipping worthy.

"That's a kid for ya." Kaleb admitted. He handed the bottle back to Monica who took her own drink. She coughed lightly then replaced the lid. Kaleb reached out to take it once again.

"Do you think that we can trust Jim?" Monica asked. This is what was on her mind the whole time, Kaleb just knew it.

"He's looking to get out of here, just like us. I think we can trust him as long as we have to. We made it clear that once we were off base

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we would go our own ways. That was his idea. I think we'll be alright.

"Okay." Monica situated and lay back on the couch.

"What are you doing?" Kaleb asked. He watched as she pulled a throw blanket off the back of the couch and covered herself.

"I feel more comfortable in here with you."

Kaleb could tell that Monica was slowly warming up to him. He didn't want to draw attention to that fact and he surely didn't want to complicate the situation. Quietly he replied to Monica, "Alright. Get some sleep."

#

Kaleb woke Monica up to move her to the bed before getting Larry up for his turn. He acted surprisingly sober before taking his post. Still Kaleb was a bit nervous and so took a while to go to sleep. He heard Larry come in and wake Monica. She startled awake, that didn't help, then he fell back to sleep and he slept hard.

#

"Kaleb!" Came a call from up the hall. Monica was running up the hall. "Kaleb, get up!" She threw the door open.

"What is it?" Kaleb muttered as he tried to clear the grogginess from his head.

"Jim and the girls; they're gone."

"Okay, so maybe they changed their minds. Maybe they wanted to go on their own." Kaleb was trying to reassure himself as he was attempting to calm Monica.

"Then why did they take all of our things?" With that Kaleb shot up.

"They what?" He ran into the living room. EVERYTHING was

gone. The guns; the knives; the small amount of food they had brought into the base. Even the remaining alcohol was gone.

“That son-of-a-bitch!” Kaleb wrenched his hands on the handle of the shovel. He didn’t take the shovel. More importantly, Kaleb didn’t tell Jim about the shovel being the only thing he had found that could do damage to the orcs. “Larry! Larry, get up!” He rushed to the room and wrapped up their gear. He pushed the blanket into the pack, and then overturned the room to find anything else he could find useful. He found some candles and a pocketknife. Monica did the same in the kitchen, finding some boxes of macaroni & cheese and a few canned goods.

Larry was in the living room waiting when they both finished. “What’s going on?” He asked.

“He stole everything.” Monica answered. Kaleb was already stepping out the door. Monica quickly followed.

“Who took what?” Larry chased after them.

#

“You’re telling me that in the time I fell asleep, someone showed up-joined our team then left with all of our stuff.” Larry tugged the shoulder strap up to adjust his pack. Monica could hear the cling of glass on glass as he did. She didn’t pay it any attention.

“Yes, Larry. A guy came into the house; because you were drunk and passed out, you didn’t hear him enter. He sat in a chair and held a gun aimed at us when we showed up. We came to an agreement and divvied up watch. Now he is gone and took with him all of our things. Now, if you want to follow his lead and take your own path-do so.”

Kaleb whipped around and took Larry’s pack. He shoved him back as

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he knelt down and pulled the zipper open. He took the glass bottles out and threw them down in the ditch. He was not in the mood for any of Larry's drunken antics. "If you want to travel with us; I don't want to see any more of this until you can handle it." Kaleb turned and kept on his path. Monica stayed at his side.

"Kaleb, I'm sorry." Larry started. Kaleb stopped. A loud distant ring caught his attention-then another. It was gun fire.

"Come on." He began to run down the road.

#

"Damn it!" Kaleb kicked a tree stump. "That dumb Bastard took our idea, and then he got himself caught. How are we supposed to get that food out now?" Kaleb gestured to the scene.

In the distance, they could see the dumpster. The black truck had been driven right up into the side of it. Obviously it made a noise that was loud enough to attract half a dozen orcs. The doors of the truck were open, the passenger side ripped away. Jim lay on the ground, three orcs sat around his bloody body. Red smears led from around the back of the truck to where he laid. A gun lay on the ground nearby. The girls were nowhere to be seen. Kaleb assumed they were shuffled off to the barracks and Jim must have died in an attempt to protect the girls. Stupid bastard Kaleb thought to himself.

"Kaleb, there is nothing we could do for them. Jim made that decision for him and his girls. We need to do what we need to for ourselves." Monica pulled on his shirt. Kaleb wasn't listening to her. He had red in his eyes. He gripped the shovel. He was pissed. He started for the group. "Kaleb... Kaleb..." he wasn't listening.

He stepped in with the shovel and cleaved off the head of the first

orc without drawing attention. The thud of the body got attention though. He slammed the shovel into the throat of the next, but he was forced to duck under the reach of the third. Jim tripped him and Kaleb slid back on his butt across the blood and gore. The orc wasn't cautioned. He stepped in and took Kaleb by the shirt collar. Kaleb brought the shovel up and slammed it down on the forehead of the beast with an enormous thud.

The orc, frustrated, whipped Kaleb around and tossed him against the side of the truck. He looked up to see Monica swing a shovel of her own at the orc. He turned on her, exposing his back to Kaleb. Kaleb didn't hesitate. He stood and jumped at the orc. Why he didn't grab his shovel he didn't know. The orc bucked and Kaleb flew into the back of the truck. He hit hard. Something stuck him in the back. He rolled to see an animal trap. Kaleb pried the teeth apart and clicked the trap. He jumped from the truck at the beast, this time with the trap in hand. As he fell toward the orc he slammed the trap against the back of its skull. The orc didn't have time to react. The trap slammed shut and tore through its head several inches. The orc tried to reach for it but died trying to pull it free.

Three more orcs were on them. Blood dripped from their lips. By now both Monica and Kaleb stood with shovels in their hands. The orcs came in and they jabbed the shovels toward them. They struck hard and fast into the throats and heads of the orcs. The orcs were hard pressed to quit. They had their own blades, rusted metal wrapped with a mesh material. They were crude enough to cause tetanus on their own, if they didn't take an arm or head off in the process. Kaleb had no intentions on finding out. He used his shovel to parry the

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blows and sliced the throat wide open of his attacker. Monica dispatched her own shovel and took down the second orc. The third was on them now. He swiped both shovels away in one massive swipe. Then it stopped. He stared hard at Kaleb, an inquisitive look on its face. Then the beast fell to its knees, revealing Larry standing behind it a shovel in hand. The shovel was rusty, but the tip was red with blood.

“Let’s move.” Kaleb didn’t hesitate. He jumped to his feet and helped Monica to hers. She wiped her brow but only smeared blood across it. He reached in and grabbed two grocery bags of supplies then led Monica and Larry in the direction of the side entrance.

“Why can’t we grab more? Surely we can find a car or something.” Larry pleaded with Kaleb, not yet wanting to give up on their stash. Kaleb looked back, almost thinking about it. Then he saw them. Not fifteen feet behind the truck was another group of orcs coming to investigate the ruckus.

“We don’t have time.” Kaleb whipped around the corner of a building and kept going. Monica and Larry stayed right with him. For the remainder of their fleeing Larry kept quiet and did exactly what Kaleb said. They saw another group of orcs and Kaleb told them to duck down. After the group had passed, Kaleb led them along a sidewalk to a fence that they needed to climb in order to evade the orcs. Next, they would need to cross several parking lots. Kaleb took the lead and ran from row to row, pausing to check the area before motioning the others on.

Finally, they arrived at the entrance gate. Kaleb knelt down and took a drink of water. It was a surprisingly mild winter. It was jacket weather but Kaleb still felt sweat dripping from his brow. With a quick

wipe from his sleeve he stood and started for the gate. It was quiet near the gate. Had the orcs just not made too much attempt to investigate this area? He didn't care. He was just happy that he could breathe easy for a moment.

"So we get in the van and we will go until we run low on fuel. We will stop before nightfall to get more." Kaleb seemed to relax. He could feel it. It felt like he was gearing up for a camping trip or a road trip; not running for his life from large green orcs.

"Can I stay with you guys for a while longer?" Larry asked. Kaleb ignored Larry's plea. Instead he gazed left to right, watching for... anything. "I won't drink again. I..." A large battle axe slammed into the car door near Larry. Everything went quiet. Kaleb looked at the axe. The wet stain drew his attention to Larry's pants. He was so scared he pissed himself. Kaleb turned around and looked up into the eyes of a large orc. This one was larger than any he had encountered so far. He had three bold black lines, an inch each tattooed on his shoulder. He must have been in a military unit of some kind. Kaleb took the tattoo as rankings; and he had a lot of them.

"Go!" Kaleb knelt behind the hood of the car as the orc took a swipe at him with a second axe. The crude metal weapon scraped across the hood causing a loud squeal and sparks. Kaleb rolled away from the car and tried to pull the other axe free. He hadn't seen these orcs carry a weapon worth taking yet.

"What are you doing?" Monica shouted from behind a beige vehicle just two cars away. "Get out of there!" Kaleb heard the cocking of a pistol. Monica knew the gun wouldn't hurt the orcs. Did Larry know? In all of their talks did they ever mention to Larry that bullets

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do nothing to these creatures? Surely they did.

There was no time for that right now. The orcs reached out and shoved the car to the side. He was coming for Kaleb. Kaleb grabbed the handle of the axe. With a quick tug he realized this axe wasn't going anywhere. The bullets hit the body of the orcs in rapid succession. The orcs stumbled back quickly with each shot, but never fell. He looked down at his chest, then noticing they hadn't penetrated his leathery skin he turned his gaze on Larry. Kaleb was just as stunned of the shots. Kaleb only realized what he was doing when the rather large back hand tossed him to the ground. He was quick to sliver out of the orc's sight and recollected himself.

Meanwhile Kaleb watched the orcs attempt to squeeze through the jumble of cars after Larry. Larry ducked behind a car and Kaleb couldn't see him. He glanced down the cars. Where did Monica go?

He tightened his grip and stood to face the orcs. He too was gone. Kaleb looked up and down the lane of cars. There was nothing. No sound, no movement. Cautiously he stepped back to the middle of the cars through the wide opening the orc so graciously opened. The orc was not there. Kaleb kept low, trying to be as quiet as possible. He followed in the direction the orc went. A scuffle caught Kaleb's attention off behind him. Kaleb couldn't tell who-or what it was.

Instinctively, he fled after praying to God it was Larry or Monica. As he ran he noticed that the orc was not in pursuit. No time for that, he told himself and ran in the direction of the van.

Suddenly he stopped. The van was gone. He stared, dumbfounded for a moment. Suddenly Monica stopped beside him.

"Where's the van?" he asked.

"How the hell should I know? I was with you two." Monica spat.

"Well, what now?" Larry chimed in.

"Larry, I don't have all the answers..." Kaleb turned to Larry, but instead looked past him at the crowd of orcs coming through the woods just off the road. There was more than a dozen. Kaleb knew that there was no way to even consider fighting this time. Leading the orcs through the woods was the decorated orc. Kaleb was almost certain that he was in fact a general or something. Did these things have military? Was this invasion planned? Were they capable of strategizing?

The horn blast was startling. Kaleb turned to see Monica firing up the engine on a beat down RV. "Come on, get in!" She shouted and pulled the vehicle around to face up the road, she nearly tipped it overturning around in the ditch. Kaleb didn't hesitate. He set his feet in motion and took off after the RV. He and Larry jumped in the side door and Monica hit the gas.

"That was close." Larry said. He dropped his bag on the floor of the RV and fell into the couch. Kaleb sat down in the passenger seat and looked at Monica. Monica, dried blood smeared across her forehead, smirked at him. He had no word. She had no words. She turned back to the road and kept her gaze straight. Kaleb reached up and turned on the radio.

"...outside do so at your own risk..."

He turned the knob and the station settled again.

"...report problems to the authorities. The..."

He turned the knob again.

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“... be considered dangerous and are not to be approached...”

He hit a button and the CD player loaded with a whirl. He exhaled as he listened to Save Tonight by Eagle Eye Cherry. He reached back up to change the track.

“Don’t.” Monica grabbed his hand. “I like this song.”

Kaleb was beginning to see that Monica did have a soft interior to go with the tough exterior she had displayed when she first barged into his van. He didn’t want to seem too excited so he kept his feelings in check, smiled at Monica, and replied, “Me too.” Monica kept a hold of his hand. They both nodded their head as they began to cry out the lyrics.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tommy was born in Carthage, MO. He spent most of his early life living in the small town called Lamar, MO, with several years spent living in Joplin and Neosho during college. He was first introduced to writing in a creative writing class while in high school. He wrote sketches for student design nights for his local theater group. Then he began to write plays and scripts while attending Crowder College in Neosho, MO.

When college was over, he married his wife, Helen Crites. Shortly into his marriage he lost his father to complications during surgery for heart trouble. He, with his wife, returned to Lamar for a year to be near family. With the birth of his son, Dylon, He and Helen decided to move north. The decision was based on his intentions to finish college. After a short time at the University of Central Missouri (and a rough battle with Crohn's Disease), Tommy finally earned an Associate's degree in Web development from State Fair Community College in Sedalia, MO.

During the times of dealing with Crohn's he wrote his first full novel "Mental Health Day". It is a story of a young man struggling with life in general and the rut he has found himself in. Working at a behavioral health hospital Tommy spent hours writing a story that became "Rogue's Phoenix: Thieves and Kings", a fantasy-fiction novel telling the story of the inhabitants of an unusually formed world and the trouble cause by a devious thieves' guild. Branching out into another world he started another story taking place in a war-torn

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America. The country, now divided, is in shambles and those still alive struggle to stay that way.

He writes in many different environments including; Fantasy-fiction, Science Fiction, alternate future, post economic collapse, and everyday stories in the world we live in. Tommy tries to use his real-life experience to create in-depth characters and interesting situations. Tommy still lives in Missouri with his family and friends. When he is not writing, he likes to spend his time with the family; fishing, hunting, camping, and playing on the water. With his variety of works in many genres, he can offer something for everyone.

For more information on Tommy, or to find other work by him, visit his website social media page.

www.tommyclarkauthor.com



OTHER WORK



The Divide:

Cataclysm

The Tower

Rogue's Phoenix:

Thieves and Kings

Stand Alone:

Mental Health Day

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