

CHAPTER 1: Alone and Afraid

This is one of the worst times of the year and yet each time I find a way of escaping it, until now

as sweat poured down my face and my lungs filled with the essence of perfume and the stench of the darkened air, I heard the faint buzzing of the foghorn the deafening sound bellowed throughout the dim lit streets and infiltrated the homes of the wary. We knew what was coming as panic filled the roads men and women, women and women, men and men it didn't matter the age or affection for one another. the idea was simple you needed someone by twelve o'clock or you would be taken away and never heard from again. we gathered like pigeons in the park to the large TV in the main square and listened to the annual announcement. Our old Doctor Mr. Lesinton and his partner Gary sat at the derelict news station surrounded by hanging wires and began to read off this year's announcement, as we waited anxiously, holding back the tears like a dam postponing the inevitable flood. " People of Elsia " Dr Lesinton Proclaimed " As you know our settlement is a safeguard to what lies outside the walls of the outer-city. And like every Civilization after an event as devastating as Operation Endgame we must rebuild and stay on a steady course so that event never happens again. And that is why each year on Valentine's day, all residents of Elsia must have a partner to procreate and to sustain a viable future for our great utopia, as we tell you Every year. Though some of you have been complacent in the past, Failure to comply to these demands will result in death so your organs can be used as transplants for those who want to live with their partners even longer. I know this will scare most of you but think of it this way even in death you will be helping people find love and be a precursor for our next generation. As of this message you have fourteen -hours to find a partner or risk the aforementioned torture". As the image disappeared from the screen but burned into our memories like a naked flame dancing in an open fire a brief pause slivered throughout the audience, whispers bounced from ear to ear as emotions ran rampant. The first to speak was always the popular ones, A man in a football jersey bellowed from the crowd " See you suckers, I'm going to have no problem getting laid " he said

grabbing onto a frightened young woman still shaking from the word spoken prior. Another man in a scraggly beard covered his mouth and faintly said " they said age, right? I heard that correct didn't I " and then we became the fox in this preverbal hunt as the sound of the first alarm broke the tension. Simmering in the crowd, Armed guards filled the exits with their weapons raised itching to pull the trigger on anyone who stepped out of line, Next was the pairing off. The first stage of the VD execution, Men would be forced to go with anyone they were next to. Placed into a line we walked towards the insemination point. Marge sat there with a cigar protruding from her mouth and a hole in her throat showing each newly found couple to their contamination tent equipped with a gift bag filled with sexual oddities, Her bony fingers stretched out and began to read the names off the list. Laid out in front of her " Jackson age 24 and Maloney age 16 please follow the guard to your room, NEXT! " this event would happen for the next four hours and yet at the back of this line was me, Alone. And panicking my eyes shifted to the guards and then to the wall before darting back to the line like a drunk hunter trying to steady his aim on a fatal shot. As we edged forward my heart began to beat even louder with each couple forcibly dragged off by the guards. I need an opening to escape, someone has to speak up to start a commotion but no one did. I bit my lip and walked forward swallowing my spit and blood as the skin torn from my lips, my legs weakened and began to stiffen up. I was becoming a rock in an ocean of paper. The others walked forward and took their punishment. All I could think of was how can I get out of this one. My mind shifted back to times gone by. From the traditional escape attempts to being called up for the army amidst operation endgame. Finding a way to hide each time we were raided and finally always finding one way to escape the terror of this day we never saw what happened to those who didn't find a date, But I did know one thing , my single friends became less frequent each year . The line moved faster as I pressed my hands together and prayed for any miracle to occur like a vicar in a desert holding out for rain to refill his *Crème brûlée*, a sandstorm I wished for, My feet marching to the beat of my heart or even another Gisrunk raid

would be helpful. At that moment my luck changed, I heard a cry from the front of the queue. Marge screamed at the young women as she reiterated her statement. I will say this again " Mark age 56 Laura age 12 " the young girl screamed " NO" Marge looked at the young girl and then shifted her eyes towards the guard " You know what happens to those who don't comply with the rules " said Marge the young girl looked behind her at the line and then wiping away the tears from her eyes she gritted her teeth and said " I don't care I'm not doing this " the young girl turned her body around and ran towards the wall, the guard lifted his rifle up and pieced down the sights just before he shot Marge grabbed the guards hand and shouted " Wait " they both watched as the girl ran towards the exit. We all held our breath and a faint cheer arose from the back of the line , This might be the day the violence stops. A contagious smirk washed over our faces as we watched her get closer and closer to freedom she held her side and panted coughing up phlegm before breathing more rapidly as she reached towards the handle for safety " Now! " Marge yelled. As the guard repositioned his rifle and took the shot, A ringing sung throughout the crowd and smiles were wiped from our faces like a drawing of a penis on the school whiteboard. "move forward" yelled Marge as she sat back down. Looking at the puzzled guard she uttered " Always give them hope " we continued to move forward. The one chance I had to escape and I let the pride of another get in my way the only thing that Luran's body showed us was the fact this was inescapable. The village square washed away the blood of the body by the sign of the rain and with the cold air grasping at our lungs and burning our feared eyes we continued to obey the orders of the guards and so each forced couple got their names called out and headed off into the tents provided scream of fear and pain shrieked throughout the crowd and stabbed through our hearts like a rusty dagger slashing open an old chest, Names became meaningless as each word was called out. My heart tightened each beat holding back the true emotions I have kept bottled for so long I just kept telling myself, I will escape this because even those without a clear set mind will say the truth once in their lives . I heard

another commotion and this time i was ready to take my chance I scouted out a back alley I once cut through as a child and have used every year since to escape this ordeal. I waited for the argument to erupt like a runner waits for the gun to fire,. As I heard Marge speaking in an aggressive tone towards two college males " Michael age 23 and Joseph age 26 " she said followed by the two men smirking under their hands concealing their faces and wiping away a playful tear that has gathered on their cheek " Were not gay miss " Joseph said holding back a laugh " I don't care you know the rules " snapped Marge . Both of them stood still like prey evading the predators glare. I whispered under my breath " run, now" and yet they didn't, Instead they still stood there still as a statue in the college grounds, not a word was spoken and yet I knew this must be a game they must be pondering could they make it to the exit or would they be shot. they have to be thinking something as the rain dripped from their hair to their face and yet none of them flinched. Time slipped by and still no movement was made until Joseph took a large gasp of cold air and looked Marge in the face his eyes shifted back to Michael and then he spoke " Well I guess I don't want to disobey the rules " Marge looked up and laughed " ok, it's good to hear that" both the men walked off and now there are only ten people between me and death . I threw up in my mouth and coughed up the blood from my sore lips on the ground if only I could fake an illness or a noise would distract these people I could escape and yet it didn't, I was expecting a movie and instead, I got a novel. Marge could now see me at the back of the line sweating and shaking like a pervert in a sex shop. with each step feeling like my feet were shackled together I heard her giggle and sprout out the words " A loner at the back let's get this line moving the higher up's will love to see him " the line started to move with a level of certainty rapidly increasing the intensity of my fate. Marge was flying through each name before her with haste desperately wanting to get to me. The guard to the left of her kept checking his rifle and pouring down more powder from his satchel while licking the top of his lips and cracking this finger tips with his brushed thumb, ten has just become five and yet no one is saying anything each time I feel I have

a glimmer of hope to escape they just accept the rules and proceed to continue. I felt like a geologist finding a bubblegum wrapper in the dirt. I continually knarred away at my teeth gritting the bottom of my front tooth and plodded forward toward what would soon be my end. And then the miracle happened that gave me my opportunity to escape, Marge was confronted with a dilemma, a Man and his daughter stood before her and waited to be sent forward. Marge covered her face and whispered to the guard " Come with me , What do we do in this situation they're father and daughter " with Marge and the guard distracted by this confusion I ran to the alley I clocked earlier and didn't stop until my legs could not take anymore. I ran past the open door, glancing over my shoulder to see if I was being followed and sprinted through the market place with my tongue out to catch the water droplets each drip from the water scared me making me feel like I was being followed.so I ran down the alley near the fractured wall (set up in the wake of the final war) Just as I thought I was so close to freedom a dirty hand grabbed me and pulled me down into the dark foreboding abyss of the cellar .

Chapter 2 - The others

As the darkness dissipated a disheveled face stared back at me holding a wax candle in its decaying puss- filled hand " Who are you and why did you take me away from my freedom" I asked in an abrasive tone the figure cleared her throat with a tremendous cough and answered back in a quiet voice " That's not freedom " she started saying " The Wall is just another security mechanism that would either fry you or tag you to be taking away . Those that have attempted to escape this place before were swept into the delusion that the wall was the only safe passage out when really it's all a façade ." The figure moved closer to the light and with a puzzled expression strode across my face I asked " What do you mean façade? " The young girl sat in front of the candlelight wiped her face down with a discarded rag left their by others thinking they could escape this facility and answered my question with a grin " This Endgame

they have embedded into your skull never happened, The world outside of these walls is fine, green grass and all . This whole great war was used as a façade to masquerade the fact the hospitals don't have enough donors left to keep up with the growing demands for transplants. And the workplaces are becoming understaffed so the higher ups created this rouge. How do you get more workers and donors to agree to help?...Create a conflict that people would never question through fear of inciting a new war. Once the bait was hooked the contractors set up the great wall around this land and reinforced it with an electric fence so no one could escape , Then it was just the simple change of the rules and the phony appeal that we needed new-born babies for those who were lost in the great war and those who didn't agree would be killed for treason and made into donors . Basically this community has created its own circle of life in which a father could be walking around with a heart transplant from his own son" The girl then sat down with others emerging from the darkness to grace their faces into the glowing light. My mind boggled with so many questions thoughts swam through my head quicker than salmon swimming up river. If there was no war, What happened to the people, how do I know these people are telling the truth and why has no help been sent for us. These were just a few of the questions I wanted answers to but before I could even wet my tongue with the first syllable I heard a distant voice of a disgruntled guard walking down the alley way accompanied by a even madder Marge " He must of went down here ' The guard bellowed to Marge as the Rain had picked up to typhoon levels sopping wet footsteps trudged through the alley way with each step echoing throughout the desolate street I heard the guard cock his gun. Soon after Marge stopped dead in her tracks he silenced her and began to whisper. " He was definitely the last one , wasn't he " The guard questioned Marge " Yes I kept my eye on him sizing him up knowing he would make a fine sacrifice" Marge deliciously replied. The guard Stealthily plodded on through the alleyway with only the flickering of near neon

lights used as a light source to guide him . " Come on out " he cried "We will find you and you know we will" I peeped out the basement window and saw Marge pull out a device with a sadistic smile emerging on her face " Lets test this out " she said. The guard walked over to Marge and looked at the tablet she held in her hands " What's that " He said pointing at the tablet with a whimsical gaze spread across his face like a child watching a commercial. " It's a tracking device, Each occupant born after Operation Endgame was injected with a neurogenin into the bloodstream" Marge said insightfully " And why would you do something like that ? "questioned the guard " In case of an event like this " Marge said with a smirk washed over her face. My panic came back in full force and incited rage among the others baked in the light " You idiot " one of the others hiding out uttered to the Girl that dragged me into this building." He going to get us caught " Another panicked at the back, rubbing their hands together until the dry rotting skin peeled off and landed on the damp floor. the young Girl took a deep breath and tried to calm the others down . " Don't worry " She proclaimed " All we need to do is a blood transfusion, Quick hand me one of the others that didn't make it, we'll use the husk as a decoy so we can move without being noticed. " She said in a hastily manner. I sat in a chair which looked like it was stolen from a dentist's office and awaited the procedure. I never saw today going like this I thought while holding my compassion before I had a chance to re-think my options a rusty needle was stabbed into my arm and a large machine vaccinated blood from my system and transferred it into the husk on the ground. One of the other people handed me a bucket and sat on the floor in front of me " Why do I need this " I questioned " Because this is only stage one " The Man said now passing by the dripping Wax candle. The footsteps grew louder from outside and the beeping became more problematic with each step, I shouted " start stage two or we are all going to be killed " I wish my lips didn't move as fast as my thought process, As stage two was excursively painful. A large cylinder was placed on my head and without

hesitation a burst of electricity blasted through the helmet and into the crevasses of my ears and shooting up to the lower lobes after the fifth shock hit me the beeping stopped I was finally hopeful but I still felt the need to ask more questions to the girl that dragged me in. Before I could even lick my lips of the effervescent bubbles that burst on my face the girl spoke to me viciously belittling my knowledge and experience " We should get rid of these candles and use you as a light bulb your clearly energy efficient when it comes to your brightness, I would say thank god your pretty but I have seen better sights standing behind a horse drinking prune juice " angrily I spat back at her hateful opinions " What are you saying aren't these comments a bit harsh " unapologetically she resumed her aggressively targeted rant " All I'm saying is being locked in this facility for so long has played tricks on your Broca area . For starters you don't seem to have a concept of sarcasm or observational humor and your speech seems to be rather limited in the time I have been talking to you , Also simplistic in design " I couldn't understand what this girl was talking about so Inquired with her further " What do you mean by limited?, The people of Elsia, I included. Have researched all the books in the world , All four of them they speak of regeneration and the importance of the procreation of our species so don't get on your high horse saying we have very little intelligence and even less common sense " The girl shunned me and walked away smugly. I sat in the corner of the room with my frazzled head still conducting electricity and then as I went to close my eyes the girl returned with a map showing more than I thought was humanly possible. She sat in front of me with the electric current still in my lobes I could tell there was a spark between us . The girl moved the map between us and pointed proclaiming with an excitable manner " We are here, Elsia as you call it or as its better known Evacuate Level Seven In case of Annihilation " I looked confused and yet she continued " You see Elisia is an acronym, This is just one of many thousands of bases people took refuge in when the fictitious Operation Endgame

took place you all got rounded up like cattle to pre-designated sites and this large vast open area here. (She pointed back at the map marking it with her dirt filled finger nails). Is the rest of the world, Untouched for one thousand years . Nature has reclaimed most of what man didn't and so that's why the true future for our species is out there on the great plains and not in some cubicle. " looking puzzled I questioned the girl as she looked at me " So is that why you want to escape this place? For a chance to be the god of the new world. " The girl reluctantly answered my question " We, I mean I wouldn't call myself a god it would just be taking back what was once ours and letting our future children see the sun bask their faces in the early morning and the moon kiss their cheeks at night instead of the holographic projections we have been forced to see in this place " I perked up and had a lot to think about. In my mind I went over everything this girl has said in the past few minutes, For starters I thought. What did she mean by "we" that is a word I have no knowledge of and she didn't want to be a god we have been told for years that the gods of the old walk the wilderness outside the walls and that is one of the main reasons we can't venture out . All I knew is I had a lot to ponder. And so with my mind ablaze with questions I said the only smart thing i had thought of all day " So how do we get out of here ?" intriguingly the girl sprung up from the ground and whisked me away to meet the others " The foundation for this structure is weak and the rain passing through the holographic projections after a viscous storm such as this has only multiplied the acidity found in the puddles that have accumulated over time with that information. We got to work digging out instead of going over " Like the sun shinning from the clouds i finally understood there plans " That's why you dragged me into the basement and that's why you knew no one could make it over the wall i think i finally understand the reasoning to your arguments " I gleefully shouted. The girl and the others smiled and moved me into the corner again i still felt puzzled about the consistency of putting me in the corner but before i had the chance to talk i was reassured in a

remarkable fashion " You see after the storm broke out, You rushed down the back alley and due to the wetness of the streets you got your clothes soaking so upon dragging you into our home we persuaded you to follow our commands and sit in the corner. The water would then drip from your clothes thus creating a damp puddle where you're sitting and it's that puddle that will be the foundation for our tunnel out of here so the last thing i think i need to say is my name is spruce and start digging " Overwhelmed i grabbed any tools i could find to help dig this hole with the known knowledge that tomorrow i would be feeling the gently breeze of the new world.

chapter 3 - The old ones didn't leave

We emerged to the gleaming glow of the new world and the stench of chord flesh wafting in the air the girl seemed perplexed as it looks operation endgame did happen after all. If that is correct what did that mean for us? have we really escaped the true protectors to fend for ourselves. We stood frozen in place as the realization of our mistakes came full force just then a new question entered our mind , we didn't know what was next?. Did we just escape those who were trying to protect us, was this really the true earth that laid bare before our eyes or just another vision? Before we had time to even ponder these thoughts any longer a dark mysterious figure emerged from the wreckage and loomed over us. His eyes as amber as the new age sun with a voice as booming as an echo in the wind. He beckoned us over to a crevasse betwixt two collapsed buildings and ordered us to follow him to the sound of drum beats and howling. We walked above the skulls of people we once called neighbor's and felt the crushing sound of glass in a place we once knew as home. The figure walked down a steep path guarded by torches and other figures overhead they shifted and dematerialized before our very eyes. The group wanted to turn back but as we glanced over our shoulders the figures we thought

were guiding us also blocked our exit. This was not a formal meeting this was a march to end, what came before them. Down through the underpass and out to the jungle which at one point stood only as a park. The mood shifted as we all came to the conclusion this would be our demise. A large figure sat obscured by their robes in front of us and with a feminine voice bellowed "I am the mother to all that is new and the lover to all that has passed, You are different from my children and yet you speak the same language yet retain our primitive features". I opened my mouth to speak and was immediately silenced. "Your Name before the event was Joseph Anderson was it not." I hesitated and then as silent as the chill of a winter mourn grabs the icy embrace of the air I replied "Yes that was my name when I still had one". "Your brother was Jebidia Anderson was it not." I perked up after hearing a name I haven't heard since an argument before the sirens started. "Yes, that's my brother. I need to tell him he was correct, Correct about all of this"

" I'm sorry " the figure replied you cant. I aggressively retorted "I need to" . "No, you don't understand". She slowed down and in a sombre tone she proclaimed "you cant you, You can never take back your mistakes that's what life is. We make mistakes and we must choose to live with them. The time has passed and you will never have those words uttered again." I broke down after realizing what she was saying this wasn't a world we walked into. It was the abyss all of our hopes and dreams, of greenery and blue skies have dissipated. We did this. They were no old ones, We were the only old ones left.

The girl looked back at me with caring eyes. This was the first time in the past twelve moons that I could see the raw emotions washed across her face. Come on Joseph we should go. She said but all I heard was mumbles. this is what I was fighting for, a dream without an image, a goal without an end. I can't take that this is the end and there is nothing we can do. I spat back venom at the

group like a rusted saw into a decaying tree. There lying to us, all of them, These omnipresent ethereal forms are not telling us what is happening here. The group looked on in shock and questioned back, Who is lying there's no one here? . I blinked, it was the old ones remember, they were right there. I pointed at the chair only to find instead of the robes of the mysterious goddess an unfurled flag. The group shuddered and their eyes darted to each other before one of them emphatically answered back in a sombre tone. Come on Joseph we should go. I sulked and rubbed my eyes once more before answering back. I guess you're right, Let's go, The next few miles were the hardest miles I have ever walked in my life through suburbs where pets that once had homes now fought in the streets. We snagged our clothing on a metal gate and before the first prick of blood could douse the broken pavement a gang of stray dogs circled us. With no way out we needed a plan, I knew even with their new found sense of blood lust I couldn't attack animals I once petted on my way home. the group looked shuck up as the pack edged closer our formations got tighter they snarled and barked, with scars and fangs still blooded by their last encounter the pack leader maneuverer the pack to surround us and with his infected eye looked at us not as the dominant species but as prey and a feast for the night that loomed on. The girl and the group took a deep breath and charged towards the pack leader dispersing the pack "Stick together!" she shouted as I quickly brought up the rear "we still can't win this" I cried , "No" she shouted over the pinned down dog screeching and signaling the others , We may not win but we can still run . She smacked the leader against a wrecked car and ran through the near-by house. With the pack jumping through the windows we ran out the exit. They toppled over chairs and the dining table where we once sat as a family snarling and gnashing their blooded fangs. We ran through another house only to have the relentlessness of the pack close in on us, They kept running and running even with the blood from their wounds brought on by the splinters of old furniture never seeming to slow them down. We ran around the

block to another estate, The estate I once lived on. The snarling and panting of the pack in the distance getting closer and closer. "Quick in here" I shouted as I remembered my neighbor Andrew built a bunker to stay off tornados in his back yard. We ran inside the shelter just as I slammed the door behind us. The darkness encapsulated the steel box we sat in and outside we could hear the scratching of the ravenous pack frantically trying to get in. Bounds of silences followed by loud bangs as they rammed themselves against the metal door, The room trembled and the echoes grew louder. We have locked ourselves into a tomb. Each knocked grew in elevation. But just as the sun cascaded against the cracks a loud screeching howl was heard followed by a deathly silence. I slowly peaked out the door to find nothing, Not even a sign of struggle. Members of the group started to panic " What just happened we definitely got chased I could feel my heart racing" One shouted. Another screamed back with an ear-shattering " What is going on!" for the first time in ages I didn't have an answer. I saw these dogs too I could even describe their infections and puss that pieced their backs, I saw the murder in their eyes and as the sun came up there was nothing but peace in its place not even a treacle of blood laid in the streets and not even a sweat bead showed our skirmish. I have to find out what is happening because someone is messing with us, The only question is who?.

chapter 4 - The old one's game

"So this was your place" the girl said in a peaceful manner, Yeah I wonder what became of this place I unequivocally thought. Before I knew it I was nostalgically speaking about my road like a travel guide gleefully describes the sights of a tour. I had a feeling that I never left, the same emotion a loving couple feels every morning. I excitability proclaimed the heritage of the street and the stories it once told . Over there (I pointed) is where Judas lived "she was one of those people where if

she was a toilet she wouldn't be able to flush with the amount of crap she would talk". I jokingly said. "She had more men than a construction site" , Every weekend the kids would go to their dads down south. And she would have a new affair in order, The husband worked on the ferries so he was never really home, Oh and over there. (A massive fern tree stood before us), Is the Home of Mr. Peter he had a marvelous garden he would tend to it in the spring and take his most divine correlations to the flower show in town , Yet every night the kids would play out and deliberately kick the ball all over his flower bed . He was forever chasing them. I then guided the group down the street we were still vigilant in case our minds played with us yet again. I paused briefly and then walked a bit further" So who else lived here?". One of the group uttered. "Well, that house there homed the Johns.. (I pointed to a dilapidated house with brick work still falling from open cracks) , "She came from Africa to live here and to this day I will never know why because even in its prime. This street suffered from problems I know she was a skilled draughtsman and Architecture lead . Her husband worked in the retail sector and ever night they would say we are going to build an extension onto this house but every time they got the wood in and the money gathered they would have their stuff stolen and need to use the money to replace what they lost looking at the house now , You can see the ambitions of their dreams it's just a shame they never got the chance to finish them". And over there is where A foul stench grabbed our noses and wafted through the breeze. "What is that smell? 'the group coughed out. " Well, I guess we'll Find out" As we edged closer to the door I regaled the group with the exploits of the individuals living on the estate." Well as I was saying this house was homed to Ms. Philips, she used to travel the world when she was younger but as time took its toll she became known as the crazy cat lady, For every month on the Calendar she had a cat for it. She was the sort of woman that you never saw without her purrfect idea jumper on. I wonder whatever happened to her.? " As those words crossed my lips and the air grew

thick I opened the sitting room door to see what remained of Ms. Philips, Half a dozen stray cats ran past us with hair still knitted in their teeth and flesh still caught on their fur. I guess she didn't make it. Let's move on as I sniffed and held back a tear. Only one house left "and who's that house there?" the group pointed. I stared at the dilapidated house with the crumbling brickwork and muttered, The old place hasn't changed a bit. "Its erm? Someone's house but I just forgot whose." I hastily answered back to the group. "I'll have a look to see if it's safe to enter so, wait here." I wiped my feet across the floor and entered the house I whispered " I'm home mom, I hope brother is over his cold " and walked into the sitting room my brain swelled with memories of the distant past as I heard voices I have never heard in millennium's. " Don't forget you two it's one more cartoon then get dressed for school, I'm not ringing up the school again and faking an cold because somebody wanted to binge-watch cartoons all day" The audible phantom cried " Yeah we don't want to miss another day of nothing " I remembered. A smile washed across my face in the first time in forever as the momentums of my past life came flooding back. I finally feel at home. My flashbacks were ended abruptly as the Group shouted from outside. "So is it safe!" they said, I frantically tried to make up an excuse just to have more time with my memories" Eh I'm still checking" I retorted back" Just stay there and stay vigilant" I picked up the pace and slowly moved into the dining room another euphoric wave of days gone by hit me " What do you mean called up" My mother argued on the phone looking worried " Ok so you're going to be jetting out on Monday with the army " I faintly remember hearing my dad's voice on the other end of the phone . So I remembered sneaking upstairs and ever so slightly taking the phone off the hook just to hear my dad speak " I know the TV says everything is peachy but we still need to be on the borders just in case something goes wrong, I understand that the prime ministers speech made it seem like peace talks went well. But usually the news doesn't give you the full picture " I recall

sitting on the landing in awe that this was the first time since birth I could hear the words of my father " Hold on, Have you got someone on the line" I remembered being caught. After I sneezed and then hearing my mother shout up the stairs " Joseph Are you on the line will you hang up now and come down here I'm baking cookies for you and your brother " I quickly ran downstairs and remember seeing my mother with her arms crossed over the kitchen counter "Joseph your mother was having an adult conversation so please don't go sneaking behind her back , Do you understand" I sat in the same kitchen now and regressed on those thoughts " Yes mom I understand" I got up and walked towards the stairs my flashbacks became more violent as I shook moving past my brothers room I collapsed to the floor staring at the door its carvings still a reminder of where we would stand to see our measurements . I closed my eyes and took a deep breath as I sparked another flashback from a time I wished to forget. I must have been twelve when I saw the doctor coming out of the brother's room this was the one time, I saw my father and mother together. I was told to stay in my room because my brother had a cold. Yet I still heard the words from the doctor that chilled me to this day " I believe his symptoms are exacerbating " Said the doctor clutching a bag of medical supplies in his right hand and wearing a blue glove " Is it a cold and just when will he be better " My parents scarcely said The doctor looked at them and sat them down in front of my brothers door " "I'm afraid to say this isn't a cold, I would like to thank you for calling me out but this illness needs a hospital visit or it could become more serious for a child of his age " the doctor slowly stated " It's not what we think it is ,is it ? " Proclaimed my mother " My diagnose says it might be. But a full medical would yield better results I implore you to visit the hospital immediately " I remember that night filled with tears and deep growls of pain from the room next to mine, I remember getting up only to be told to get back to bed. And I remember seeing the car leave in the early hours and come back later at night. My brother was in the hospital and that's all

I knew and now looking back on it all I wanted to know.

I sat immobilized in front of the moldy door scratches still on it from our younger days, It was at that moment I finally felt clarity for my mistakes. If I just listened to those with authority, I wouldn't be in this mess the group seemed optimistic that we will finally find Shangri la but just like that fable it's a myth. This is what we found, The truth of a destroyed world that burns our feet with every step and keeps us running every night. The mind games and horrors that turn our eyes red and our brains frantic. Sure the Domes of Elsia blinded us with the tantalization of freedom obscuring optical illusions with every neon bead. Bleeding from the signs lifted from the old world and tangled into this surreal totalitarian playground. But at least we had a routine, A purpose that guided us, Tradition that came around every year that we could loaf, Love or fear. Here we are the lost one venturing forward and I'm afraid listening to those without a clear voice may have doomed us all. It can't just be our minds that are seeing these figures chase us and dance in the billowing smoke. Alluding to our fates. Or can it? maybe it's a noxious gas that clings onto our lungs and slowly kills us within or maybe its a premonition of things to come. Just then my existentialism was cut short by the sound of a loose floorboard cracking up on me. I hastily spat out " I told you guys I would tell you when the coast was clear! " I peered my head downstairs to see nothing but an open door. I shut that as I walked upstairs at least I thought. I did And so I slowly made myself downstairs to investigate. The door opened revealing a cupboard me and my brother used to hide in When we still had the fun and games of the days gone past. I edged closer keeping one hand clenched to steady my heart, Breathing deeply I walked into the cupboard. To find nothing but an empty utility closet as I turned round to leave I heard the voices again. They scratched and sneered at my brain pounding me with questions to which I had no answers. the voices told me " You know more than you're letting on . You have to tell them" Them what I cried. The echo travelled through the house and

out into the street. The group answered back " Are you ok in there? " I quickly restored " Fine coming out now " before I exited the house the voice informed me that it was coming. I still can't comprehend what this is, whether I'm losing my mind with the lack of sleep I have endured or the old ones are playing some sick game using us as the pawns. I made it back onto the street with the amber glow of the setting sun dancing on the smashed glass of the windows. The group looked dumbfounded by my appearance and equivocally pondered what happened when I was in the house I answered back before the words could even form in my head " It was just a house filled with rats and dust nothing more nothing less" And with that, I urged the group to move on before nightfall. I thought now might be a fine time to question the girl in the group as to where we are heading. "So what's the plan now? " I asked calmly only for her to not register my response, Perplexed I spoke again "We do have a plan don't we? " She looked at me with fear in her eyes and then just to reassure the group quickly shot back nervously " Yes we head south whichever direction that is and maybe there we will find what we need " I looked back at her before asking my finally question " Which is " I said and before my lips closed she quickly answered back " Freedom "

The night sky danced among the clouds with the sound of wood snapping and trees bending in the breeze. The country park that was once a nice walk through a mile away from my estate was now a catastrophic forest with nettles and looming dead trees closing us in each step, we walked the sound of owls and forest dwellers accompanied us through each tree line. another few yards we chanted . With the sounds growing louder and louder. The hoots of the owls gave way to the hissing of snakes and the trees that loomed over us like protectors pieced the moonlight and opened to a large portion of stale air. We walked forward with the feeling of wrapping branches around our feet and signs that once greeted us to the park adding as a reminder to turn back. We arrived halfway through the park, past the bushes now housing dangerous forbidden fruits to an open

field with tall grass and the sound of rustling. We stopped and watched the grass move sporadically from one mound to the next. This wasn't the wind and we weren't alone. we could see a glimmer of hope in the distance a tree line with a faint but unmistakable fire from a wrecked car. If we could make it to that car park the light sources could guide us in the direction of this supposed freedom. The rustling in the long grass stopped momentarily and this was the time we picked to make a bee-line for the exit choking on the smell of the fumes and dead air that grabbed our lungs like a zombie in a B-movie . We ran through the grass with only the crackling of the fire as a guide, cutting our faces on the sharpness of each blade was the least of our problems whatever was in this grass with us knew we wanted to escape and toyed with us relentlessly the rustling followed us through this maze with small openings in the grass line acting as a viewing point . Loud hissing came from the left of us then slivered to the right trapping us in the middle, We pressed on with the darkness clawing at our backs and separating the group at each junction. Keep moving toward the flame we shouted as the sound intensified. Finally, we made it out the other end and scarpered toward the fire blazing from the car park. We looked back to hear the hissing dissipating and the group covered in lacerations off the blades of grass and nettles. "We must press on!" one member shouted spotting a light over yonder. That's a Settlement I'm sure of it. The light flashed green beckoning us closer. I turned to the girl and asked " Is that close enough to freedom " She sat there with the ash of the burning cars gripping her lungs and jokingly replied " Better than here "

Chapter 5- What the frying pan to the fire

The next few yards felt like an eternity decaying buildings and advertisement boards now scrawled in graffiti littered our path but that wasn't the worst of it. We arrived at a checkpoint that once housed soldiers with a sign over our head (welcome to fort ignus)

a banner now draped over the sign with a message reading (Ignus is now part of the dome federation for escaped immigrants) i looked back at the group and said " I guess we know what that flashing light is now " The group stood in shock before blurting out " There are more domes! " We learned as we ventured onwards the government built multiple domes for the new dawn ours was for the new population and this one was for the new workforce . As we walked the familiar smell of flesh gripped our nostrils once again and to our horror, we saw a sight I could never unsee. Soldiers laid dead along this base with self-inflicted head wounds now festering with maggots gnawing away on their new hosts. We cut through the tent and out the other side. The group questioned "what happened?" and I guess I knew a little too much " You give an army the weapons but no enemies then the enemies become your brother " The group looked puzzled " But why would the army turn on themselves " I quickly answered back " Multiple reasons really, it could be power or anger and most likely the water they were drinking from was contaminated before the great collapse creating a fungal infection on the brain and driving a person already pushed to their limits with social manipulation to crack and become paranoid over the very men they once called family " This wasn't a guess somehow I remembered what my father told me about the army to scare me away from joining, I just never thought his words would ever ring true . We pressed on holding back the emotions that now whirlwind our conscious minds and moved down the street. Before we made it to the corner, I heard the distant sound of shouting and the cocking of weapons. The light that once guided us now shun on us obstructing our vision as a figure leered over us with a murderous glare in his eyes, the figure shouted " You are in direct violation of Ignus bylaws speak! " The voice bellowed we panicked before the girl showed the courage and answered the figure back " We are passing through on our way down south" The figure answered back deceptively " English? move on you're not welcome here " We moved on before the gun in the figure's hand was used for

more than pointing and discussed among the group what is really going on back there " I guess the banner wasn't lying , We should move on before he informs the others " As we walked down the road the once vibrant marketplace now wreaked of expired fruit and flies danced around each stale like a moth to a flame. The banners that used to tantalize us with offers now laid bare to terrifying permission and blood red graffiti. The domes are the new world, read one as we slowly made our way past with another reading the new workforce rises from ignus. We pressed on with the gleam of a new dawn awoken from the clouds and exited the city. This road was known as an exit to the wild and I guess now was the time to see if that statement was true. As the sun broke we found ourselves in the forest with a low heat burning the blisters on our feet salty sweat dripped down our skin and onto our blooded ripped clothes. Its been five moons since we ate and the effects are starting to show. God rays cast through the forest with the cackling of the branches mocking us from afar. The girl remarked " This way " and the group and I followed her down a hikers path and past a dark cave as we ventured on. The darkness followed us from behind a loud growl and panting shuck the sleepy willows and broke the leaves off nearby branches we looked up to see more figures swinging from the branches overhead and laughing maniacally . Wishing us to fail on our journey the growls became louder and more intense as we picked up the pace, the pounding of our hearts interspersed with the panting of the darkness. This was one time when the darkness would infuse one of its victims and break up our pack. Before we knew it one of the members of the group stopped and screamed with his face blood red and a tongue spitting fire " I have had it with running , We need to find a place to sleep ,we need food ! " The rest of the group tried to calm him down but by this point in our venture the tiredness was starting to take its toll and we lethargically failed at our attempts but for the first time in this journey we finally agreed with what the others were saying we may not even know the names of the members of our band but we finally

heard their chords . we could tell the girl was pondering leaving us to die but for some reason, she took a deep breath and agreed with us. " I guess freedom can wait " She stated and pointed towards the ranger's cabin nestled between the collapsed tree line. " Are you ok with horror clichés" The girl jokingly said as we walked towards the cabin. As we got closer to the door we saw a massive scratch mark embedded in the wood, Something tells me this wasn't the work of an axe and the noise that made these marks is still out there and had been following us for the past mile. We walked into to cabin to see the visitor desk overtaking by mold (welcome to the wondersplint national park) the sign read as we searched the cabin for supplies, We searched each room diligently holding onto anything we could find but all that was left was one bed and an old Winchester rifle. That night became the toughest part of our adventure so far with each of us taking shifts. one sleeping and the other patrolling. The cocking of the gun is the only noise that cut through the whistling of the wind and before long it was time for us to close our eyes and pray the darkness would stop.

Dawn broke as usual and another day welcomed us with open arms for the first time in forever, I felt enlightened by the sounds that accompanied me. The humming of the birds feeding their young in the treetops and the daily routines of the bees through the former. The preposterous nature of the day meant I was ready for what horrors would emerge as we pushed onwards. My speech was still lacking alternating between complexity and mute. somehow the problems with words seemed minimalistic in this new world. And best of all we now had a weapon to cast off the darkness when it reared its head. The fear of the unknown now seemed intriguing. We opened the cabin door and smelt for the first time the lush greenery that wafted through the tree lines and tickled the grass with a small breeze. Today will be the longest trip but it's a trip that's worth seeing through. The next list item to take care of was food and that meant going off into the uncharted wildness to find a settlement that could help us. We walked through

the looming redwoods and up steep mountains before long we were gazing over the top of a cliff edge and taking in the awe-inspiring beauty that many mountaineers had seen before. This was what real freedom looked like, The escape to see the creation of this fertile world untouched. The sights of tops of trees and waterfalls were the first time I truly felt like I was back in the old world. The girl ran in front of us and excitability pointed " Smoke " She cried and sure enough just miles away down the crevasse that separated the valley was what looked to be an open dome. Even if this wasn't the end of our journey we could take solace in the fact we now had the light on our side. We ran frantically down the mountain pass and ripped our way through the broken branches that had been used for climbing. The chalky black fumes filled the atmosphere and blocked out the natural light of the forest and we moved closer the smell of meat tantalizing us with the prospects of a feast. We arrived at the source of the smoke signal and was greeted by a friendly face yet our eyes still couldn't believe this was an open dome. A large glowing neon sign stood confidently to the side of the entrance (Welcome to the all you can eat buffet of mideria) We ecstatically pushed our way through the crowds and inside the dome. A man dressed in a pure white suit stopped us and spoke in a faint peaceful manner " You guys must be starving I would like to Welcome to mideria the place to eat for our new generation " We were ushered to a large banquet and asked what food we desired We all tripped over each other's words with suggestions from meat to vegetables nothing seemed off the menu . The waiter took our orders and broke up our group " All those wanting vegan and none processed food follow me " He demanded looking puzzled I got up from my chair and asked him why we couldn't eat together, To which he responded back hastily " Here at mideria we take pride in our progressive nature , Complaints were made in the past that our vegan guests venturing south didn't want to see the disgusting smell of meat touch their nostrils while they enjoyed their dishes . So we made the conscious decision to separate the meat eaters and

those who prefer the natural way of life" The waiter pompously replied somehow I could understand what he meant this was a time for change and start over so we hugged the members of our group and said goodbye until after the feast and got ready for the most filling meal we could ever have asked for . The spectacle began in the most overzealous way possible. Two torches lit up on a large stage at the end of the banquet hall, a man dressed in white smoothly announced the leader via a microphone " Ladies and gentlemen tonight's feast is brought to you by our glorious leader general Nero. Flames danced beside the man on stage with choreographed drum beats by exquisitely performed by the members of his foundation , tuning in. The general took hold of the microphone and with a booming voice proclaimed " We are filled with love and hate but tonight we forget our struggles and enjoy a feast you will never forget" The table lights sprung up with flamethrowers lighting all of them in unison. A thousand waiters emerged from silk curtains from behind the stage and carefully place succulent meats in front of our face. The feast was a constructed carnage of laughs and ripping through the flesh that hung on the bone. The place turned into a hyena's den with jokes and tears passed away the table and smiles cracking from ear to ear. We have finally made it I thought looking at the girl sitting next to me " They may only be four of us left but is this the freedom you wanted right? " I said to the girl over the sound of the music and laughter shattering in the background " Yes " She tearfully replied. The entire night was a hoot with more meals brought out and a variety of entertainment out onto the stage. After so long held in fear and the unknown torment that hounded us on our journey, I forgot what happiness looked like. As I sat down gnawing away on the meats in front of me, I listened to the musical band and for the first time laughed with tears at the comedians the great general Nero brought onto the stage. I finally felt like we found a group of people that are just trying to survive like we were. in the later hours now. we sat back and watched the last of the comic do his stand up. "

How are you all doing" He screamed full of excitement as he entered the stage. We roared with joy as he continued " My grandmother was looking at the paper the other day and she goes, they look like beautiful cozy overcoats. I took the paper off her and said Gran those are body bags " Howls of laughter cackling through the crowd and as the night went on the drinks kept following. Each joke became more mumbled as we slipped into intoxication. The last thing I remember hearing was an encore from the comic and his final words " Thank you all you have been great". Then suddenly morning. Holding my head, I cracked my fingers together and held my swelled stomach, that was a night that was surely unforgettable I thought as I woke the girl and the other members of our group. The girl yawned and rubbed the sleep away from her eyes with her face still covered in the gravy from the night before " Ok " She uttered " I guess it's time to find the rest of the group and head off " We searched the hall for the waiter from the night before and asked for directions for the rest of our party. The waiter looked back at us perplexed as we asked where are the none meat eaters that you took from us last night. Still, in a daze we stumbled to the wall to support ourselves the food from the banquet wasn't sitting right in our stomach as a faint sickness befell us " We only serve meat here " He replied and continued to walk off with the chiefs blooded overalls tucked in the laundry basket. I quickly followed him to see the chief in person . The large gentlemen turned away from the kitchen table and smiled " Did you enjoy the feast I prepared" He asked with a smile. I stood motionless and asked " Where are the other members of the group we came in with the non-meat eaters " The chief chuckled and replied " They were at the feast with you last night I hope you enjoyed your meal" The sickness in my stomach grew worse as the realization of what transpired last night, And with one last breath I cried back with blood red eyes " What happened to them! " The chief nodded to the waiter to stand near the door blocking our escape and sinisterly answered back in a dark, ominous voice" How did

you think we managed to put on an all nights feast traveler? " The sickness took full effect as I collapsed to the floor . The last words I remember hearing was the chief giggle and proclaim " Tonight's feast is going to be bigger"

Chapter 6- The escape, The trail and the separation.

I awoke in a dungeon with the dripping of water and the shafts of light illuminating the rusted chains and blooded corpses in the cell opposite. I turned my head and was glad to see the remaining members of our group alongside me but not for long . A guard walked down the hallway with a barrel filled with dead bodies and dumped them in the opposing cell." That's the starter sorted " He menacingly responded I could make out one of the bodies. It was the comedian from last night's entertainment.

"I knew I would get the last laugh" joked the guard knowing we could be next I closed my eyes and heard the footsteps and chatting of the guards to general Nero. " We have more workers being transferred from ignus tonight " General Nero said to the guard. The guard stood there and responded " Yes sir, The ignus workers enjoy singing to lift their spirits or so I heard" General Nero sat down with the creaking of the wooden chair ringing in my ears as I kept my eyes shut. It's ironic that the darkness would turn out to be my safe escape . " Have you been talking to Argustice " Bellowed general Nero at the lonesome guard he angrily continued " Any information about our guests goes through me first " the general then took a deep breath and calmly continued " Be seeing as you are correct. Our esteemed workers from ignus enjoy music to make it through their day " The guard looked at the general and asked him a question " How much food is traveling with the workers " The general responded back quickly before getting up from his chair" I was informed by the high council that thirty of the workers have given up on eating meat since there work became harder " The guard scribbled the information on

his paper and questioned the general on tonight's feast" How can we make a full feast out of thirty meals great leader " The general passed my cell then stopped " The chief is making another batch of that famous drink between that and the entertainment acting as a distraction we should be able to look like theirs more food than there is " The guard followed the general down the hallway, All the time scribbling notes on his paper ' Of course leader I shall inform the chief now and bring the pills to the fountain later " The general stopped at the end of the hallway and patted the guard on the shoulder, The clink of the armor howling through the bars and echoing down the chamber " You are a good man " Claimed the general " I want the smoke signal set up at three and make sure they pass by the cabin in the wondersplint park from that angle we can hear their voices echo through the woods " The general locked the dungeons door and continued up the stairs. We sat there in stasis with tears filling our eyes. For what we perceived was freedom was nothing but the worst end to the subjects of Dome Elsia. And now we walked right into that fate because of greed. I guess this was a feast that i would never forget. Each time i struggled to break free the shackles grew tighter. I surveyed the remaining cells to see how long we would last before the inevitable happened. Scrawled into each breeze block by the cell doors were inscriptions detailing the order of who shall be served first. I turned to face the girl and the last of our remaining group only to see on the wall behind us we were the dessert. I should feel relieved that we are the last to die but as I heard that intimidating whistling cascade through the hallways it reaffirmed how doomed we really are. Kicking and screaming could be heard from the top cells with the cries of children echoing through the halls. " These will do for starters" Said the chief sharpening his cleaver and laughing menacingly. The only thought going through my head was those of a selfish nature voices tantalized my subconscious "Sacrifice the group and run" They repeated rapidly. Without thought, I screamed " No we are getting out of here together! " My voice shook the

bars and travelled through the cells. The next door was unlocked with the jingling of keys getting closer. More screams and vicious beatings filled the air with spats of anger and the thumping of clubs followed by deep breaths and eventually silence " Right the main course is ready for departure " The guard said throwing more bodies onto the pile. Before i knew it. I opened my eyes once more to see the chief running down the stairs and shouting frantically at the guards " We have a problem " He panted catching his breath between words and clutching onto his heart with his bloodied hand " What sort of problem?" The guards responded. " We have run out of the ingredients for the special drink. Without the abstract phenomenon the following group will be aware of their surroundings " The chief sat down in the wooden chair at the far end of the hall with sweat pouring from his brow. Both the guards smirked and looked at the chief " Well we now have a bigger dessert course " Before the chief could even form a sentence he was whisked out of the chair and thrown into our cell with his head smashing on the wall. Both of the guards emerged moments later holding rifles and headed up the stairs " You know the drill by now we head to the city near the dome of elisa and gather more of the ingredients". Now alone and afraid in the cell we learned over to see the chief clutching his head wound and shaking on the floor. I guess karma does exist even though its effects seem fleeting. I picked up the courage to ask our new guest how we could escape this place and he sat there and finally after four long breaths he answered back "We can only escape after the feast ", This was not the answer I was hoping to hear so with much thought i pushed him to explain further " When the drug takes full effect of the host it paralyzes the body and creates a fungal infection on the cortex of the brain making persuading easier for those unaffected , The irony is after each feast ends any of the cleans up crew responsible for taking care of the bodies and bringing them to the kitchen can accidentally inhale the phenomenon themselves rendering them immobilized . So when the feast is at its finale the clean-up crew lock

themselves in the generals chambers until the area is decontaminated and then they emerge to bring the bodies to the kitchen safely this normally takes a full hour before the area is safe to pass through. So that would be our window of opportunity " The chief then looked at us . Without a beat the girl sat up and fired back " What do you mean OUR window of opportunity! " She screamed . " You put us in here " The chief looked back at us and spontaneously burst into laughter " All of that doesn't matter before we are on tonight's menu, there's no way to escape " The other members of the group started to question our situation " Wait he's here as a ruse, Its just to keep us preoccupied until the guards come back" I looked at the grinning chief and saw through his façade " Your right !" I shouted " Without the chief they cant prepare the feast and he's most likely the only one that knows how to create the drink" The chief combed back his hair smearing his bloodied hand across his face before answering us back " Who's to say, Maybe this is just to stall you until our friends arrive " We all sat in silence with one thought to cross our mind the chief needs to die. We thought about ways to loosen our shackles as the chief paced back and forward in front of us . " you could untie us " I said and was immediately met with a response. " That's a great idea ... But wait the guards have the keys" The chief said toying with us like his new prey. He sat down in front of us after pacing back and forward and panted clutching his chest and then began to speak " You should count yourselves lucky you chose the meat. The others didn't but they did give us a beautiful gift for killing them, A fabulous looking Winchester rifle from the cabin in the woods" As he continued. My nostrils flared up " And lets not forget the look on your face when we told you that all of the group enjoyed their meal. I honestly don't know why we even had that comedian because the face you made upon realizing what you did was the real entertainment of the night " The chief cried with laughter as vile built up in my throat " Anyways its been nice measuring you up but I really have to get back to the kitchen " The chief got up from the floor and shouted for the

general at the cell door . The general slowly walked down the hallway and to our cell. The general spoke softly to the chief as he edged closer to the bars" The guards informed me you ran out of the ingredient if that is the case then I'm afraid we won't be needing your skills anymore " Before the chief could speak the general walked away locking the door behind him. The chief frantically screamed after the general with his voice only broken up by tears " You're joking right, I'm important please don't leave me here " . The chief looked at the door and only heard the faint sounds of the general responding " See you at the feast Paul " The chief fell to his knees and cried with his tears filling up the marble floor. Quickly the girl perked up and said " Guess we found out if he was just stalling us " Seeing the chief broken I thought now would be a prime time to expect the truth so I asked my first question again " How do we really escape " The chief turned to face us wiping away the tears from his eyes and holding his chest " The stories I told you were true the only way to escape is after the feast " he said sobbing uncontrollably .We sat motionless with the thought of death creeping up on us by the second, Each step from here on out was agonizing. And before we knew it the shafts casting from the sun faded and the darkness swept the room. The guards returned and walked to our cell. " Right we got the ingredient " Said the guards covered in blood stains and bite marks. The chief quickly perked up with a devilish grin and then proceeded to say " And you need me to prepare it I knew it was part of a plan " The guards looked puzzled and then responded " No we brought in a new chief from elisa to conduct the drink ." After those words left their mouth, the door opened and the new chef walked toward our cell. His Eyes darted to us in the corner and then back to the guards his lips quivered and he began to speak with furious anger " Where are the rest of them " He shouted the guards looked frightened and anxiously answered back " Who ?" the new chief Took out a small piece of paper from his pocket and rolled up his sleeves before speaking once more with his veins pulsating in his neck " The rest of the fugitives, those in the corner " He

grabbed the guard and pointed to us sitting nervously in the cell before shouting " Those right there are the fugitives that escaped Elisa we thought the Gisrunk took them. And so I will ask you again where are the rest of them " The guards looked petrified before they could make the faintest sound. general Nero burst into the room " Get your hands off my guards " The general shouted before his voice could raise in tempo the new chief grabbed one of the guards guns and pointed it at general Nero's head " Where are the remaining fugitives " The general laughed with a booming voice and answered back " Dear boy the feast of course " The new chief froze up in anger after finding out his new position and was immediately put in his place after getting hit on the head with the remaining guards gun looking up from the floor the general leered over him and spoke " Your duties are as followed ,The guards and I shall have our feast first and then our guests shall gauge on the scraps " Pointing to the cell and gritting his teeth " If there is any more insubordination I shall see it you are the main course Now are we understood " The new chief picked himself up from the ground touching the back of his head and steadying his feet before reluctantly replying to the general " Yes I understand sir " . The general shifted tones and ecstatically responded " That's fantastic news then we shall have our lunch now, You will find the Germaine meals in the pantry and for drink we shall have a bottle of the kitchens finest " Clapping his hands the general ordered the new chief to reside to the kitchen " Chop chop" He requested before exiting the room . The new chief stood in front of our cells and glared at our bodies in the corner before whispering " I am taking you all back to elisa and in the trial of Elisa laws the general will meet his end for killing the others " The general shouted down the stairs for the new chief to hurry up. As the chief left our cell and walked down the hallway, we heard a sinister sounding phrase uttered by him " Don't worry sir this will be a feast you will never forget "

Chapter 7- Two steps forward more steps back.

As we sat in our cell, we heard the familiar sound of the orchestral score fill the air. The same sounds that beckoned us to our feast would spell the end to this empire. We knew that tonight the dome would fall. As one chief laid dead in our cell, The new chief prepared the feast to wipe out the powers at play. Each drum beat adding more emphasis to the generals finally steps. The guards grabbed us from our cell kicking and screaming to the kitchen. As we were forced down the hallway, I saw the signs of terror in each empty cell. A blooded soft toy cascaded across the floor in the Main course cell. A Formidable foe now cleaved in twain sat in the starters cell and a gargantuan Slay mark laid scrawled into the metal door. The light hit our eyes as we entered the oversaturated hallways stretched as far as the eye could see with the unmistakable signs of laughter and cheers heard from the dining hall. The workers from ignus have arrived and are ready to feast on the weak. We were thrown into the kitchen and dragged before the chief. " Here's your precious cargo" The guards sarcastically said before exiting the kitchen and patrolling the hallways. The chief looked flustered as he scoured the shelves expeditiously while muttering to himself the same words over and over again " I must get this right" He chanted while pouring the contents of the pork ribs into the containers. He smiled maliciously while formulating the drinks and slammed the doors to the oven that still held burnt flesh. Our rifle hung over the counter like a game trophy from a hunter's lodge as our eyes peered up to its position. The drum beats got louder and the echo's filled the hall as the general delivered his captivating speech to the inhabitants of ignus " People of ignus We are filled with loyalty and courage to strife towards perfection but tonight we honor your valiant struggles in the face of this hardship and ask for you to enjoy a feast you will never forget" The Smashing of plates were heard slamming down on the tables and the crackling of fire filled the air as the stove in the kitchen was lit to prepare the general meal . The chief read the drink recipe diligently and walked out of the room

to prepare it in solitude. Before leaving we questioned why he was leaving us alone and without haste, the chief responded. " These ingredients are the highest value the people of elisa make and for that, I must keep the secrets clandestine " Time edged on slowly with each minute interrupted by the forceful clashing of drum beats. The promiscuous marchers exited the banquet hall to tremendous applause and walked down into the general's chambers dripping with sweat. I heard the unmistakable sounds of the announcer entering the stage and comparing the next act. " I know the people of ignus love music and that's why you're in for a treat, please welcome to the stage our very own Serenatinals " The crowd roared with excitement as the band entered the stage and the music grew in tempo the chief returned and the waiter shuffled more men into the kitchen smirking and remarking to the new arrivals " We have more non-meat eaters here so prepare them a dish " the chief glared at the waiter and shut the kitchen door . With panic filling the room the chief bit his lip drawing blood and gritted his teeth together before delivering his final words " I hope this works" And with that, he exited the kitchen with the drinks in hand and knocked on the door of the general's chamber. The platter was whisked away from him before the chief could even enter the room. The guard excitedly proclaimed " After our session, this will fill us " And slammed the door on the chief's face with the unmistakable smell of body odor wafting through the cracks. Minutes later the chief returned to us in the kitchen and sat patiently in front of us on a small stool." Nothing to do now but wait" he implied. The girl asked if the plan would actually work and without any hesitation, the chief kicked away the stool and picked up the rifle from the wall before jokingly stating " If it doesn't this is plan B " Pointing the gun at the kitchen door. As we waited for the pheromones to kick in. The next few hours felt torturous as the music stopped and deadly silence imposed the atmosphere. The chief nervously got up from his stool and slowly opened the kitchen door. The entirety of the halls were abandoned with only the

sound of the buzzing of flies , He ushered us over to the door and told us to wait as he crept up the hallway to the chambers. Peering his head into the chambers he quickly turned around and ordered us to leave " Its safe now lets go " He faintly whispered the group turned to the chef and questioned what was in that room and his response was both cryptic and confusing, as the drinks flowed and bubbled in the glass " Nothing but an assisted suicide " He said before opening the large metallic doors and forcing us out into the bitter cold that pierced our skin like a knife . He frantically moved us to his cart and lashed at the horses to move. We were now away from the fall of mideria with the bleeding of the neon signs sparking the final whispers of this dome. The chief turned back and started talking to us as we laid in the back of the cart " You will be delivered to elisa by dawn " Cracking his wip and holding the reins of the horses the girl seemed calm as she gave directions " Maybe we would get back faster if you took the highway " She smiled and then went to sleep leaving the rest of us in a state of confusion . Another crack rung through my ears as the chief turned back to face us again " If it was up to me i would leave you here " I looked back at the chief and asked why before another crack of the wip came thumping down. He then cleared his throat and answered back " Ever since you left we haven't had one Gisrunk raid. They must have returned to the Domes down south " Before i could register that thought a loud buzzing noise rang through my ears and shivered down my spine. The girl awoke and sporadically grabbed me " Now " Now she screamed the chief turned to face us " What's N- " before he could finish his sentence the cart was rammed and thrown off the road. The back of the cart hung suspended by the wooden bearings. The last noise i remember hearing was a snap before plummeting off the highway and down to the assume below. As i faded into darkness i heard the girls voice " The empire has fallen but we have just begun "

I awoke to the sights of bloodshot eyes staring back at me and the ear-shattering sounds of heel boots tapping on the cold concrete which

contrasted with the blazing fire smoking from a lit waste paper bin the girl sat in the corner shaking uncontrollably and shifting through our identification cards " The chief , Real name Prometheus Walters Guess he won't be needing this anymore " she said as she threw another bit of the paper in the bin feeding the flames and cracking through the near rusted her eyes blistering by the fire darted back at me . She slowly picked herself up from the corner and wandered over clenching a baseball bat in her right hand and dressed in a black leather overcoat. The chief looked at her in disgust " You bitch " He shouted "you're one of them" The girl smiled and grabbed the chief by his neck " Now that's no way to talk to a lady " She sneered. I nervously sat back and waited for my fate. The girl paced back and forward pointing the bat at us individually. " Eenie " She stopped at me and stared "Meeny " she moved onto the next member of the group "Money " She walked past another member and then stopped at the chief "Mo" And with a colossal swing smashed in his head with the bat I turned away to shield my eyes from the horrific violence that would fuel my nightmares before being dragged back into the fray by the sound of the girl clicking her fingers together . Out of the smoke that now clouded the room like a storm emerged two pale white men she called them her disciples and ordered them both to take care of the corpse " Take him outside he's bird food now". She said with a cackling grin I sat motionless as she sauntered over to me as she deviously lent over to my ear with lips as cracked as breaking ice and breath as thick as the mountain air. she whispered " Look around you, Joseph " I was grabbed and emphatically turned to face the wall with ripped posters and plastic Skeletons dropped across the borders . Her clammy breath heated up against my neck as she uttered those words " Read our freedom " Looking at the torn poster I anxiously read out the details " Welcome to Meaning Mikes Spooky Funhouse " . One of the members of the group perked up and said what we were all thinking " You're Mad, This is the freedom we'd been chasing a goddam amusement park! " Her

nails scratched across my neck as she grew displeased by the groups response " I saved us from the torture of the dome and this is my thanks! " She roared . The smoke became nothing more than a black canvas choking our lungs with soot. Take them outside the girl screeched with a temperament that drew blood to her eyes. We were all thrown out the doors of the funhouse and into the gleaming lights that once beckoned travelers to a land of fun and excitement. As the fear within us amplified the mocking of nearby gulls engulfed the atmosphere. As the lights buzzed and flickered in the background and the jukebox replayed the parks theme, The girl ripped a piece of rope from the swings and toyed with it along the floor. She tied the rope around one of the member's necks and shook as she tightens it. until the breathing stopped. She dragged the unconscious body over to the strongman game and wrapped the other end of the rope to the top of the bell She then commanded one of her disciples over and handed him the hammer " How's your strength? " She asked as the disciples struggled to pick up the hammer " It's good to miss " She then loosened the rope just a tad around the group members neck just to hear the coughing of spit hit the ground in front of her . Without any hesitation, she grabbed the mans neck and squeezed. " This is madness " She shouted before commanding the disciple to hit the target. " Now " She cried as the hammer hit the floor blood dripped down the girl's hand and she turned to the remaining members of the group. " And then they were two, Does anyone else think I'm mad". We all sat in fear as she continued her rant with howling laughter " Good then let's have some fun and before I forget welcome to Gisrunk territory.

I remembered the stories from my youth the Gisrunk derived from the word Grimmey or lower class. These were the last people allowed into our new utopia. I recalled a small boy knocking at our door before the event hit with an optimistic twinkle in his eye and a sneer of ineptitude. As my dad left days prior to fight on the frontlines. Only my mother accompanied me to the door and listened to the special this young child spat out "

Do you guys need some scrap metal to fend off the apocalypse " The young boy started his sales pitch with. In the background, the television played beat by beat events of the devastation happening overseas bombs being dropped on allied countries all because of words said by those without the intelligence to keep quiet. The boy continued bellowing over the noise of the TV. " I said do you not want any of this crap to protect you its proper canny stuff, only five pounds each or whatever you'll want to pay" I tuned out momentarily as the death toll scrawled across the screen. With the boy's voice muffled in the background before he furiously punched my shoulder to snap me out of my trace. " Listen mate alreet this war is going to kill us and I want to get home so are you goanna buy this crap or not" His patience was drawing thin so in haste, i gave him six pounds and frantically scrimmaged through the miscellaneous junk. I felt the quality of the materials and yelled out " Hang on you little shit, This is sheet metal " I looked up quickly and he'd vanished quicker than a breath on a warm window. I slammed the door in anger with the bolt snapping like gunfire matching the violence on the TV and stomped off into the sitting room while muttering to myself along the way. My mother turned her head away from the Television to ask what was wrong and through gritted teeth i sarcastically answered back " Turns out you don't need to go to the gym to lose a few pounds all you need to do is open your door to the grimmeey buggers up the road" She sat there sniggering under her breath before i composed myself and asked if my father had been killed . She looked at me and insured me that his name has not been shown on the toll yet. With a sense of relief i rolled back into my rant" Never let any of those sought near this house again " My mother looked at me and said nothing. My recollection came to an abrupt halt as the girl dragged us from the outdoors to the next attraction. " How are you finding Gisrunk territory so far" She inquired. I couldn't bring myself to answer honestly so i quickly concocted some belligerent lie. " Oh, this is just what i wanted the freedom to look like " I said, After the words wet my lips i could see a menacing

glare across the girls face. " Soon there will only be one" She manically spat out. I thought i would enquire if she knew about the freedom beyond this point in the hopes of bamboozling her ambitions. So with a cavalier attitude, i politely asked " Not to intrude on this wonderful location you have built here but does one as intelligent as yourself know what lies beyond the great wall down south". To my surprise she answered, But be it with furious anger " Those that left us " She snarled. I quickly responded " Who?" she looked back at me and answered promptly " The government that left us to die live beyond the wall and secured themselves in their bunkers as operation endgame took place." I thought to myself that it may be a long shot but i may be able to trick these people into venturing out of here and escaping down south. So with baited breath i quickly spat back " They left us to die , maybe we should pay our leaders a little visit " In the back of my mind i smirked with a sense of grandeur " Surely if our leaders are still alive they will have armed guards protecting them meaning that these Gisrunks will be shot on sight" I relinquished a war cry and screamed to the girl and the remaining survivors " What are you suggesting, stab the heart of authority and cripple the ones that enslaved us" All the while the grin grew bigger in the back of my head soon these people will be dead and I'll be free. the girl answered back" He's right let's destroy the totalitarianism that once caged us " The group all yelled out and took up arms, As for me I sat back and thought they bought it. they'll be dead by dawn.

Chapter 8 - The road to reform.

That night i slept in the spooky house at the funfair with the gleaming eyes of a damaged jack-o-lantern demoralizing my frantic chose. I tossed and turned yet couldn't escape the whispers in the darkness they kept scratching at my brain with more deeper tones screeching in my ears " You know what you're doing . Bring us the sacrificial lamb " I awoke covered in sweat . And stared at

the cobweb covered wall while the shadows danced in the moonlight through the open cracks. Guards patrolled outside so i pretended to sleep while there gaze leered over me . my mind was starting to see reason maybe I'm becoming the same as all those around me. I must tell them we cant go onwards, Yet those words were locked in the recess of my mind. If i said anything now then they would know i just wanted a way out . I knew I couldn't take that chance , As dawn broke the faulty electrics awoke the entire group with the intercom calling for more fun and excitement at the spooky house of horrors I picked myself up from the floor and stretched my back all the while hyperventilating. Today is the day we find the end whatever that may be while the others packed their bags in anticipation I shook uncontrollably . The girl patted the sign of the park with her right hand and ordered us to move on insisting i travelled in front . The road seemed longer than any others we have ventured on and i was the first point of conflict . I spotted many new domes in the distance that we needed to pass through. Which made each step we took more frightful than the last. I swallowed my tongue and held my breath as we plodded on down the road muffled voices filled the air as we came up to the first sign with the words being un-audible at first but the voices became clear the soundings broke new words, like verses my father once told me the first day i got bullied " We all fight our own wars using our own weapons, though you may not fight with loaded ones they can still do harm" I stopped dead in my tracks and queried" Did anyone just speak ? " a deathly silence fell over the group before the girl lashed out with a vile rage " Don't start that again thinking you're hearing voices!" I realized from that moment on it would be wise to keep my lips sealed. The black clouds suffocated us as the dust from the road kicked up in our face the fading lights of the fun fair dissipated into the distance and a lone hue of vibrant light cascaded along the ground-breaking us into the southern section. This was the no man's land, A place where a decisive question could lead to a disappearance. And the heart of many dreams has been missing without a

trace. I shuddered frequently as birds flew off the cracked fences that enclosed our linear path. the volatility of the group's actions shattered the overall fearful dread we all had about our final leg of the journey and yet we all put up with this masquerade and infused our own bravado. That was until the beams of light shun on our faces and a voice called us to the first of many domes. Surprisingly unlike before the man guarding this dome seemed friendly " Hi all where are you heading " He cheerfully asked with a red rosy glow upon his face. The girl answered back " Down south and you're not stopping us" The man chuckled and replied back " Well Gosh i wouldn't want to stop you from following your path but i must say those clothes look like they couldn't keep a moth away from a flame, How about you folks come in and we'll get you something new. We all reluctantly accepted this man's offer with a hint of slight hint of stress. As we walked into the dome a sudden snowstorm kicked up outside. " Looks like you made it before the cold came" Said a man dressed in a red robe. We looked around and started to take in the beauty, This dome was like a palace, red drapes hung elegantly from pristine chandeliers without a molecule of dust or dampness in sight. A soiree gathered in the main hall while servants conscientiously attended to the proceedings. a calming cadence played in the background with the velocity of a house fly. The man ushered us into the hall with glee " Come let's get you into something more fitting. I just know you will like it here" The man clicked his fingers and a dwarf going by the name Mia rushed over " Yes sir " Politely proclaimed Mia clutching her clipboard tightly in her hands. " See that our fine guests are dressed to perfection " The man said with a joyful grin. " Of course, follow me " Mia answered back rushing us along the hall to the changing rooms. The smell of perfume decorated the halls. After we were changed, Mia came running up to us with her clipboard and started pointing it in our face. " Come on guys if i could just get one like and one recommendation then that would be swell " Looking perplexed i quickly retorted back " Why?, whatever happened to just

doing something because you wanted to help without the insidious lust for attention " Mia pushed the clipboard closer to our faces and repeated her previous statement. Another member of the group tried to ask a question but was left with no response " Excuse me mia but now where do we go?" The member asked , Mia pushed the clipboard towards him and started profusely saying " Come on guys just one like and recommendation and that would be swell and if i could get 10 likes off the whole group that would be a dream goal" By this point the girl lost her patience and aggressively answered back " Here's a more tangible goal just tell us what is going on here !" Mia peeped out the changing room door and lowered her voice before speaking " We need to harass guests for these likes or the boss will fire us .the boss expects a high level of productivity and if we don't achieve that then the storm will take us " At least we found the seedy side to this illustrious establishment or so i thought. Filled with rage and an obligation to speak her mind, the girl stormed into the joyful man's office with a spitting tongue of fire she snapped at the man sitting gleefully behind his desk. " How dare you threaten your employees with the harsh winter outside if they don't harass the guests" The man looked puzzled and slowly pushed himself up from his chair before exhaling and delivering a response in a milestone voice "That story again" He sighed as he stared out the window pointing at the helpers below rushing around with their clipboards " Those that hold the clipboards and won't let you leave are reforming addicts. We allow them to work the odd job to starve their addiction" He proclaimed. the girl spat back with a vicious temper and shouted " And the men in robes another sick joke " The man chuckled and showed the girl the file for those who wear the robes. " Those people are therapists; they keep the helpers in line so they don't fall back into their past lives " .Back in the hall mia pushed us through to the dining hall. I spoke with a questionable sense and asked " Is there freedom beyond this dome ? " My question was quickly met with disdain " We don't speak of the outside " Screamed mia making the others

around us look up and stare " You're making a scene , quickly get to the gates " She pushed her clipboard into the back of us and rushed us forward dripping with sweat. as we approached the gates a man in red robes grabbed mia and harshly spoke to her " Nice try but you know the rules " The man took the dwarf by the hand and threw her back into the hall " We work and we rest " Shouted the man " That's how we get better and dispel our desires, remember " The girl returned with news of the dwarfs and whispered it to the group " They are called helpers, the name was given to those who are escaping the wrong decisions they made in life" We all looked at the man in red and knew the ones we put our trust in were using us to escape . We must talk to the man again. The distant sound of screaming whisked away into the background as the music grew louder in tone. the man walked down the stairs and pushed aside the velvet drapes "we have gifts for all those who spend time with us and today we have new guests " a sea of eyes veered in our direction as a spotlight shuns upon us. " We are heading to freedom " Said the girl. The faces in the crowd laughed in their hands and cackled with glee. The freedom we craved may not be even real. We were chasing the hope of a distant past to forget our actions? The man walked through the crowd and started to speak once more" You had freedom in your dome and you let it go, You trusted those that hid from traditions and tried to forge your own path and now you claim to want what was in front of you at the start " The crowd burst into laughter as tears ran down their face . " That wasn't true freedom" Screamed the girl. "We are searching for the end of the line " The crowd stopped in dead silence and the music halted , the man glared at us and finally spoke" I see, in that case you have two options you can have the freedom of our dome and listen to our rules or , You can chase the ghost that haunts your dreams but doing so will exile you from all the domes in the land " We stood there and pondered the man's question before firing back " We want the latter " The gates opened to a blizzard as the guards pushed us into the cold. The man stood by the

gates and pointed down the hill to a red flashing light. That's where this whole world started. I can only hope you have made the right choice. The gates slammed behind us as we shivered our way to the red light with the blizzard obscuring our vision. Minutes turned to hours and hours into days as the cold air choked us with an icy grip and beat us to the ground the lights of the domes faded and we walked onwards following a black shadow luring us close to the light. The whispers in the wind grew in intensity and the once green grass became a blanket of white. The end was in sight and we only had the hope we would make it. before the darkness consumed us.

Chapter 9- The Diablo

The misty embrace of the cold air dispelled from the atmosphere and the final piece of this puzzle finally found its place, we were here in front of the dream. A large silo covered in rust and still painted in the writing of those who came before us. A hatch remained open echoing down large dust filled corridor and tailing us towards a bright light beaming from an open door. We all made our way inside and began to hear the voice that haunted us before. " We know you're here " Bellowed the voice before continuing to speak " We have monitored your secrets; we see your fate" Touted the voice speaking in a feminine tone. " You're not the first and shall not be the last to see what real freedom is " We edged closer to the door and slowly walked inside the dripping of nearby pipes filled the air as we breathed in the particles of dust. As we entered the room, we saw nothing but an empty desk and a remote. Flies circled the chair. The voice spoke to us again, " I can see you're all here " The girl shouted with vile hatred" What is your sick game, How can you see us " The voice quickly responded " look

up" We peaked up into the corner of the room to see a small camera and a flashing light. " Grab the remote and we can speak " Demanded the voice. I picked up the remote and pressed it at the camera, to my horror the black silhouettes that spoke our names before appeared in front of us. " So, the ghosts are real " I uttered. The voice laughed and began to explain " No we are still alive, these are projections. We use them as fear tactics to keep people inside the domes and serve us until they die . " I furiously spat back " And the animals that chased us " the figure stood there and flickered " those are more of our projections, Guards that chase people into the domes to seek safety and fear the outside world " The group stood and asked " But why ? " The figure flickered more and then began to speak " Before the dome's lawlessness consumed our economy to an unmitigated degree, our money was gone and our plans were failing. We needed to create a backup plan and that's where operation endgame came in. We created the domes and injected the new population with trackers. This meant when anyone escaped the domes we could set our projections on them driving them insane. The lawlessness destroyed our streets and neighborhoods killing everyone who wasn't safe in the domes. We, on the other hand moved away to another country but monitored the events taking place so they may never happen again. " I stood there in shock and frantically uttered back. " You people are the devil how could you kill the innocent and destroy our own country. you drove an army into paranoia, you left the domes in the hands of psychopaths and for what, entertainment " The figure flickered and an assertive voice came out, firing back at us " It doesn't matter if your 100% accurate with your statement if you don't fit the narrative you will be given a cameo role

and then forgotten to the aging of time. Because no one shines bright, the best you can ask for is to be a flare in the dead of night. One second you can be deemed a savior to all and the next second you have faded into obscurity and left to regain the littlest bound of dignity and decency you crave to stay relative. Because you followed a fantasy and believed those that fight you, With clawed backs and sharp fangs. So do what you want because we all know how our movie ends as we sink into the abyss it's just who directed it and what role we played throughout that still remains blurry even to the most learned man That's what role you play in this and that's what role we all played ". The girl smirked and chuckled before speaking " We will tell everyone about your nefarious means and the domes will fall " The figure stood there in silence before touting us with its response " You had a choice to remain in the domes and you picked exile over the true freedom we gave you, No dome will allow you back in. from now on you are banished to hold the information that you crave but with no tongue to speak it " We all stood motionless we had all been played from the start. If it wasn't for our blind belief that something greater was out there, we would all still be plodding on in our mortality. The figure edged closer to us and whispered " Who lead these people here " I stood in shocked and recalled my past interactions with the whispers that consumed me, I lead them to this place. The voice grew in intensity " Why did you lead them here " I swallowed my spit and began to answer back in an anxious manner " This is the last place my family was before my dad got the call " the group looked at me in anger before the voice uttered more " And what else happened, You have to tell them " I shook and tightened my fist " Operation endgame was about removing those who

have committed the sinful acts in our old world, I lead us to each dome in an attempt to search and remove those that destroyed our world, I'm tracking and killing those who cant follow the rules of our new age " The figure quickly shouted out " Operation endgame is a code word for the agents of the new world. " The remaining group attacked me. The last thing I remembered was a fist coming at my head and then I blanked out. I awoke hours later covered in blood with the girl trembling outside the room. she ran outside and frantically looked back at me before speaking " You're him, El diablo " I grinned and took in the cold air. " It's just us now