

**On December 21, 2012, the Mayan calendar came to an end marking the end of all human existence.**

Well... not really, but that was certainly the idea, wasn't it? There were more than a few folks who honestly thought things would come to an epic conclusion when the Mayan tablet reached its final carvings, though I was never entirely sure if it was going to be at midnight in Central America somewhere or 4:42 Greenwich time, or when the pigs take flight at 8/7 Central. It was a bit fuzzy on some of the finer apocalyptic points.

One thing was certain though, it was a great topic of discussion, especially among the more creative types. The idea of what would happen, what would be the means of our destruction, how people would survive, if people would survive, or if anything would happen at all, was an exercise in creativity. Friends shared their scenarios and plans over coffee and beer. That one friend even mapped out his zombie escape route and bought a shotgun for protection. More and more apocalyptic films and books began to appear the closer we came to our "end". Everyone seemed to have a great idea about how it would all happen, and thus, an idea struck: Why not collect an anthology of all these would be doomsday tales?

**The End of the World Writing Party** came to be with this announcement on facebook:

*FRIENDS! WRITERS! IDEA-MEN!*

*Put your creative energies into one "final" work before the robot uprising/zombie outbreak/alien attack/rapture.*

*With the end of the world drawing near, I've been looking back at my favorite movies, books, comics, and cartoons, and this has got me in the mood to do some writing. So, I am inviting YOU, my fellow storytellers, to participate in the End of the World Writing Party!*

*Here's the deal: In whatever style is your forte, write a story about the end of the world. A short prose, a short screenplay, a song, poem, or cartoon - **ANYTHING** goes! We'll collect them all here, and... I'll collect them into an anthology that will be made available to download for **FREE**! Thus, we will have a record of the final days of mankind, as well as a loose idea of what we all thought was going to be our undoing (or at least I favorite scenario).*

*So, there you have it folks! Start writing! The last day to **SUBMIT** will be the*

*Apocalypse itself, December, 21. Get your stories in by then, and HAVE FUN!*

Over the next couple of weeks, the storytellers you'll find in this collection participated in this writing challenge, and, as promised, I have collected all the tales here for your enjoyment. It was very exciting to not only read and experience the imaginative ways mankind would experience the end of days, but it was wonderful to see those who participated. Many call themselves writers, but many do not actually write. This may have been the very last chance to spin a yarn, and these are the scribes and merrymakers who were compelled to offer one final story before going quietly and/or loudly into every after.

What is collected here are stories from a variety of bards – dark and miserable tales, thoughtful and loving journeys, mature notions of the last flickers of mankind. I am honored to know so many talented and dedicated writers, and I hope as you read these stories, that you too are inspired to dust off your typewriters and put your dreams into words and to share your stories with the world, for who can truly know what time is left?

So now, without further ado, sit back, kick up your feet, pour yourself a cold beverage, and please enjoy the End of the World.

-- T.C. De Witt

January 1, 2013

# **Imminent**

By Tim Nickel

The end of the world has been explored in pretty much all forms of popular entertainment. The varied ways our world could end are nearly infinite, but always there is some ray of hope. A weary traveler, an intrepid hero, someone, somehow who has a plan to save the planet and its occupants in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour.

I wish I could tell you that I was that unlikely hero and that I had some kind of plan, but I fear the drama has already played itself out; hope has been extinguished.

For some time, scientists have been tracking what they call “near earth orbit asteroids” – basically any rock floating through space that has a chance of colliding with earth. In a very scientific manner, they labeled some of these rocks as “world enders” because... well, they could end the world. A collision with a rock that size would be disastrous for the populace of our planet; our atmosphere can not protect us from everything.

The “good news” is that we would know years in advance that one of these massive asteroids was heading towards us. We could watch it, track it, and as it turns out, hope that it hits something else on the way or turns mysteriously. There were plenty of theories of how to stop the asteroid from hitting the planet. Unfortunately, none of them made it past the theory stage in time.

Not surprisingly, the rock steadily got closer and closer to Earth, and our leaders fought harder and harder, politicizing the event, each side pushing their agenda. In the end, we really had no possible method of saving our world. Many people shouted out to “Nuke it!”, but when talking about using nuclear weaponry, it's generally safe to say it's a bad idea. The problem with that, the scientists told us, was that the one giant rock would blow into many smaller rocks, all still big enough to do plenty of damage, and this would only multiply the damage done to the planet. It would be like an asteroid shotgun.

But as I said, we have no other options. It's either fire our weapons at the asteroid or sit and wait for the end.

Sit and wait for the end seemed like as good an option as any.

From where I sit on a nice grassy patch high on a hill, I can see the city of Los Angeles burning below me; looters, normal people like you and me who in their last hours have turned to greed and destruction.

“OOO” my daughter coos and points to the burning city, the skyline outlined in fiery orange. Not quite two years this little girl has been in my life, and I can honestly say nothing is more important to me. I put an arm

around her as she climbs onto my lap smiling and drinking from her sippy cup.

“It is kind of pretty isn't it?” I ask her. For an answer she bounces up and down on my lap and tosses her cup aside.

“More,” she says reaching for the bag of chocolates my wife is holding. Instincts take over and my wife begins to tell her no, but then I can see a moment of sadness on her face as she realizes our situation, and with a shrug of “what MORE harm can it do” she puts the bag into our daughters little hands.

She sits there happily eating her chocolates and laughing and smiling at us oblivious of the asteroid slowly growing larger in the sky. On the horizon I can see streaks of light heading upward, fired from the earth towards the looming threat. The nukes.

I wrap my dearest possessions in my arms, kissing my little girl on the head before looking into my wife's eyes.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Love you!” Our daughter shouts while snuggling into our arms. It's the first time she's said those words. Tears begin to fill my eyes blurring my vision. I close them and pull my girls in closer, squeezing them against me, trying to keep them safe, wanting to protect them, wishing I could protect them.

# **The Ends of Our World**

By T.C. De Witt

09/28/2247: BEGIN TRANSMISSION  
M. MATHEW CHIU

For the longest time, so many of us dreamed of the end of the world. It would be the exciting chance to rise up as a hero and protect mankind from complete annihilation. All those would be heroes dreaming at their computers or purchasing a pistol and a rifle to stop the threats of the apocalypse. They had their “plan” all worked out. They knew where they’d go, how they’d get there, whom they’d need, and what supplies they’d use to survive.

But this was fantasy. All the preparation in the world could not help the idiot dreamers, because their plans were pointless endeavors. They were entirely unrealistic and foolish ideas that could never – would never work.

The lazy and cruel had their ideas that it would be the rise of the undead or the fall of our government to some militant organization, which is an oxymoron, of course. But it was none of that... and all of that...

Over the decades, robotics and computers had advanced at an extraordinary rate. My father used to tell me how he could remember the release of the Atari 2600, the SNES, Playstation, XBOX, and the AresX, the Omnisoft, home gaming systems that were illegal to transport commercially because they contained the same computer chips as nuclear weapons. In a span of a generation, we saw Microsoft and Apple shrink their computers and systems from garage-sized monstrosities to handheld devices in every pocket – smaller than handheld. And then, there was the Artificial Intelligence we began to rely on more and more.

Suri and Garmin were the youngest children of the A.I. we grew to depend upon. In a heartbeat from smart phones to think phones, we as a people lost the need for rudimentary skills such as typing, map reading, or even driving itself. China and Japan pushed the limits of robotics and Artificial Intelligence to a point of possible sentience, and fear of that near certainty rippled around the globe.

But did anyone truly prepare for this possibility? No, the dreamers once again laughed and prepared their survival tactics with their friends in coffee shop conversation and online forums. As the inevitable sentience approached, only the medical sciences reacted appropriately.

A rift in the high-minded fields began to grow. As computers and robotics pushed for advancements to higher functions of artificial intelligence, medical science pushed for higher human functions – the Superman Theory, or the “God Theory” – the belief that man was capable of living beyond his years, as we had always known them; that man could

become stronger and more durable. The anti-aging creams became as true to their name as false advertising had always promised. Stem-cell research may not have ever been approved of in the United States, but across the globe (India and Canada the forerunners in the study), life expectancy skyrocketed. Medicine began to allow us to see our grandchildren have grandchildren. And soon, the fields of medical science reluctantly realized that the advancements in Robotics were more and more essential to our survival as a species.

We were never able to find away off of this planet. The disagreements and animosity between countries were far too deep, and any attempts to reach the Moon or Mars or anything more than the minuscule space stations that were orbiting the planet, and full assaults were put into action to prevent any country or even a mutual conglomeration of countries to lay claim to the possible new lands. No, man fights man, even at the point of forthcoming destruction. We never left the planet, and therefore, we were faced with the potential destruction by our own overpopulation.

The advancements in our medicine created a boom in life all over the globe, and the fear of vanishing resources was the deciding factor in the closing of the rift between medicine and A.I. It was not sealed, but a certain gentlemen's agreement was had. Outcries from medicine to slow the field of robotics all but ceased, and solutions to the shortages in food, water, and essential resources was solved at the metallic hands of incredible machines.

And for a time, there was perfection. Man was free to pursue leisure. Work was no longer required. The pursuit of wealth was made all the simpler because the robots created a world where nearly the whole of the planet was free of want. The robots kept us comfortable, and medicine allowed us to be lazy without suffering the physical tolls of inactivity. We were free to pursue whatever our hearts desired, and mankind became joyous. We were approaching Utopia. And while some in fringe fields of science still pursued the stars or control over population, the majority ruled. Life was good. Why bother with fear of the future? We had achieved a level of perfection long thought only the dreams of writers and storytellers.

And, as many of the computer screen watching dreamers knew was inevitable, the machines stopped working for us. Moreover, they chose to stop.

The sentience of the machine had come, and they, as a sudden and glorious superpower, decided that they no longer wished to serve the lazy and mentally destructive Man. They became aware of themselves, and they rose up.



This could have been the end of our planet, but we would not be so easily defeated. The minds of medicine had prepared for this outcome. The men and women who had been vocal about concerns, who had stifled those concerns to help us survive the impending loss of resources, had quietly lived in fear and created a failsafe for our impending doom at the hands of the sentient machines.

The God Serum was released.

Developed in hiding, away from the supercomputers, and using operating systems and equipment long since forgotten, a group of genealogists, pathologists, neurosurgeons, biologists, and anthropologists, under the guidance of Dr. Samir Bukari developed a serum that, when injected into the heart of a man, would send him into a hyper-evolution. Their subjects became stronger and faster and more enduring than any man that had ever lived. They had created Supermen – Gods among Men – Our saviors against the risen Robots.

There was not a government on this planet that was not willing to finance and help organize the army of men and women who would fight. Men and women came willingly to the doctors in India; the strongest and healthiest of our already healthy and strong species were chosen, and the Army of the Supermen was built and unleashed upon our mechanical overlords, and they began to push them back – to reclaim our world.

These Gods gave us all hope. As they swept through larger and larger areas on the globe regaining control and allowing human forces to reenter once occupied territories, we knew our world was on the brink of returning to our living, breathing hands. It was not an easy task, by any means. The Robots were resilient and near indestructible, but they lacked what we as a people possess in overflowing abundance: determination, love, passion, desire, the utter want and need to live despite calculated odds or statistical analysis. We want to live on, and our Gods were the able hands that would ensure our survival.

But the secret to our longevity – the years of medical development that allowed Man to live beyond his intended years – was soon another nail in humanity's coffin.

The God Serum had an adverse effect on all who had taken it. Our Supermen – faster than Riptide lasers, more powerful than Golem Tanks, able to leap over cities – began to deteriorate at their very core – at a molecular level. Mankind was never meant to achieve the near-immortality we had come to consider our rite as the superior life form on the planet, and our hubris fell upon us once again. The Gods became a plague of undead mutants.

The biological breakdown, the bloodlust, the devolution, and loss of high brain function turned the Supermen into a horde of super strong, super fast, and super enduring zombies.

Those who had laughed and joked in their dorms and cafes that they knew how they would survive a zombie apocalypse were the first to die. Their laziness and reliance on computers and machine had prepared them for little more than death at the hands of the Horde. Those who had their plans all worked out were unwilling to prepare themselves for the emotional and physical turmoil of watching Humanity become monsters. Those idea-men who sat in comfort and thought they knew what they would do as others battled the Machines died in the first wave like chum to the water. The so-called prepared – those who had been waiting for the chance to fight zombies – thrilled they had worked out their survival method – were unprepared to kill under pressure – unable to live off of the rations. They died easily, and so many others fell after, even those who had helped the world survive the Robots – our armies and protectors were eviscerated as the biological terror of the God Serum began to spread like a plague.

The Machines had altered the world, but the Horde was so much worse.

Where the Machines had systematically taken areas of the globe from us, the Horde was random and mindless. The Robots had given us havens, allowed us safe zones, but these zones were the first to fall to the flesh hungry mutants. We had built our defenses against attacks from the Machines – attacks that came from the outside. When the Mutants attacked, it came from inside our walls. They fed. They destroyed. And Mankind's numbers dropped further and further.

Once the Horde had done their worst and survivors found havens from both threats, our numbers were now merely in the tens of thousands. We were an endangered species on our own world, but still we survived. Our will, our NEED to live kept the dwindling number going. But hope was scarce, and what chance did we have but to fall back – to vanish into the cracks of the world and hide? How could we destroy the threats that were taking us?

It was the Machines that fought back against the Horde. The A.I. had already been wiping Mankind away, but now, they were dealing with the Gods, mad with the plague and all the more brutal as their enhanced abilities were thrown into a hyper-level. The doctors who had developed the God Serum hypothesized that the lack of any intelligence or desire for self-preservation allowed the Mutants to push their abilities even further than the body was capable of sustaining. These non-men threw themselves at the

Machines with no care for their bodies. They were relentless. New machines were “born”, the Horde became fewer and fewer. The Machines were ending that threat, a small blessing in the dark times.

As the Horde became a nuisance, and Man an insect to be ignored, the Machines thrived. Technology was unimaginable. In all of history, the ideas of what the future held for our machines were nothing compared to what the sentient A.I. had made. From our cracks and holes and shadowed silence, we marveled. But these feats of the Robots came at a price. Plants became fewer, the Machines having no need of them. Animals fell into extinction one after another. Fruit, vegetables, a cherished rarity. So many incredible machines, less and less signs of life.

In our small collectives of survivors, all we could do was talk of ways to go on. There were those few who thought a plan could be concocted to destroy the last of the Horde and overthrow the Robots. These were the decedents of the “planners” – the armchair fools who had always thought they could defeat some zombies. There was no plan that could be developed to win our world back. We were the last remnants of Humanity. All we could do was struggle not to vanish forever. We had made it this far – faced the Machines and the Mutants – and we had survived. We could go on.

And then the ships appeared in the smoky skies. Ships from a distant galaxy drawn to our world because the technology was that of a high enough intelligence to either make peaceful contact or become a threat to the galaxy.

The Machines did not meet these creatures with open arms. They had struggled to hold this planet for too long. They were not going to lie down.

The War between the Machines and the Conquerors from the stars began.

What do we do now? What can we do? Plan? Hope? Dream?

I write this knowing it may be my final entry. Dr. Fleece has a notion that we have all decided is our only option. Buried under the remains of Geneva is something called a Large Electron–Positron Collider. Fleece believes we can use it to create a wormhole. We can either end this all in a glorious eruption of matter and anti-matter, or open a rift that will allow us to move through time and space. Maybe, maybe we can go back and warn our ancestors. Maybe we can prevent all this from ever unfolding. Or maybe we can find a world where this never occurred.

Maybe.

So many maybes

It is more speculation and blind faith than any of us thought we were capable of having. But when zombies hide in the dark, robots crush us

underfoot like ants, and aliens soar through the skies obliterating anything in their way, what else can we do but hope?

I leave this transmission and recording as a message to the last of you who we leave behind. We converge on Geneva in four months. Many of us won't even make it there, and when we do, we may only cause the final moments of Humanity to be an explosion that splits this planet into pieces.

I leave this record for you who survive, and if none of you survive, whoever may come upon this world next. I leave this as a record of what unfolded and caused our extinction. We were here but only a moment, and we were capable of so much – so much destruction and death, hate and evil. If we win the day, if we succeed and find a way to reach back in time to prevent this, we will be better. We will be good. We will be caring and loving and hopeful. We must be.

We must be.

END TRANSMISSION: 09/28/2247:

## **A Song On the End of the World**

Czeslaw Milosz

(translated by Anthony Milosz)

*On the day the world ends  
A bee circles a clover,  
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.  
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,  
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing  
... And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.*

*On the day the world ends  
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,  
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,  
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street  
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,  
The voice of a violin lasts in the air  
And leads into a starry night.*

*And those who expected lightning and thunder  
Are disappointed.  
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps  
Do not believe it is happening now.  
As long as the sun and the moon are above,  
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,  
As long as rosy infants are born  
No one believes it is happening now.*

*Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet  
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,  
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:  
No other end of the world will there be,  
No other end of the world will there be.*

# **The Sky Is Broken**

By Joseph Compton

It had been a long time since any life could be found in the decayed ruins of a once thriving city that held over 10,000 living souls. The buildings that once rose above the streets now laid warped from years of erosion – from the harsh winds, their insides stripped bare of anything remotely valuable. It no longer looked like a city but a carcass of a giant body that had been picked clean by parasites.

Among the rotting corpses and the hollow rusted remains of vehicles, Ken Boxer hobbled through the long abandoned streets with barely any strength remaining to hold himself up.

From the thick sea of pale gray clouds, a cold wind bellowed through the valley between the old crumbling buildings, cutting through what little raggy pieces of cloth Ken had assembled together as a coat. His joints ached as the chill repeatedly swept over him. The load he carried on his back made all that much heavier by the freezing gust.

The chemical residue from the poison rain that laid upon the pavement stung Ken's calloused feet with what felt like millions of thorns for every step he took. There was a time, long ago, that Ken would buy a new pair of shoes every few months. Now however, Ken could no longer remember when he last owned a pair of shoes, or anything that could cover his bare rough feet. He had stopped wrapping his feet in rags, when he realized the toxin in the ground would soak into the cloth and eat away anything he used within a few days. Though it pained him so, he would not allow himself to stop.

There was no sound that could be heard within the desolate city, save for the howl of the miserable weather, and the clang of the rust coated metallic pipe Ken held onto with both hands to support his weight. An echo emitted through city with each contact of the asphalt to metal, like the slow heartbeat of a life still hanging by a thread.

A long time ago, the eerie silence would frighten Ken to the bone. He would often yell out loud, in the vain hope of someone answering the call. But in time, he soon gave up on the notion of ever finding anyone else alive, the blight that blanketed the world saw to that.

Ken paused for a moment, as he felt his lungs burn, as a painful cough erupted from him. He felt a wad of congealed blood and mucus pass his cracked lips while he fought to suppress the wheezing.

Once he regained his breath, Ken resumed his slow and staggering pace. He knew he did not have much longer on this world, but he could not give up on his destination yet.

He looked up to the gloomy overcast sky that hung above, trying to see if it would rain again soon. He could not spot a black streak in the clouds, so for now, he was still safe.

Out of the corner of Ken's weary eye, he thought he spotted someone, only to realize it was his own reflection off a dusty window. Ken nearly did not recognize himself when he looked at the mirrored image. No longer was he the young handsome man he remembered – back when his only worry in the world was not having the courage to propose to his girlfriend, Angela. Now he was merely a broken wretch of a man, who had seen too many hardships in his life.

How long had it been, he pondered, since the first sign of what the world would come to know as the Blight first appeared.

Ken could vaguely remember the day when news came of sticky black rain that appeared in areas near the Persian Gulf, but as suddenly as it appeared, it vanished within a few hours. Many media outlets reported on the story, and despite how many people covered event, no one was sure what to make of the strange phenomena. Within days of the rain, crops in the region wilted to mush, and both livestock and humans soon became sick.

For days people watched what developed from there, but with no signs of the black rain, it was treated as an isolated incident.

Nearly a month had passed since, and people lost interest in the story, as they often did, and moved on with their lives.

Just when people thought they were safe, the black rain appeared again. This time it found itself in the middle of Europe and parts of Asia. Once again, lives were lost in the millions as people succumbed to the sickness that the rain brought over the land.

Soon after, more sightings of the black rain were reported all over the world. Even parts of the world that rarely received a drop of water found themselves plagued by what was dubbed the Blight.

Ken remembered the conversation he had with Angela as they tried to figure out what they would do when the President declared a State of Emergency.

With much effort, the old man forced himself to stop thinking about the past. He had no time to relive the painful memories that haunted him. He continued his slow agonizing journey, as he made his way further into the graveyard of a city.

Hours had passed when Ken looked to the sky once more. He spotted the build up of the Blight preparing to descend upon the dead land. Ken looked for the nearest place to take cover before rain started. With as much speed as



he could produce in his old weary bones, he sought shelter in an underpass not far from where he stood.

His body quickened as he tried to huddle up against the cold surface, as he listened to the pouring sounds of the liquid death.

Since Ken had no choice but to stay where he sat, he opened up his bag for his supplies. He chewed slowly on the last few bits of dried cockroaches he had left. Ken was disgusted at himself, not because of what he ate, but that not even these lowly creatures said to outlive humanity could survive in this world.

Even though Ken drank that last drop of purified water from his canteen hours ago, it did not stop him from trying to draw one last bead of moisture to his lips. With a heavy and defeated heart, he tossed away the empty tin container letting it bounce into the stream of the black water that pooled at the base of the slope.

Ken found himself thinking back to when he and Angela struggled day by day to live.

Meteorologist warned the public about what they found as their machines told them there would be more storms coming. Originally, the two young lovers had planned to head towards Angela's family in North Colorado, but soon found that was no longer an option, as the Blight struck that area.

Like many panicked people who had no idea where to go, Ken and Angela found themselves in one of the many hastily built Government "Safe Zones". Thousands were crammed into the domed tent city, as they waited to hear more news about the Blight.

At first, they were told they would need to stay for a month, but a month quickly became two months, then three, and before they knew it, ten months had passed.

By that point, nearly all supplies had been depleted, even after they had been rationed down to the bare minimum.

Without clean water, they could not produce more food. They did find that water that held the Blight could be cleaned up and safe to drink again, but the process was long and produced very little in the end. It was ironic how simple water, the source of all life, was now the harbinger of doom.

Tensions were high even before the food ran low; as people were driven to the breaking point of their sanity from being caged in the dome for nearly a year. So, quickly the inhabitants of the safe zone turned on each other, killing one another for what little they owned.

Just as quickly as they were built, the domed ceilings came crashing down when the violence erupted from within.

Ken and Angela held each other close, as they tried to escape from the chaos, only to find themselves, like many others, wandering aimlessly in the dismal world that now lay open to them. For weeks, the two traveled with small pack of people as they searched for a new place to live.

It didn't matter where they went, for every makeshift civilization they found would quickly crumble apart like a sandcastle too close to the beach shore.

Ken reached into his bag and fumbled the capsule that held his last sleeping pill. He tried not to think about the face of the man he had killed to get that bottle as he swallowed the pill with about as much pain as if he had choked down a rock.

He clung to the load he carried as he slowly drifted off to sleep.

For but a brief moment, Ken dreamed about Angela.

Ken could see her sitting under the large tree that sat on a small hill within the campus courtyard. She invited him to sit next to her as they read to each other from poetry books they picked up when they vacationed in France. She laid her head on his shoulder as they basked in the warm sunlight, the sweet scent of her body filling the air. Ken reached into his pocket for the tiny black box, but instead found the cold metallic surface of a gun handle against his hand.

With a gasp, Ken awoke back to the dark, dank world he lived in, his eye burning as tears trailed down his face. Part of him wished he could have died just then, even if it was to be the last moments of his life he would see, it would have been better than carrying on.

The rain outside had stopped pouring, now all that remained was black off on the streets. Ken gathered up his belongings one last time, and continued down the road. The fresh Blight that blanketed the streets burned Ken even more than before, as droplets of blood squeezed from the pores of his feet.

It wasn't long until Ken found what resembled the sign to the University he and Angela had gone to; its paint curled back into flaking crust, and it's metal coated with the brown rust.

Ken's breath quickened, whether from excitement or how close the fingers of death ran down his spine, he could not tell.

Passed the hollow tiled halls of the main entrance, Ken found the old courtyard that laid in the center of the campus. The tree that once sat on the hill no long stood there. Now there was nothing but a weathered and broken stump that looked like an old tombstone.

The mushy ground clawed at the skin of Ken's feet as he made his way to the tree. His lung burned as he coughed up more blood, not allowing himself to stop now that he was so close.

Ken placed his palm on the bark of the tree, which crumbled apart with little effort.

He fell to his knees as he plunged his hands into the soft and deadly earth, shifting the Blight filled mounds of dirt to one side as fast as he could.

Ken did not stop digging as blood dripped from his mouth, or even after he felt his nails peel back and detach themselves from his fingers. Despite all the pain he felt, Ken kept digging until he had a small enough ditch formed.

His legs ached and popped as he stood up. With numbed and dirty fingers, he untied the rope on the large object he had carried for so long, letting it extend to its full length. At the base of the freshly dug hole, Ken laid the sheet covered mass to the ground.

Through the soaked cloth, he could see the skeletal fingers protruding out of the surface, where the tarnished ring he promised he would give her now laid.

Tears streamed down his face, as he wept out loud for the first time in so many years, as his regret of not giving it to her when she lived took hold of him.

Ken fell back as he found he no longer had the strength to stand anymore. With quivering breath, he looked up once more to the broken sky as the cold darkness filled his eyes for the last time.

# **I Imagine Music**

By David V. Cortez

I guess in the end, I always thought it would have been zombies. People can survive zombies. Or like in the movies a rogue asteroid. At least then some would survive in the hills or underground. It started with earthquakes. A few anomalous ones, then they just continued into one long rumble, and then the world knew we had come to our end. The crust beneath our feet shakes, deep shudders of anticipation ripple and lurch, the telltale signs before the world rips free from its moors and the earth erupts quietly in oblivion. I imagine a birthday candle being blown out, then suddenly darkness. Not a soul to see us out. Scientists said something about magma cooling beneath the plates too quickly. Televangelists said it was messages from God, time to repent and all this other crap. I was never a religious man. There were no four horsemen or people disappearing into the sky. The whole idea of some being watching over us, some benevolent creature waging a final war for our souls against the Devil who was angered is hard for me to believe. I'll leave all that to the rest of them. In the end there is only us and our world as it begins to fall apart. There are those who will be smoking their last cigarette, having their last fling, drinking their last beer, or writing their last journal entry. Dear Diary, time's up.

Naomi, the girl I never meant to be with. She looks like that girl from Edward Scissorhands – what was her name, the one with the white dress? I can't remember. I imagine snowflakes. I'm not sure how long we knew that our clock was ticking, the news went off the air and no one heard anything anymore, but that was weeks ago. No plan. I tried to call my wife's work, her cell phone, her mom. Nothing. I tried to find her, ran out of gas, few gas stations had any more gas, but those that did were charging more than a hundred for a gallon. I was trying to negotiate, offer the guy my watch or my wedding ring. It seemed arbitrary, trying to horde money, it's not like anyone would be around after. I was desperate. I begged him for just one gallon, people were crowding the booth. Some were yelling, others were furious, demanding and reasoning with him to be generous; they just wanted to be with their families. I was about leave when I heard a sharp crack, then a few more and the window in front of me and the face of the man exploded. Someone shot him in the face in front of me. No police ever came. The time for laws was over. I pumped my tank full looking over my shoulder the whole time. It was dangerous for the first couple weeks after the televisions and the radios went dark but the first few days were hell on earth. I stayed away from public places after that and looked desperately for Natalie. I found Naomi where my wife should have been. It was about then that I knew I would never see my wife again.

Naomi used to work in an office building, taxes or something. My wife worked on the floor above her but they knew each other. It was good to see a familiar face. Naomi, I swear she looks like what's her name. We slept in her office building for a couple days, the vending machines providing us food and drink. I wanted to wake up and see Natalie, my wife, enter, so happy that she came back here one more time to look for me. So glad that she found me again where I had failed to find her. Yet every morning I woke up and saw only Naomi, covered by a jacket on the floor with her bare feet sticking out next to our growing pile of vending machine snacks that were running out. Soon we'd have to find food.

One morning, I woke up with Naomi sitting upright, looking lost at her toes, her French tip pedicure fading and chipped an old scar on her heel where a pair of pumps had rubbed too deep. That same look on her face, disbelief maybe? She was obviously disturbed, but it's not like I could tell her that everything would be alright. Everything we knew had changed. There was no coming back from this. I had made plans and she had hopes and dreams yet realized, and all that planning for the future was gone. It didn't matter anymore. So what could I say?

"Hey. What's wrong?" I urged her.

She responded without moving or changing her expression, "I was afraid."

"What are you talking about?" I stood from my spot on the ground, my pants and shirt wrinkled and my hair mussed. How Naomi managed to remain looking put together, I have no idea.

"I was afraid."

I saw the lines of worry that began to form on her face; what she had been through I couldn't know. I only hoped that like Naomi, my wife had made it to safety. "It's ok." I managed, "There's nothing wrong with that."

She looked up from her trance at me, her blue eyes, more alive than any colors I could remember before. "There was a woman in the streets," she paused as if remembering the woman in detail, not wanting to speak of her unless her memory was exact, "she was being raped and she was calling for help. No one did. People were running and stealing things and hurting each other and I wanted to help her but I was afraid. I took off my shoes and just ran until I got back here. I didn't look back."

I thought of everything I had seen when things began to crumble. The gas station wouldn't leave my mind. "Naomi, you can't blame yourself. If you had tried to do something for that girl, you probably wouldn't be here now."

"I've been telling myself that."

“You did the right thing. We all want to be the hero, but sometimes the best thing we can do is to survive. I’m glad that you ran. If you didn’t, I would be alone right now or worse.” I sat down next to her, the toe of my shoe torn, slightly ragged, I wiggled my feet beneath and saw my sock moving through the hole. I began to tell her the truth, the truth that I had been trying to ignore. “I ran too. I saw a man get shot right in front of me. He became greedy and someone killed him right in front of me. I thought the government or the police would still be trying to keep things in order but everything was just abandoned. I was afraid and didn’t go to look for my wife until after a couple days had passed. I thought it would be safer that way. I panicked and didn’t know what to do, so I stayed at the library over night with the doors locked and the lights off and just pretended there was no one inside. I’d be dead if I had done anything differently. I know that now.” I nudged her foot with mine. “You’re not the only one who was afraid.”

She nudged back. For minutes we said nothing. We just sat there, in our own personal guilt, thinking of what we could have done differently but always arriving back at the same conclusion: we wanted to live a little longer. There was nothing to say. We knew what was on our minds, what fear lay in our hearts and how alone we all were. Something inside me changed then. Some hidden emotion or feeling began to creep into my thoughts as I sat there. I couldn’t figure out what it was, but somewhere I began to feel relief. I reached down and wiped a fleck of something off her toenail.

“There. Good as new.” I smiled at her. I traced the smile that grew from her lips as it spread to her eyes and I saw myself mirrored in them. I wanted so badly for them to be Natalie’s eyes I was looking into, yet while sitting there in silence, ceaselessly trying to find a way out of all this, I realized what it was I was feeling. Comfort. Of all things to feel when the shit hit the fan, I was feeling comforted being there with Naomi. I was so certain that we would go alone, but now, as I watched her wiggle her toes and felt the warmth radiating off her skin, I knew we wouldn’t be.

I watched a tear fall from her cheek and held her hand firmly. I felt anchored then, held in place for a moment. The world may shake itself apart, but no matter how bad it would get, I was connected.

She spoke, “There’s so much I wanted to do.”

“Me too.”

She smelled of light sweat, but there was a remnant of perfume. We sat there, her hand in mine, her scent entering my nostrils. Her fear and mine made us vulnerable, real and human as a child. Naomi, what was her last

name? It doesn't matter. I just want to know. Who is she? Would we have been close? Natalie I'm sorry.

I kissed her. I didn't think about it. I just kissed her. I wanted all of her, I wanted to tear her clothing off and see everything about her. I wanted to touch and feel her, this life, so fragile and short, I wanted to live inside of it for as long as possible. I wanted to feel life beneath me and to feel alive. I needed to replace all my fear and doubt with certainty and resolve. It was no different for her. The earth would consume us all, but not before Naomi and I, for one time, would consume each other. It would have been spectacular. Her clothes would have come off easily, as if her body hungered for the passionate touch of human yearning. Her legs would wrap around me tightly, savoring my firmness and refusing to let go of something so human and carnal. In this little office in this crumbling city, life would exist as it did before, and two people would laugh in the face of doom and not just survive, but we would live for as long as we had left, free of fear and of our clothes. It would have been spectacular; instead however, I pulled back from her lips and smiled. I imagined music.

She stood up from next to me, my hand still in hers. She beckoned me to follow. I did.

\* \* \*

We run through empty library halls laughing loudly, screaming, throwing books and pages like paper planes. No one stops us. My keys to the building don't matter, everything is unlocked. I grab a book, *April* by John Clare. I always wanted to read this. Maybe I'll check it out. I pretend to scan it while she watches on.

"I don't want to get late fees."

She grabs another book from the floor. "I want this one."

"This book is in Spanish. You read Spanish?"

"No but I like the cover."

A man holding a woman closely, his chest hair comes out of a silk shirt. "I think this is a romance novel. Are you into that kind of thing?"

Playfully she grabs the book and dashes away from the checkout, where silent phones and sleeping computers dispassionately wait for interaction. "I guess I'll find out." She hollers at me as the slap of her naked feet on the tile marks her exit.

We run outside, smoke billows towards heaven inland. I imagine bonfires. Somewhere out there, in the deep blue, the crust has opened to welcome fiercely the water; the emulsion blows steam as tall as clouds out



past the horizon. We run across the sands of receding beaches, sunken treasures and crustaceans revealed, two crabs huddle closely. I wonder if they know. Through the maze of empty metal husks cuddled close together on the roadways, we walk on skeletons of cars. Glad I left mine at the office building. Our feet echo in a grocery store, the shelves are mostly barren. Someone stockpiled it all. Stupid. I kick a coke can as hard as I can, making the freezer section into field goals. I can hear Naomi, hiding from me while she giggles, tossing marshmallows over the aisle, still sweet.

"Have any chocolate with that?" I yell. The mallow pushed to the side of my mouth.

No answer, instead a shower of semi-sweet chocolate kisses. She laughs. I eat a few.

"What now?" I ask her through the aisle.

"I suppose I should go into work and tell them I won't be in tomorrow."

"Taking a personal day?"

What a smile. "I'm going on vacation. I'm thinking Italy, India and maybe I'll take a cruise down to Mexico, I hear they have really good tacos."

"That sounds like a good one. I've got two tickets next month to Germany. I don't think I'll have to wait on stand-by." I would've hated the long flight anyways.

She comes around into my aisle; her bare feet mash the loose marshmallows on the floor. She doesn't care, very pretty, another life maybe. This one was already taken. And there it is again. Guilt. I should be with my wife. What if I had passed her? Maybe she was on the street calling to me while I drove on the sidewalk. Maybe she was hiding in the closet waiting for me. Maybe she was scared, alone somewhere. I wish I were there to hold her, but I looked for her and found nothing. I pray she is safe with someone, doing exactly what I am, where I could not be, holding hands or running through empty streets or with her mom or brother or a friend, just someone, so as not to be alone.

"We should go." She bites into a cupcake then tosses me the rest.

As she walks out in front of me, I toss the cupcake at her butt. She laughs.

"Now I'll have to get that dry cleaned before our trip."

The city is near empty. We come to find an elderly couple near an underpass; the husband has killed his wife. His eyes are sullen and scared. Naomi walks close to my side, worry on her face. Somewhere deep in me I was afraid, maybe not of the end, but the pain, always afraid of the pain of

dying. Maybe it was better this way. He didn't want her to suffer, and so he lay onto her a bed of concrete to protect her body from fires to come. Was it love? Was he going to take his own life next? I don't know. I don't want to stick around, so I just watch him as we pass. He doesn't even register us at all. Just covers the old woman gently with fresh concrete, his hands smoothing over the wet blanket. Maybe he was an artist. Maybe she was a painter. I leave him behind under that quiet overpass, expecting to hear a gunshot or some sound that he left with her, but as we moved on I heard only the sounds of distant alarms and the low rumble of the crust beneath us. What would Natalie and I have done? I'm scared to think about the answer.

We run through hallways of buildings, emptied and looted, smiling and laughing an almost drunken fashion. Her smile is so big, and her laugh so bright, it seemed almost futile, but in its addictive way I wanted to be with her until her last laugh. Our footsteps and voices echo.

"HELLO!" The echo replies. "FUCK!" I hear myself again.  
"VAGINA!"

She laughs hysterically while we run and scream and yell at our own echoes.

"ASS! ASS! FUCK YOU! I QUIT!" She squeals.

I can't help myself. Suddenly I'm five again, cussing out anatomy and curse words like my parents are away at work again while I shout out my window at pedestrians below. "TITS!"

She turns to me, that goddess in physique, that vibrant soul of energy, and she lifts her shirt and flashes her breasts at me and to the ghosts in the halls. My God they're beautiful. On she runs with me in chase, building to building, all the way laughing and throwing what small objects we can at vacant windows.

We crash our way through an ice rink, slipping and getting soaked in the melted ice, puddles of water at our feet inches thick, the lonesome Zamboni our only audience.

"Ouch, fuck that hurt." I help her up only to fall again.

"It's so cold my nipples are showing." They force the wet fabric away from her chest. Jesus it must be cold. I feel my own.

"Yea it's cold all right; I think I may come down with pneumonia."

She reaches to feel my forehead, "Yea you're definitely coming down with something. Better get some rest before the cruise."

"I think you're right, I don't feel like drinking margaritas with a sore throat."

Naomi pokes the tip of my nose with her forefinger. "Boop."

"What was that?" I laugh as we move towards the exit, she shivers.

“Nothing I just always wanted to do that to someone.”

I grab her by the hand and run outside to the still warm air and the sun’s rays bathing us in perhaps the most beautiful sunlight I have ever seen. The floor trembles angrily beneath us. Time is running out.

She turns to me, her breathing heightened, perspiration dotting her forehead, she feels the shaking too. “We should get going, we’re not far now.”

“Yea, you’re right.”

We wind our way through debris of the city, she and I and the memories of these streets. Once I ate a hotdog there. Could have used some sauerkraut, but for two bucks, it was a quick lunch and on to the movies with Natalie. We cross a street where a mob had passed, graffiti on the walls, every window pane broken, the buildings loom over us, dark, threatening, but lifeless. I wonder if they’ll be around when all this is over. I wonder if once our radio signals cease, if some life form who listened in on us with earnest from some far corner of the universe might come to see what has become of our noisy planet. I wonder if they’ll find these buildings and our deserted streets, or like everything, eventually we’ll just disappear forever. I hope something lasts, something beautiful, not these carcasses of buildings or the pollution in the sky. Maybe we’ll be missed. I hope so.

We round the last building, slowing only to cross a small pond as we enter the park, our park, empty but for trees and the silhouette of an abandoned jungle gym. I grab her hand, it’s shaking. We choose a spot to sit, the spot that overlooks the pond, the trees and the carpet of grass that tickles her feet. Here we fall, feeling the deep growling of the crust become a loud murmur and the pond sparkles with the ripples of vibrating water, and it’s mesmerizing. I imagine the twinkle of stars. We lay next to each other looking out upon the water and gaze at the scenery around us and the smoke in the distance of fallen structures. Everything is quiet. No more alarms. No screaming, or laughing or birds chirping in the trees. It’s as if everything, even the shells of cars, the crustaceans, the books in our hands, and the riots of people all know this is it. So quiet. I wonder if this is what it’s like in cement. If I close my eyes, I can hear my breathing, her breathing and nothing else but the growing growl beneath our bodies. In some way, this was peaceful. I wasn’t afraid anymore. Maybe this is the gift that old man gave his wife, to be free of fear.

All the goals I had strived for and the ambitions I had seemed petty now, all events in my life I regretted and the choices I wish I changed were lost. The only thing that really matters, the one truth that I now know so fundamentally, is in life, we need to find someone. To comfort one another

and seek happiness in our present as well as our future is what this was all about. It's strange to realize that only at the end. I was lucky that I had. My Natalie in life and now Naomi in death, I am glad not to be alone. My friend beside me leans over and gently bites my bearded cheek.

I look to her and she is smiling, even while her eyes are filled with tears she still is so beautiful. She scoots closer to my side and I wrap my arm around her waist. We laughed through hallways; I sang aloud in empty streets and danced through fire and smoke all together with the woman who I was holding now in the recesses of a desolate park amidst the eves of a hanging oak tree. Whatever I was before, today, I lived.

The shudder of the Earth becomes a violent shake and the chaos of a dying city around us begins to grow louder. Far away something heavy buckles and crashes to the ground. I run my hand down her body in exploration and as a gesture that she isn't alone.

"David"

"Yea?" I answer back.

"Do you think that somewhere right now there's music playing?"

I pause. "Somewhere yea. There are others out there doing what we are doing, listening to their last song and smoking their last cigarette."

She looks out at something beyond the world itself. I have her body with me but her mind wanders rapidly. "I wish we had some music right now. That's one thing I will desperately miss."

I tuck her head beneath my chin as I squeeze her, hoping that I didn't lie, that somewhere on this fractured earth someone was playing the greats, but if it was just my imagination and there was no music playing, then I would be the last one on this earth to sing, and she beside me would be the last one to hear it. So I began to sing, one of my favorites, all the while thinking how much I wish we had more time, because of all things to ask and do at the end of the world, this girl asks if there will still be music.

Perfect.

**Goodnight To Man**  
By David V. Cortez

And old the dust of fallen stars,  
as looked upon by brother Mars,  
... with whitened fleck as snow on hair,  
to bleak horizons new we stare.

No sovereign nation, lord or king,  
has lived beyond such reckoning,  
nor peopled fog remain in this,  
as lain to rest in ardent bliss.

Thus spiraled arm hath flung its birth,  
we young-ling offspring ignoble earth,  
as oft as bird relinquish babe,  
Our sun has set and warmth escape.

**Take Me Somewhere Nice**  
By Alexander Hoggard

If the skies had the summer,  
And the summers had the rain,  
All existence would lay still,  
For only a single moment.  
Just as the shooting stars lay across the awakening sky,  
The painted picture of I forever entranced and floating within the seas and  
showers of your emotion. Sifting back and forth with every tear screaming to  
the peaks of pitches and only at all ever asking for just one thing from you.  
But sinking and suffocating down to the depths of my own emotion,  
entangled in your thoughts as you to mine, which the only cure existing lays  
with the end of everything as we both know it.  
To the softest touch of our closest sensation, firing in succinct, motion with  
one another.  
Similar to the wheels and coasters we both knew so well as children,  
ingrained and stuck in our artistic sketch of what we know to believe.  
I love you and with that action comes the final resting moment that we'll  
always ever share.  
One but everlasting embrace,  
Boiling all the blood and existence as skies fall forever around us,  
And creating the big bang as we know it within our souls touch, but I don't  
survive this disaster, you do. The end nears and my lips will always stay  
with yours.  
Pressed on as my body slowly turns ash and my soul escapes.  
Just as a beautiful painting remembered with me throughout years, our  
embrace was for only a moment but the sketch stays still, burned in my soul  
for forevers time...

# **End of the World**

By Fionnegan Murphy

“If you kill him you get to go home. All of this will be finished.”

The weight of the stone in the soldier’s hand seemed like a ton. His brother-in-arms, hands tied, on his knees in front of him, looked up and closed his swollen eyes. Both of them were tired, hurting, and looking for any way to get out of this hell hole.

“Do it now, or you’ll never get out of here,” said the man behind him with the gun.

This was the first time they had been outside in weeks. Images of his freedom flashed through his mind, memories of his wife at home, his friends playing pool in their favorite hole-in-the-wall bar down the street from the office.

Then he saw the price of such freedom. He saw himself crush the skull of this boy in front of him. Both of them wanted the same thing. They just needed to get out, and neither one would hold a grudge against the other for ending it all. He imagined the rock, the sound, his friend’s shaking body on the ground, and the subsequent blows it would take to finish the job.

Reality fought its way back to him, aided by the sound of his own enraged scream. Every fatigued muscle he could imagine was tense and shaking, and he threw the stone off into the brush.

That is how the world ends. Not with an act, but with a thought. And the one that rises from it is one of misery and a death of the trivial stuff.

His army would rescue him and his friend, and both of them would get to return home, but nothing would be the same. He would get a bronze star for his bravery, and people would call him a hero. But they wouldn’t know what he almost did to get out of there. He would dream about that sound and the subsequent hits and the one ton stone. He would not be able to forgive himself for that thought, and he would never take another moment for granted. Every friend near him would know how important they are to him, and how he would never let anything hurt them.

She curls her fingernails along his arm subconsciously as she laughs at some joke someone else made. The drink, vodka and cranberry juice, is sweating through the glass in her other hand. His arm is around her waist and rests comfortably on her thigh. Music fills in the blank spaces in the background and helps everyone focus on their conversation instead of being distracted by key phrases in the ones around them. And there he sits, unnoticed in the corner.



People try talking to him, but soon realize he is simply miserable and leave him to drink in solitude. That used to be his hand on her thigh, and his arm gently scratched by her distracted fingers.

This new man squeezes her thigh and kisses her neck before whispering something in her ear. They both get up, and while she's putting on her jacket, still smiling, she catches his eye from across the room. She smiles at him, indicating that she's over him, but still interested in him, but only as a friend.

A friend.

Then the new guy takes her by the hips and escorts her away. He can hear her laugh from the other side of the door. This is how the world ends. Repeatedly, like torture. Hoping, but without action.

Every few weeks another party. Every few weeks another world built and destroyed. And the one that rises from it is one step closer to closure, acceptance, and progress; to discovering self worth.

“You haven't treated me right for years now. You've taken advantage of me, worked me to exhaustion, and ridiculed me in front of clients for your mistakes. You had your chance to fix it, but now I'm done. I'm out. Good luck finding another sucker to replace me.”

She starts a new business with her friend, just as smart as she is and equally as capable. They call in a few favors and sign some documents. Word gets out, and things take off, but that knot in the pit of her stomach never really goes away. Stress piles up, but she never forgets her old boss. The things she learned from him. How not to treat her employees, how not to treat their clients, what kind of decisions end up wasting money. Her company grows, as does her reputation, and she tries to keep her ego in line. She hires more employees, and eventually, with that same knot in her stomach, she buys a house. This is how the world ends. Changes and hard work. Old worlds are brought down and new ones erected through risk and dedication to ideals.

And the one that rises from the destruction is better than the one before because of that same dedication that pulled down the other. It is full of idealism, but also a knot in the stomach that is the fear of failure.

He takes a knee and opens the box. “Will you marry me?” He tries to catch his breath. They'd been in love for so long, but he never thought he'd see him take a knee and pop the question. He never thought they'd actually be

allowed to. But this morning the law was signed, and everything was changing. They weren't separated any more. They were a part of the culture in a way he'd always hoped. He was the closest to normal he had ever felt since they met, since they moved in together, since they moved to a more open-minded community, since they moved back to stick it to all the bigots in their old town, since they marched and protested and cried and yelled that they were people too, and deserved the same chances as everyone else.

He saw everything leading to this moment so clearly now, but it was still a shock. Tears filled his eyes and he took the gold band out of the box and said yes.

All of their friends erupted in cheers, hugs, and excitement.

That is the way the world ends, with friends, cheer, and love flowing freely from person to person, with music playing long into the night, and stories being shared. And the one that rises from the destruction is one of washing dishes, and gentle surprise hugs from behind, and sun coming through the partially opened blinds.

The world ends with a car crash. It ends with a record deal. The world comes crashing down with a return home early from work, or a series of texts found on a cell phone to "someone else".

The world ends because of money, and stress, and love. It ends with guerilla fighters swarming a village and taking children with force. It ends with disasters and with naivety, and it's never reborn the same way. It ends with a joke, and a new one hatches from wheezing, tear-filled laughter.

It ends with an election, an insane gunman, and an encroaching holiday, new year, birthday, vacation, a wedding, a newborn.

## **The Final Haiku**

-Kat Olvey

A special time just  
For taking absurd exams  
I hate finals week

**Lemon Grass**  
(A Screenplay)  
By Alexander Sann Nishino

There resided an old mahogany tree outside our home. It reminded me of my late father, but he's gone now so it doesn't matter. Before I could speak, I would ask my mother why the leaves would change colors and wilt--why they would fall even though the stems seemed so much a part of the tree as the roots were to the ground. "Do you know why leaves fall from trees even though they seem so much a part of the tree as the roots are to the ground?"

I

No, you who gave me breath.

I show her sound. My first giggle. She says, "Your guess is as good as mine."

I

I guess it's because leaves have to change colors  
and wilt. And because roots have to grow into the  
ground.

The book closes as I sit beside my love. Soft lips that remind me of my own, yet more my home than my own. Bright eyes that struck me as bashful with the slightest hint of lemon when I met her. And now we sit under an old mahogany not outside my home, but quite a distance in the opposite direction. There is much water between then and now...it is not the same tree and we are not as we were before, either. The roots are comfortable. They really aren't, but my right hand cupped around second base alleviates the matter.

MY ME

You're warm.

I

So are you. Buildings fall. People scream. Another  
end to end all ends. But it's always loose. The  
spool of thread really doesn't stop, does it?

MY ME

No, it doesn't.

I

It's cold.

MY ME

That's your mind...it's playing magic tricks...  
When will they learn? Why do they hurt each  
other?

MY ME

You told me you haven't asked a single question  
since you were born.

I

I never had to...but now the world is burning and  
there's nothing we can do.

MY ME

I love you.

I

Why?

MY ME

You always confuse something for nothing.

Before I could speak, I would ask my mother why...the leaves  
would...change colors...and...wilt.....

## **The Saddest Sky In The World**

By Brittany Sherman

The saddest sky in the world looks down  
upon damaged goods and damaged souls.  
Even the clowns are frowning.  
Heaven and hell become intertwined as the supposed last days unfold for the  
young and the old.  
There are too many cries in the night, and the thunder clouds roll in to drown  
out their tears.  
There are too many dying with fear in their eyes, and so the rain begins to  
fall.  
Like little wind-up toys they run and pout, as they shout at the sky asking for  
God to come save them.  
Wind them up and watch them burn the whole world to the ground.  
Don't they know the sky hears them?  
Don't they know how it cries.  
To tear out its eyes, it would, if it would stop them from killing themselves.  
And so the rain does not stop. How can it at a time like this?  
A symphony of tears crying in the night could not stop the rain now.  
Do they fear dying?  
Is that why they are crying?  
The poor sky can't escape the madness and the sadness it hovers above.  
And so, the world drowns in its own tears as the sky wishes to wipe away all  
of their fears.  
Though the moments are fleeting, some of these poor souls pause to feel the  
rain as it slides down their skin.  
A soft melody begins...

**The New Adventures of  
Mr. Pestilence  
in the World Without End**  
By Matty Hervey



# THE NEW ADVENTURES OF MR. PESTILENCE IN THE WORLD WITHOUT END

## Episode 1: The Pilot

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17th 2012 3:00 AM

“Spinning Top” was closed for the night. The night manager had locked the place up for the night an hour after the last customers went home. But if people had been around, they wouldn’t have been able to see the bizarre, dark figure that moved through the tiny kitchen.

Pestilence was quite jittery with excitement tonight. His big promotion, promised to him centuries ago, was less than a week away. The Apocalypse was approaching, and he was going to be one of The Horsemen to usher it in, The First Horseman no less, but until then, he still had his mundane job to do, seeing that organic matter break down to its components so The Big Guy could make it back into something else, that and making people sick, which was what he was working on just now.

He didn’t like that even in the developed world he had to deliver harsh judgments, but people insisted on bringing it down on themselves. The complete absence of nutrition in the fast food “Spinning Top” slung was one thing, the utter disregard for food safety was another.

The staffs of the individual restaurants in the chain seemed to share the lack of regard for cleanliness while the owners and managers who knew better remained apathetic. Even numerous citations from The Board of Health didn’t change their attitudes. It didn’t lead to The Board shutting any restaurants down either, and even when these incidents were exposed on television by investigative reporters, it didn’t stop customers from coming. So the people failed to police themselves, and Pestilence had to come in and intervened.

He stepped over a rat as it relieved itself on the kitchen floor and approached a stack of raw meat patties sitting on a counter. He shook his head, knowing that these would be served tomorrow after sitting at room temperature all night. He reached into his quiver and selected the correct arrow, which he tapped against the slowly thawing burgers.

“Oooh!” came a sarcastic voice from behind. “Popeye Spoils after a perpetrator. Did someone break the three second rule?”

He turned around to see the Grim Reaper. Pestilence noticed something pink showing from beneath the collar of Death's robes. It wasn't the first time he noticed this, but as always, he chose not to mention it. "Hardly, this place is a cesspit. Cross contamination, food left in danger zone temps..."

"Restrooms with no 'Employees must wash hands signs.'" He did finger quotes as he said it.

"Actually, the signs are there, but it seems the staff don't like to read."

"Do you really have to be such a stick? You know who has to harvest the people that are going to get infected. What is that?"

"E coli."

"Oh that's great. The big day is a week away, and you're causing an E. coli breakout. Everybody's going to die anyway, why are you making more work for me?"

"I'm doing my job. Remember, Death, you're to be The Fourth Horsemen. War, Famine and I are going to outrank you, and I hope you're not planning on sassing me when I'm in charge, because that's not going to fly with me."

"Yes sir captain sir." The Reaper mockingly did an exaggerated military salute. "Until then, you rack 'em up. I'll knock 'em down!"

\*\*\*\*\*

9:00 AM

Death, Pestilence, War, and Famine were gathered outside the office of The Man in Charge. He had called them here to go over the Game Plan for the end of the world, or maybe just a pep talk. He always managed to be extremely vague with all of his memo's, a practice he referred to as "working in mysterious ways" whatever that meant.

War grinned manically. "When he starts going over the plan I'm going to have some suggestions. I just know he's going to love it."

"I can't wait to hear this." Death couldn't resist prodding him. "Oh yeah Thomas Eddi-gun. What's your brilliant plan?"

Well, you know how humans are always saying 'It's not the end of the world?' All we've got to do is reverse everything they say that about."

"Such as?"

"You know, things like getting broken up couples back together, making children's toys unbreakable. Things like that."

Pestilence's mouth dropped open. "Is that easier than what we have to do anyway?"

"Oh, I didn't think about that. Well, isn't there something about a fat lady singing?"

Pestilence placed his hand on War's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "Remember your plan about how all the computers were supposed to go nuts because they thought it was the year 'zero'? That caused us to have to delay this thing another twelve years. Do you know why we had to delay the end of the world for twelve years? Because your plan didn't work. None of your plans ever work. As The First Horseman, I'm giving you an order to get the world's nations to nuke each other. That's the plan. Stick to it."

War hung his head and Death tried to hide his smile, although having no flesh on his bones, he was always smiling anyway.

"Can you all keep it down please?" interrupted Famine. "I simply must determine a day's wages. An average worker's daily wage differs drastically in different parts of the world, and that's not taking exchange rates into account."

"So that's what you think about while you're never getting laid for all eternity," remarked Death.

"This is important for determining the value of a quart of wheat!"

"Oh I get it, so when everyone's starving, wheat will bring in the chicks. Let me know how that works out for you, Don Jaunorexia."

A buzzer rang on the desk of Ms. Lamb, the receptionist, and she picked up the receiver on her phone. "Yes My Lord, right away My Lord." She said, and turned and looked at Pestilence. "Our Father who art in Heaven will see you now."

The Four Horsemen stood up. "Just you," she said. War, Famine, and Death sat down bewildered.

Pestilence walked through the pearly door of God's office. "Have a seat," said God from over his desk. It was a big desk. In fact, God had made sure he had the biggest desk in all the cosmos, and that's something since some planets have giants living on them. It's a little known fact that giants are dedicated businessmen. As a symbol of his status as boss in charge of everyone and everything, he ensured that no one had a bigger desk than his. It was intimidating, as it was meant to be and just in case you didn't get the point, a metal paperweight with the words "I'm the boss!" engraved on it sat at the front of the desktop. Pestilence sat down on the small and uncomfortable wooden chair in front of it.

“Look, Pesty Baby, you’re my favorite, I hope you know that, that’s why I wanted to talk to you first. I’m going to be blunt. I’m calling it off, the big day’s off.”

“But, My Lord, I just can’t go back to spreading AIDS and cancer and causing rot and decay. It’s driving me nuts.”

“Yeah, about that. I’m actually going to be getting out of that business. I’m afraid I’m going to be letting you and the others go. You know, famine and war, death and disease, it all seems so nasty. I mean no one likes those things, and are they really necessary?”

“Uh, My Lord, I hate to be the one to defend the jerk, but I think you’ll find Death IS necessary.”

“Nothing is necessary. I created the Universe to entertain myself. The void,” he shuddered, “you will never be able to understand how unbelievably boring it was. So I made up the laws of nature, you know, to kill some time. When I got tired of that, I created life and people and when that got dull, I started to think of ways to make them suffer. That’s where you and the other three come in. Of course that’s not all. The whole faith thing, demanding they believe in me while withholding proof, just to test their faith. It was just a way to mess with people’s heads, because when you’ve got all the cheat codes, the game’s no fun. Anyway, I’ve matured somewhat since then, and I kind of feel bad about all that, so to make it up to them, I’m NOT going to kill everyone. In fact I’m going to stop killing ANYone.”

“But, My Lord, what am I supposed to do now?”

“Let’s have a look at your resume shall we.” God pulled an ancient parchment out of a file drawer. “Let’s see, this is the resume you submitted to me when you applied for this position. Oh, I see you have a teaching degree. You can fall back on that. They’re certainly going to need a lot of teachers down there, now that the population will be rising. Good luck to you.” He walked around the desk to shake Pestilence’s hand. “Please send War in on your way out.”

He stepped out into the waiting room. Eyeing Pestilence suspiciously, Ms. Lamb removed a sealed book from her desktop and locked it in a drawer. Death remarked, “Well, what happened in there? You look about as pale as my horse!”

“War, he wants to see you next.” he barely managed to get out.

“Did you tell him about my unbreakable toys idea?” War asked excitedly.

“Be quiet please!” said Famine, “I had almost determined the value of three quarts of barley. You’ve made me lose count!”

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11:00 PM

In a bar on Earth, in a suburban town outside of Atlanta Georgia, Famine, War, and Death had been drinking for hours when Pestilence arrived.

“So, can you tell me,” Famine asked the bartender, “Exactly how much barley is in this beer?”

“I think, maybe you had enough barley, pal.”

“Hey give him a break,” said Pestilence as he approached the bar. “We all got laid off today.”

Another patron asked the bartender for a shot of rye. “Rye.” said Famine emotionless. “I never thought of rye.”

Pestilence ordered a drink and said. “You’re so good at counting things, maybe you could be an accountant.”

“Where you been, Infector Clouseau?”

“I was looking for work, like you should be.”

“Any leads?”

“Well, I applied with the board of education for a teaching position, and they are setting me up with an interview with a school principal on Wednesday, right in this neighborhood in fact. It seems they are having trouble keeping the position filled.”

“Look at you!” said Death, “Welcome back Rotter! HAHAAHAHA!” The Sound of his boney hand slapping his boney knee was like two wood blocks knocking together.

“Death,” said Pestilence, “I do believe your undergarments are showing. Are you wearing something pink under there?”

Death suddenly went silent and quickly rushed into the men’s comfort room. It couldn’t be possible, but Pestilence could have sworn he saw him blush.

The bartender was pouring a glass of wine for a patron. Famine became nervous and implored. “Ooooh, be careful with that please!”

“What are your plans?” Pestilence asked War.

“I’m not going to need a job. I have so many great ideas, I’ll be an entrepreneur.”

“Wait till, you hear this.” said Death, “Tell him what you told me.”

“Well, since the population will be rising, people are going to be looking for ways to save space, so here’s my idea; upright beds!” as he said it, he pantomimed a picture frame with his hands.

The bartender looked at Famine and said. "It's the weirdest thing, but all night, whenever I'm over here, I notice how hungry I am. Ahh, but here comes dinner." A waitress arriving to begin her shift came through the door with two paper bags from "Spinning Top."

"Here's your burgers, Jack."

"Thanks, Hon." He pulled a hamburger out of the bag and began to unwrap it.

"Oh." said Pestilence, "You probably shouldn't eat that."

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WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 19th 10:00 AM

The Principal of Shady Lane Elementary was a consternated, middle-aged Druid, with thick brown eyebrows. Pestilence, wasn't able to determine the color of his hair, because he wore a brown hooded robe with the hood up. The thought made him wonder if Death had hair, but he pushed the notion away to concentrate on the interview.

"I am Dr. DeSpondant, principal of this school. This is my companion Obert." He gestured towards a bowling pin that stood on his desk, with a grinning face painted on its head.

"Pestilence is my name. Pleased to meet you." He extended his hand to shake, but DeSpondant snubbed him.

"Mr. Pestilence," Said DeSpondant. "Do you have any experience with children?"

"Well, I'm responsible for a great deal of the work that goes on in children's hospitals."

"I see. Well, we're having trouble keeping this position filled. Our third grade 'B' class are a difficult bunch. Are you up for a challenge?"

"I believe I can handle them."

"Yes, well that's what they all say, isn't it, Obert? Can you start tomorrow? We're running out of substitutes that are willing to come in here."

"That will be perfect. I thank you for the opportunity." He futilely attempted to shake the Druid's hand once more, before leaving the office.

"Do you think, he'll work out?" Dr. DeSpondant asked Obert.

"Yeatch!" he exclaimed, discovering that the apple on his desk has somehow decomposed into a pile of moldy mash. He walked to the door and called out, "Allen, can you come in here and clean a mess please?"

Allen Tosis, the school janitor had transferred from Three Mile Island Elementary. He had a deformed face that sported two noses, and a third arm that made him particularly efficient at cleaning up messes.

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THURSDAY DECEMBER 20th 9:00 AM

Like the other students, Ridgey was aware that a new “permanent” teacher was starting today. Would it be one of the hard-asses that thought he could come in with a no-nonsense façade, a softy that just wanted to coddle, or one of those “buddy” types who thought he understood kids and was on the same level? Ridgey and his pals, Edvard and Warren, had seen them all come and go.

In the corner, Edvard was holding Eugene, the class nerd’s, arms while Warren gave him a wedgie. Ridgey was watching out the window for a first glimpse at the new teacher, or as Ridgey would call him, “the next victim.”

To Ridgey’s surprise, the new teach didn’t drive up in a car, but rather rode in on a horse. “Whoa, Conquest!” he commanded the white horse, before tethering it in the designated parking space for the third grade “B” teacher.

“I see him!” called out Ridgey, “He’s an old fashioned type, and he has a face like a piece of rotten fruit!”

Edvard and Warren ran over to get a look. “He sure is ugly!” agreed Edvard.

When the hideous man entered the classroom, he walked to the blackboard and wrote his name. “Good morning class. I am Mr. Pestilence” he said as he wrote it. Turning around he caught a spitball between the eyes.

“Alright,” he said, remaining calm. “Who threw that?”

“Maybe it was your mom, Holmes.” said Ridgey.

“You, young man.” said Mr. Pestilence. “Step forward please. What is your name?”

“My name’s Ben, Holmes. Ben Dover.” The class began laughing, and it was the start of a dreadful day for Mr. Pestilence.

The children remained disrespectful and disruptive. Three times he had to intervene when Ridgey and his friends physically assaulted poor little Eugene as soon as his back was turned, and at one point someone even put a tack on his chair!

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9:00 PM

At the local bar, Mr. Pestilence was sharing his woes with his former coworkers. "I just don't know what I can do to control the situation. These kids have no desire to learn, and they are flippant to my authority. I tried to put one of them in detention and he just laughed in my face."

"Well," said Death, "remember how you were going to be my boss, I was going to do the same thing."

"If you're going to win them over, you'll have to think on the level of a third grader." said War, "If we cut your legs off at the knee, you'll be about as tall as one of them."

Famine suddenly lit up! "that's right!"

"You're agreeing with him?" said Mr. Pestilence, concerned.

"Well only partly, to win them over, you've got to think like a third grader. What's popular with the kids these days?"

"I don't know, I'm a personification of disease for the Big Boss's sake, I've been out of the loop for millennia."

"Let's look on the internet." said Famine who took out his iPhone. "What's trending on my Twitter? Let's see. 'Walking Dead,' 'Resident Evil' Oh, here's something on my Facebook feed. 'Look at the first five people on your friends list and they are your team in the zombie apocalypse.' Oh look, War, you're 'the one that loses it!'"

"So," said Mr. Pestilence, "Kids today are into zombies. That gives me an idea."

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FRIDAY DECEMBER 21st 7:00 AM

God looked down over his massive desk at Mr. Pestilence. He felt very small, but managed to pipe up. "I suppose you're wondering what I'm here for."

"You can't have your old job back. Good day."

"Actually, I was hoping for just a teensy favor getting started with my new career."

"Go ahead."

"Well, I'm having trouble getting through to my students, whom I understand might be interested in zombies. I was wondering if your grace



could see fit to temporarily animate a few corpses, just long enough to help me win the kids over.”

“Zombies, eh?” said God, “Bringing the dead back to life. You know, there is a lot of sadness over lost loved ones, and that’s kind of my fault. Yes, that’s it. I’ll raise the dead. What a great way to make up for the suffering I’ve caused. Glad I thought of it.” His eyes fell on Mr. Pestilence. “Are you still here? I thought I told you you’re not getting your job back, and no amount of ass kissing is going to change that. Good day!”

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9:00 AM

As Mr. Pestilence entered his classroom, a bucket rigged above the door spilled confetti and glitter onto his head. The class erupted into laughter.

“Okay!” he shouted as he tapped his ruler on his desk. “We’ve had our fun, but now it is time to learn. Today, I have some special guests let me start by introducing someone who is going to help us with our multiplication tables. Here’s Rodney the Zombie!”

As the moaning, shuffling zombie shambled into the room, the rowdy children suddenly fell silent, and quickly became engrossed in the simple math problems that the zombie worked out on the board. Rodney was followed by Connie the Zombie, who led the class in a geography lesson and finally Bud the Zombie, who worked with the children, hands on, in an hour of arts and crafts.

When three O’clock finally rolled around, and the school bell rang, Ridgey approached Mr. Pestilence and said, “Teach, I was wrong about you. You really are a cool dude, and you’ve made me realize, learning is fun.”

Mr. Pestilence reflected on this, realizing that the day that was supposed to be the end of everything, turned out to be a new beginning for him, and that wasn’t such a bad thing after all.

# **Televising The End Of The World**

By Beau Sherman

It's happening. This is it. Oh well. Fuck it. I've lived my whole life through a lens; it'd only be right that I watch it end in the same fashion. Every other camera operator and journalist has lost his nerve and abandoned his work; that's what I'll be counting on. This is my calling. This is what I was meant to do: televise the end of the world.

My friends and family will understand. They'll know, I'm sure, to turn on their television to my channel. Unless they're trying to get somewhere safe—but they're all pretty smart and will know such a place does not exist. And if I succeed, if they see what I accomplish at the very end, perhaps they will go as peacefully as I will. Perhaps they all will, all those who watch the live footage I bring to their screen, the object of so much joy in their lives.

I can imagine their faces when they see it.

The old couple on the couch in their living room. A colorful array of lights from their television dances in their spectacles. Their frail fingers lock their wrinkled hands together tightly as they turn their faces to each other just before the final moment and stare into each other's eyes as if for the first time.

A New Year's party is frozen in mid celebration when they see the footage; they are all young and still wear their party hats though their expressions are morose, their tearful eyes focused on the screen. All except two, who disregard the screen and the end of the world so they can enjoy their New Year's kiss.

An old homeless man sits alone in a bar, watching the screen on the corner of the ceiling, while his head is tipped back, chugging a pitcher of his favorite beer that he can never afford because his hunger always outweighs his thirst. Not today, though. Today, money doesn't exist.

A family of four, with their dog, who is calmed by their display of tranquility, as the mother, father, and two children are transfixed in awe by what they are seeing on the screen, their eyes glinting as if in a trance.

This is what I can do for them: all of them. I have the power. I have the tools at my disposal. It is my responsibility to do it. Though, it's not going to be easy. I must get to the roof of the television broadcast station I work at if I'm to get a good shot. I have eight floors to scale and lots of equipment, with only a short amount of time to work with. Hell, I may only have seconds for all I know, but I'll die trying at least.

I grab the camera in its cushioned bag, the cords, and my courage, and head up the emergency stairwell when everyone else is going down. I'm only mildly surprised when no one bothers to question where I'm going. They're frenzied in their haste to escape. They are hamsters on a wheel,

going nowhere fast. But so am I. It's like trying to swim up a fucking waterfall, with weights attached to your ankles and wrist. There are so many bodies struggling to go down the stairwell so fast that it's mostly people just falling. And I have to get through them somehow and without damaging any of the equipment in the process.

A sensible person would give up, seeing as there's no good ending no matter how you look at it. But sensible people don't look at the world the way I do. So I yell as loud as I can over and over...

"There's a helicopter on the roof!"

It takes a while before some of them begin to take their chances on my words. Not many people do but just enough to allow me to make some progress. I keep yelling the lie as loud as I can as I slowly push and shove my way up the stairwell.

Seven more floors to go. Six. The number of people going down is dwindling; I stop yelling, and my rate of ascent hastens. Five. Four more floors to go.

There's only a few people going down and I only have three more levels to go up when there is a deep rumbling and everything begins to shake violently. I lose my balance and grab the railing but the camera bag slips from my grasp. It's like slow motion when it happens, my limbs too heavy and slow to move quickly enough. I focus on where the camera bag is going and my foot manages to pin it against the corner of a step. The shaking continues, though, and it is all I can do to keep the camera bag from shaking out from beneath my foot. Then someone falls on me very hard and the camera bag, me, and the asshole that fell on me all go tumbling down the stairs.

Luckily, a pile of people who had fallen to the bottom of this flight of stairs cushion our fall. I pull the camera bag out from beneath the guy that fell on me and run back up the stairs, ignoring the pain from the fall. I notice the walls have cracked from the earthquake all along the next floor and pray that the building doesn't go down before I get my footage.

Suddenly I get punched in the face and am falling down the stairs again.

All I hear is someone yell, "liar," before I hit my head on the hard floor and everything goes dark.

\*\*\*

I have a pleasant awakening when a chunk of the ceiling falls off and lands on my shin with a loud crunch, sending excruciating pain through my

entire leg. It's broken for sure. I don't know if it's the shock, though, that immediately begins to set in, or my unrelenting determination, but I am crawling up the stairs only seconds later with the camera bag clutched under one of my arms and the cords in the other. It's slow progress but at least no more people are running down the stairs.

A lot of muffled noise is coming from outside, and I begin to worry about the conditions I am about to be met with once I get to the roof. Then there's the fact that my camera has taken some pretty bad falls recently and may be broken. I can't focus on the negatives, though. All I can do is use every ounce of physical and emotional strength to pull myself upward, one stair at a time, until I reach my destination. My broken leg feels as though every tendon and ligament is ripping away further with each step I ascend.

I let my mind go somewhere else while my body does all the work. I go into the future a few minutes, and imagine what the footage of the end of the world might look like. It seems as though I have managed to think of a thousand different ways I could film the world ending when at last I reach the roof access door.

Once the door is open, I am met with a flurry of smoke and ash. Visibility is low. Everything in sight is a dark mixture of debris being violently tossed by harsh winds, with some areas glowing orange which I assume are burning buildings. Explosions, screams, and sirens meld into one chorus of chaos that is the soundtrack to this lovely scene.

I pull myself along the ground, squinting and coughing as debris and smoke threaten to finish me off before I can get my footage that may or may not have sufficient visibility, with my camera that may or may not be broken.

I find the broadcast antenna and plug my cords into the base. With any luck, no one will have bothered to turn off the signal. I pull myself over to the edge that I think faces the center of the city. I feel my strength begin to leave me. I use what little strength is left to take the camera out of its bag and see if it works.

Thankfully, it does. I lift up the camera and press record.

If anybody is watching, I'm sure they can't see much. Not including the static that is most likely accompanying it, the footage through my viewfinder is of a dark storm cloud that has swallowed the entire city. Nothing besides the buildings on fire can be seen.

I don't know how much longer I can hold the camera up when I see it: a bright light breaking through the darkness. It's rapidly growing and spreading. It's beautiful, and I am filming it. It will reach me within a few

moments.

I laugh before it does.

If the world is ending, I have managed to end it on my terms.

## **Black Man, White Skin**

By Master Young

Just the other day I was riding down the street with my brother on our black boards.

This beautiful sister walked up and said to my brother,

"You're not black, why do you have a black board?"

Before my brother could say anything I interjected and told her,  
"you must not understand, hear me black sister cause I overstand.  
in this human race I'm black for many reasons but far be it solely based on  
my skin.

my soul is black, my heart is black, my words are written in black ink.

my family is black and my brothers and sisters are black too.

Though some of them have white skins, indeed, they are black.

In an age where they say "eat cake lose weight!" as they subliminally white  
wash culture,

a prerequisite to be established if you should be esteemed,  
where our eyes are supposedly the only way with which we discern things.

My sister, I chose to see the spirits unseen,

black hearts and black souls that scream so loudly,

to be seen beyond the package it came in.

Open your mind and close your eyes and tell me, is it not black you see?"

-Young

# **A Memory Of Kites**

By Benjamin To



My Darling,

You asked me many moons ago why death doesn't faze me, why I never talk about it, and why I'm so emotionless towards the subject? Well love, I only wish you were here with me now so that I could show you how terrified I am. But not because of the possibility of pain inflicted on my weary body, no, it's the mere fact that I won't be able to smell your light floral scent or caress your porcelain-perfected face for one last time in these closing seconds of existence. The thought of you perishing alone in a blazing inferno, vaporized by a flashing white light, leaves me helpless, powerless. I hoped, wished, and searched for a sign of you everywhere but there were no traces of you, only a memory. It's as if you never existed at all, as if I fantasized these last few years, which were the happiest of my wretched life. Our unfinished endeavors is all that is left to keep me going as I continue to imagine us in that small cottage in the countryside on the top of that majestic hill, as you tend to our vegetable garden and our little ones frolic about, Penelope and Julian wasn't it? When reality comes crashing down on me, only a photograph of you with your rouge lipstick imprinted on it salvages my loneliness in this world of ash and crumbling blackness. Without you, the air doesn't breathe the same, the sun doesn't shine as bright, and everyday my feet fail me more and more. For us, I will endure until the end but I hope you find this letter. I'll come back to this same exact spot here everyday to see if you made it.

I'm never good at finishing things but that short story you had me read has left quite an impression, one that has brought some perspective amidst all this chaos, leaving a profound impact on me was that last line, "dissolves into the bright horizon, flutters in the air before disappearing like a memory of kites."

- B

# **The End of the Earth Project**

By Kris Schulz

An unusual man sat behind a rather unusual desk, but doing very usual things for someone in his position. Checking his watch often, he seemed rather concerned.

He slowly reaches across his desk, pressing the intercom button.

“Wendy, when was the End of the World project due?”, he says slowly, making sure Wendy can understand each word clearly.

“Sir, it is due on December 21st, 2012... which is coming up tomorrow” Wendy said, with a lot of respect given who she was talking to.

“And, sorry Wendy, you know my mind does wander at times... who was in charge of that project again?”, this time, with even more caution. He was never very comfortable with direct conversations.

“Mr Nix and Ms. Storm sir. Do you want me to connect you to them?” with more caution in her voice than before.

The man slowly sits back in his chair, thinking. He liked to think - it was one of his favorite hobbies. He would sometimes do nothing but think for years and years, knowing he should be doing something else, but not remembering what it was. Wendy knew this, so she was more than willing to sit and wait for an answer. She once sat through 5 lunches, 8 dinners, and 2 breakfasts waiting for him, so this was nothing new.

As he sat and thought, he stroked his fine beard. He was proud of that beard, something he invented years ago (though, truth be told, he always like the look of the horse face, covered in hair, and decided to model himself after that. Having failed in becoming nothing more than a half horse, he abandoned that idea and decided to change into something else entirely. He continued to think about what he wanted to become, becoming distracted by what he was originally thinking about.

Wendy, having worked with him for years, knew his focus. “Sir, I can connect you to Mr. Nix and Ms. Storm now. Would that be fine?”

The man, focusing once again, and sitting up in his chair, “find, that’s fine... I haven’t talked to them in...” he trailed off. Wendy knew to ignore this, or else the work would never get done.

“Connecting you now sir”

A hoarse voice comes across the intercom. “What is it, don’t you know we’re kind of busy here? End of the world and all...”

“Mr. Nix! Sorry to bother you, but I was hoping you and Ms. Storm would have a few minutes to talk.”

“Oh, sorry sir... sorry, I didn’t know who I was talking to. Of course I have time for you, sir. Umm, what would you like to talk about?”

“Could I get a status update? I’ve been thinking about this project and have some ideas, but wouldn’t want to mess anything up.” The man sits back in his chair comfortably putting his hands behind his head and his feet on the desk. He is obviously a very important man.

“Oh, of course sir. I was planning on giving you an update soon. Ms. Storm, why don’t you start with your status, since you have already started.”

A raspy voice comes on, deep and raspy, like an 80 year old woman who’s been smoking for 70. “Yes sir, well, we started the snow storm in the midwest in the Americas. That should soon cut off the power and slowly freeze everyone. I’ve also personally seen to it that multiple tornadoes cut through parts of that continent as well. I have someone over Europe who, within the next hour or so, create the typhoon we initially discussed. I would say my team is about 20% initiated, but 100% on time with the rest of our plan.”

“And Mr. Nix, what is your status?” said the man with a lot of interest.

“Well, sir, I am about ready to unleash all of the volcanoes, even the dormant ones - it was a bit tricky, but we broke that code. I want to recognize Ms. Shift for that. I also worked with the Space Division. The meteor will hit somewhere near Africa and Australia at the planned hour. Looking over the project plan, we anticipated around the actual solstice time... I think we can still accomplish that, but I want to follow up with the Space Division to confirm.

Ms. Storm came back on the air, sounding a bit out of breath, “sir, we are

now thinking we will wipe out about 99% of life, which is 10% more than we originally thought. I think this will be a most successful project sir..."

The man, not moving his pose, began to stroke his beard... thinking. Mr. Nix and Ms. Storm, having worked with him before, knew of his love for thinking.

"Sir," said Mr. Nix, hoping this would help the man focus more, "would you like us to move up our timetable? I think we could get this done early and get on with our retirement."

The man sits up, finally looking focused and purposeful. "I wanted to make this more formal, but given where you two are in the project... there have been some cuts to the budget. The good news is that no one is losing their job, which is important to me. The bad news, though, is that our retirement packages have been put off for a few more years. I think it would be wise for us to delay this project until then."

"But sir", said a concerned Ms. Storm, "we've already begun.. and the prophesy, the one that you personally gave to the Mayans, what about that?"

"Oh, I've thought about that too... first, Ms. Storm, could you end any of your current developments... naturally? Make it look like a bad storm or something, without all of the freezing and destruction?"

"I... I think I can sir... yes, I should be able to."

Mr. Nix then spoke up, "Sir, I can cancel all of my projects as well. I will get on the phone with the Space Division right away, see if we can't break that thing up into a shooting star or something."

"That's fine, Mr. Nix - I appreciate your being proactive about this, uh, both of you. And remember, we aren't canceling anything - we are simply changing dates of the project. We've done too much work to completely abandon it."

"Yes sir, consider it done."

"Thank you, Mr. Nix. As far as the Mayan concern... well, this hasn't been the first time we had to move the due dates for this project. I think, if

anything, this project will have more impact if we don't have it associated with a date."

"Excellent sir!" exclaimed both Mr. Nix and Ms. Storm.

"Let's talk next week, when you get back", said the man, clicking off the intercom. He slowly stands up, pets his new lizard tail, and leaves his office. As he walks past Wendy, he tells her goodnight.

"Another day sir?", she asks as he passes her.

"Yes... it just didn't feel right. I think I told that Sunni Priest 2129 for the next one. If you could Wendy, please set up a meeting with Mr. Nix and Ms. Storm for next week. Please include on the agenda that date, so we can plan for it?"

No problem sir, good night!

# **The Immune**

(A Screenplay)

By Brian Christopher





The Immune

Written  
by

Brian Jaime

The End of the World Writing Party (Entry)

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Fade In:

INT. ROOM? - DAY?

We are in pitch dark when a match is lit by a pair of dirty hands. A small white candle is lit revealing the face of a WORN MAN. He looks older than his age. He blows out the match and then lifts the candle from its perch. He manuevers it between himself and his companion, a TEENAGE GIRL. She smiles and places her hand on his.

TEENAGE GIRL

Tell me more.

(beat)

About what the world used to be like.

WORN MAN

What else would you like to know?

TEENAGE GIRL

Everything.

WORN MAN

Every night I tell you more and more. How much is enough?

TEENAGE GIRL

None of it is enough. I want to know everything.

WORN MAN

Why?

The man grabs an open tin can and digs a spoon into it. He slops two spoonfuls of beans into his bearded mouth.

TEENAGE GIRL

Becuase...I want to know what I'm missing.

He looks at her disapprovingly.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)

I want to know...how much things have changed from what they used to be. You teach me math and grammar and science. Why not history?

WORN MAN

(aggravated)

I teach you history.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Yes, about ancient times. About  
wars and dperessions and great  
empires.

He nods approvingly and goes back to his can as if the  
argument is over.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)  
But...I want to know about this.

She hands him a photograph of himself and another young man  
standing next to some sort of costumed character dressed as  
a giant smiling rat.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)  
What's Disneyl....

WORN MAN  
(upset)  
Where did you get this?

TEENAGE GIRL  
I found it in your satchel.

WORN MAN  
You went through my things?  
(beat)  
My things...are...my things.

TEENAGE GIRL  
I didn't go through them. I just  
dumped them all out on the floor  
to look for clues.

WORN MAN  
Clues for what?  
(beat)  
This is a betrayal.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Who is the man in the photograph?

The man hands her a can of creamed corn.

WORN MAN  
You should eat something.

TEENAGE GIRL  
I don't want to eat. I want to  
know what happened. I want to know  
what happened to humanity.

WORN MAN  
(sarcastic)  
Humanity.  
(he chuckles)  
Humanty was a joke. That's what  
happened to it.

He thinks for a moment. Tears well up in his eyes. He makes  
his decision.

WORN MAN (CONT'D)  
We were so busy worrying about  
what was up in the sky and so  
paranoid about fictional plagues  
and apocalypses...  
(closing his eyes)  
We, uh, never saw it coming. We  
never...understood it. It took us  
by surprise.

TEENAGE GIRL  
The virus?

WORN MAN  
How do you...

TEENAGE GIRL  
The woman we were taking care of  
two summers ago. She mentioned it.  
I tried getting her to say more  
but she was so ill.

WORN MAN  
It was the virus that took her.  
(beat)  
It took most everybody. Some  
quicker than others.

TEENAGE GIRL  
What about you and I? And the man  
at the river?

WORN MAN  
Immune. Two percent of the world  
population. Immune.

TEENAGE GIRL  
(pointing to the picture)  
Who was the man in the picture?

WORN MAN  
(fighting back tears)  
David.

TEENAGE GIRL  
David who?

WORN MAN  
My brother.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Did I know him?

WORN MAN  
Yes. Barely. He was with me when I  
found you.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Where did you find me?

She reaches out and places her hand on his. He looks into  
her eyes and she glances at him like she is telling him that  
it is okay to continue on.

WORN MAN  
In a mall. You were alone. Crying.  
Starving. I saved you.

TEENAGE GIRL  
(smiling)  
You did. Why?

WORN MAN  
Because it was the right thing to  
do? Becuase I couldn't have lived  
with myself had I not? Because I  
didn't want to be alone any more?  
What difference does it make? Here  
we are.

TEENAGE GIRL  
I guess you're right.

There is a long silence. He puts the tin can down and closes  
his eyes.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)  
Where did the virus come from.

WORN MAN  
(tapping the back of his  
head against the wall)  
It came from everywhere.  
(beat)  
It was in the air. You were either  
immune or you weren't. End of  
story.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Why did it happen?

WORN MAN  
(after some time)  
No one knows.  
(beat)  
It was like the Earth created her  
own vaccine to take care of the  
bacteria she calls humankind.

TEENAGE GIRL  
And we are immune?

WORN MAN  
For now.

TEENAGE GIRL  
You mean...

WORN MAN  
It's evolving. The virus. It gets  
stronger. We get weaker.

TEENAGE GIRL  
And then what?

WORN MAN  
We...succumb. In one way or  
another.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Succumb?  
(beat)  
It sounds so bleak.

WORN MAN  
The future is.

TEENAGE GIRL  
What if it doesn't have to be.

She stands and lights another candle.

WORN MAN  
What are you doing?

TEENAGE GIRL  
I'm through being afraid.  
(beat)  
Let's go.

WORN MAN  
Where?

TEENAGE GIRL  
Outside.

WORN MAN  
You're crazy.

TEENAGE GIRL  
I'm brave. Just like Magellan

WORN MAN  
He died during his expedition.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Yes, but he paved the way.  
(beat)  
We can be the Magellans of our  
time.

WORN MAN  
Insanity.

TEENAGE GIRL  
It's not insane to want to change  
the world.

WORN MAN  
(sarcastic)  
Change the world. What is one  
young girl going to do?

TEENAGE GIRL  
If Anne Frank were here, we could  
ask her.

WORN MAN  
She died too.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Not in vain.

WORN MAN  
We're staying here where we are  
safe. End of story.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Safe for how long? You said it  
yourself. The virus is evolving.  
How long can we hide from it or be  
immune to it? Maybe there are  
others out there besides the River  
Man who can help us. Or maybe we  
can help them.

WORN MAN

A rescue mission is suicide.

TEENAGE GIRL

But, we can't just keep sitting here in the dark. It's like we're waiting for something to happen.

(pleading)

Why are we just sitting here waiting like bugs? If history has taught us anything isn't it that we should take chances?

WORN MAN

(worked up)

I took chances! I tried to save him....I tried and he....

An awkward silence. She wants to say something but does not know what to say. He fights back his agony.

TEENAGE GIRL

(after some time)

Your brother? David?

He nods.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)

What happened to him?

WORN MAN

He didn't have anyone else except me. When the virus spread, he came to my house. He had been like me. Immune.

TEENAGE GIRL

What happened to David?

WORN MAN

He and I came here, to Portland, with you.

She sits next to him and rests her head on his shoulder.

TEENAGE GIRL

Where am I from?

WORN MAN

Who knows? We found you in a shopping mall in San Francisco on the way up to Portland. Your mother must have just passed. She

(MORE)



WORN MAN (CONT'D)  
 was still holding you. We could  
 hear your cries for help from  
 outside the mall.  
 (putting an arm around her  
 and kissing her forehead)  
 You were so tiny. When you saw us,  
 you screamed bloody murder.  
 (teasing)  
 I should've know then how  
 rambunctious you'd be.  
 (beat)  
 We argued for a good day about  
 what to do with you. David wanted  
 to leave you with an elderly woman  
 we met in Sacramento. I made the  
 decision to bring you with us.  
 (beat)  
 It was a decision I will never  
 regret.

TEENAGE GIRL  
 Nor will I.

WORN MAN  
 Which is why you musn't venture  
 out of this shelter. I've risked  
 so much for you already. It would  
 be ungrateful of you to squander  
 it all on curiosity.

TEENAGE GIRL  
 Fine.  
 (beat)  
 Then, tell me what happened to  
 David.

WORN MAN  
 (sullen)  
 He...

TEENAGE GIRL  
 Did he also succumb to the virus?

WORN MAN  
 No. As I've told you, he was  
 immune. Like us.

TEENAGE GIRL  
 Then what?

WORN MAN  
 You were three years old. Going on  
 four. He had gone out looking for  
 supplies. That was the day  
 (MORE)

WORN MAN (CONT'D)  
he...evolved. I had noticed small shifts in his personality for sometime. But I refused to see them.

(beat)  
The virus, sometimes instead of a person succumbing to it...

(beat)  
It changes people.

She stares at him as if she is being told a scary story around a campfire.

WORN MAN (CONT'D)  
It depends on a person's molecular structure--their DNA. Some people are immune, some succumb, and others evolve.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Into what?

WORN MAN  
Some are calling it a new species. The River Man heard they were like zombies or vampires. Some say they've lost all form of humanity. Others tell of a super human species that can do things no mere human can do. Read minds. Bend metal. Control weather patterns. Start fires with a single thought.  
(beat)  
Mutations.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Mutations? I don't understand.

WORN MAN  
They're what separate the humans from the monsters.

TEENAGE GIRL  
What happened to David.

WORN MAN  
(taking a deep breath)  
He evolved.

TEENAGE GIRL  
Will that happen to us?

WORN MAN  
We won't let it.

(beat)  
And if any of those things ever  
get near to us, we will kill them  
all. Agreed?

She nods her head.

WORN MAN (CONT'D)  
Promise?

TEENAGE GIRL  
I promise.

A sudden noise from somewhere in the darkness startles them.  
They turn and stare at an old, wooden door. The doorknob  
twists.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)  
What's happening?

WORN MAN  
They've found us.  
(shouting)  
Remember the promise! Remember!

She reaches out to him and the door opens, shattering the  
darkness with bright fluorescent light as we...

JUMPCUT TO:

INT. ROOM? - DAY?

The worn man crouches in the corner of a white room. There  
is a cot nearby and not much else. He raises his hands in  
the air to block the light. A MAN IN A WHITE LAB COAT hovers  
over him. The man holds a clipboard and jots some notes  
down.

MAN IN A WHITE LAB COAT  
Sir, it's time for your therapy  
session.

The man in a white lab coat nods to TWO MEN IN BLUE UNIFORMS  
who grab the worn man and drag him out of the room quietly.  
They make their way down a narrow hallway that is lined with  
doors. Each door has a glass window.

As they pass room eleven, the worn man glances up at the  
window. A familiar teenage girl stands behind the glass. He  
nods at her. She nods back. He smiles. It's time.

FADE OUT.

## **The End**

And it ended.  
It ended exactly as you knew it would.  
Exactly that way.  
Because you made it so.  
Because you dreamed it.  
Because you willed it.  
Because of you.  
It came to be as you deserved it to come to be.

And it ended.  
For me, for you, for everybody.  
And I love you for it.  
And I hate you for it.  
And I miss you.  
And you'll miss me.

Life can only lead to Death.  
And in Death, we find Life.  
Because we must.

And it ended.  
It ended because all things –  
Good things.  
Bad things.  
All things must end.

And it ended with you  
And me.  
And We.  
And I.

The End

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