

The Emancipation

Evan W. Jaqua

September 9th

My wonderful little girl, you brought happiness to the lives of all you touched—especially mine. Your heart was a source of boundless joy that showed itself in your constant laughter and play. You are my light, my living light, and forever you will shine.

Though I hold you now for the last time, in my heart you'll always be alive. Let this terrible void in my soul, and these tears, be the testament to my everlasting love, and to the happiness I'll always feel because of you.

I'm writing a diary for the first time after burying my three-year-old daughter today. Her name was Aysha. Yesterday she died, and it seems everyone else around here did too; I see no one else alive. With no power, nothing works except my battery-powered radio, and it picks up nothing but static. No idea what happened or what's going on.

Unimaginable hell. Words defy me. Confused and frightened, I'm starting this diary to help me collect my thoughts while I try to find out more. I keep telling myself this can't be happening, that it's just some terrible nightmare.

It struck yesterday. I was listening to the news, getting ready to take Aysha to daycare, when hasty and incoherent reports started coming in. Something terrible's happening, but...what? Just before the radio goes silent, to my horror Aysha's in increasing discomfort and having trouble breathing. I remember taking her in my arms; screaming erupts throughout the city—the most awful screams I've ever heard. Becomes deafening. Then I feel a dull pain in my lungs; it spreads. Moments



later it was like some hellish parasite was consuming me. Pain so horrible that I just wanted to die, but spurred on by Aysha's screaming, my only thought was to save her. Her screams were interrupted only when she began coughing up blood and convulsing. Spasms so strong I almost lose my hold of her. Then her screaming stopped. As her convulsions become weaker I'm watching her life draining away in my very arms, and am helpless to stop it. Indescribable desperation. "God, please..."

Not sure what happens next, but I vaguely remember running down the stairs and out of my apartment building in a blind panic, cradling Aysha, to find help. Futile. All around, people were either



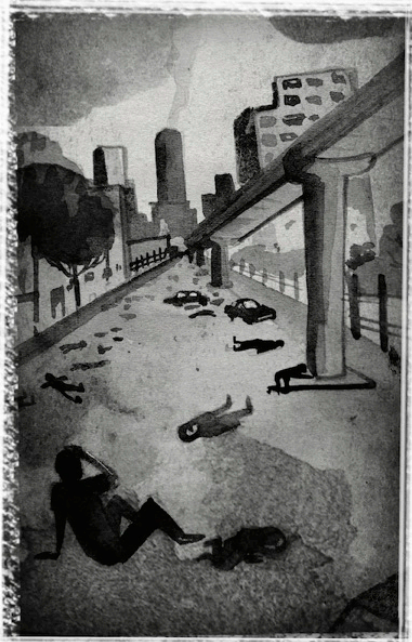
dead or ghoulishly thrashing about. Then all the terrible shrieks seemingly at once went silent. I too started coughing up blood and I began convulsing. I knew Aysha was gone, but was unable to let go. Refused to believe she....

After several panic-stricken minutes of aimlessly running around holding her limp little body amid the sudden eerie silence and countless dead, I find myself on my knees unable to stand up any longer. Violently convulsing and in excruciating pain, the horrible reality hits me. *Surrender...it's over.* No reason to fight anymore; my will to resist's broken. *Let this end.* Those were my last thoughts. Slipping into darkness, powerless to stop it, no desire to even try.

The next thing I remember is waking up, and for a split second thinking it was just an awful nightmare; but the aftereffects at once kicked me back to reality. Intensely sore bones, blurred vision, no motor skills... After who knows how long I finally recovered enough of my eyesight to see my watch. I'd been out about eleven hours. In the twilight, I lay in a pool of my own bloody vomit, pants soiled with

my own bodily waste. Aysha was next to me. Even after her horrible death, she still looked so beautiful, like a little sleeping angel dressed in her beige t-shirt and small denim coveralls. Whatever it was that took her life couldn't rob her preciousness. From the depths of my soul, I felt the tears. *"Aysha, no..."*

After some struggling, I managed to sit up. Nothing but dead people as far as the eye could see. I could make out huge, billowing



columns of smoke in the distance, south of downtown. Aftermath of bomb explosions? Train wreck? Looters? Then, too weak to keep a sitting position, I fell back down hard on the pavement, which sent a jolt of pain through my bones, causing me to blurt out a scream. In my heart I just wanted to lie there and die next to Aysha, but I was intensely thirsty and something pressed me to stay alive. Barely able to move, I started crawling to a nearby store, resting every few feet and carefully avoiding body after

body on the way. I dimly recall reaching for bottled water. Then all went dark. Woke up this morning.

"Just a horrible dream. Can't be real. But...where am I? The store? In these filthy clothes? God... no." Don't know how long I lay there, numb and weak, crying and just wanting to close my eyes and never wake up.

But again, my thirst... savage, intolerable. Drank more water. Grabbed some bread. I got the subtle feeling my strength was returning. After a while of struggling like a newborn colt, I was able to stand up using the grocery shelves as support. As I ate and drank more, I sensed the throbbing soreness in my bones easing, my coordination coming back, and the blurriness slowly dissipating. Horrible diarrhea, I had to relieve myself there on the spot, but between drink-

ing water, eating bread, and resting, after a while I gathered enough strength to stagger back to my apartment—even heaving myself up the many flights of stairs, albeit mostly on hands and knees. Threw away my soiled clothes after wrapping them in a plastic bag, and wiped myself clean with paper towels and bottled water (tap’s dry...).

Ate more and spent most of this morning sleeping. Astonishingly, my strength’s in fact been coming back; seemingly no more diarrhea, and the soreness and blurriness continue to ease. So... whatever unimaginable horror that hit us wasn’t necessarily deadly and apparently isn’t even long-lasting.

What the hell was it, though? A terrorist attack? In the short minutes before the broadcast stopped, reports were coming in from around the world. Baffling—how could anyone pull off such a widespread atrocity, especially simultaneously? Maybe it’s a pandemic? If so, is it natural or manmade? But...how could a disease strike everyone, everywhere at the same time? (*Did* it strike everywhere?) Couldn't have been nuclear...or could it have been? Like neutron or dirty bombs? Does radiation even kill people in that manner?

Being shrouded in ignorance is part of the torture. All I can do is speculate.

My 16th-floor apartment has a view, so I spent some time looking out over the city, but to my utter dismay I saw no sign of anyone else alive. Just the dead scattered everywhere. Then I spotted some crows picking away at one of the bodies in the street below; horror and panic jolted me out of my dazed state.

I rushed out of my apartment building and back to where Aysha lay. Wrapped her in her favorite blanket and buried her in Denny Park.



...

Excruciating grief... Distraught and numb with disbelief.
God...what's happened?

Sept. 10th

7:10 A.M.

Woke up about an hour ago.

Last night was hell; not only for this unfathomable horror, but also for the *total darkness* around me. With no electricity, everything was pitch black; not even the stars were visible because of clouds. Bad as the darkness was, the silence was even worse. No usual rumble of the city—just dead silence punctured by the eerie echoes of dogs occasionally barking and howling in the streets, and... the sound of my own breathing. I could even hear my own heartbeat. Alone and scared, I felt like a child lost in a cave. Kept recalling the moments when it struck. Aysha...the agony in my chest now is even worse than the excruciating pain I felt during those awful minutes two days ago; rips my heart out. Can't stand this.

God, just finish me off. Let it end.

In the dark stillness last night, I felt evil lurking. A merry-go-round of questions kept me awake: Is something out there in the streets below? Or is it inside this building, maybe outside my door? What the hell could it be? The people—or thing—responsible for all this? Will they or it come to kill me? Are deranged survivors nearby? Or maybe bloodthirsty gangs are already combing the streets to loot and kill. Are they going door to door looking for people? How long before they find me?

My suppressed panic must've given way to sheer exhaustion. But even sleep was no escape: I had intense, awful nightmares. I can't recall the details, except in one of them something was crushing me

alive. Don't know how many times I woke up drenched in cold sweat and had to change my clothes.

A few more nights like that and I'll lose it, if I haven't begun to already.

With no power and no running water, my watch's the only thing still of use. Seeing the second hand ticking is like watching the heartbeat of an old friend; the only "living" link I have now to my immediate past and the world I'd do anything to return to.

8:53 A.M.

Physically feeling even better today, though I'm still weak and drained of energy; body feels heavy, and even minor movement causes me to lose my breath as if I were on top of a high mountain. But my heart aches beyond words, and I've no escape from it. Wish I'd died—this hurt's worse than death; a terrible weight on my chest I'm powerless to remove. Can't stop crying.

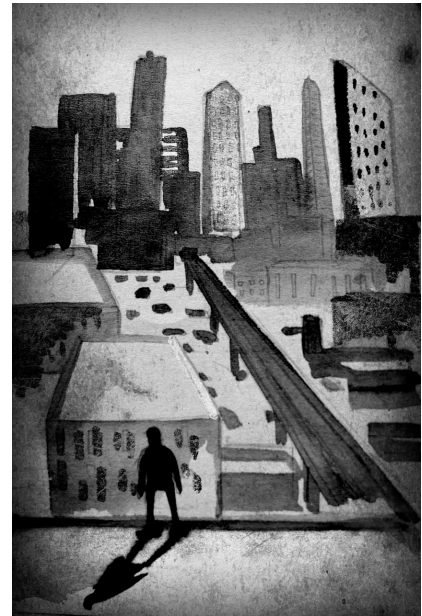
A little over two days ago Aysha was sleeping peacefully in her small bed, cuddling her cat doll. I can still hear the soft sound of her breathing. The despair I feel to go back to that moment—I'd give anything to see her again, and to go back to the life I had. The life that's still so tantalizingly close, feels like I can touch it.

With each tick of my watch I feel like I'm trapped on an unstoppable train that's taking me away from everything I knew, and everything I loved, to a lonely and desolate wasteland forever. It's unbearable.

Has to be a way to turn back the clock... There's got to be a way.

11:07 A.M.

Spent a little time trying my father's old shortwave radio, which I'd been keeping for emergencies. No signal picked up. Then I tried yet again scanning the city from the rooftop of my apartment building, but saw no planes in the air or ships moving in Puget Sound. Worse, I still've yet to see any sign of human life in the streets below. So nightmarish and weird—where the hell are other survivors? Did they flee the city during the eleven hours or so I was unconscious? Were they evacuated?



Must be someone else alive somewhere, for Christ's sake!

A little bit ago I went over to my brother Charlie's apartment, just a few blocks away. No sign of him. He and his church group must've already left on their scheduled daylong excursion when whatever-it-was struck. Don't know where they were planning to go, so who knows where he might be. Is he...even still alive?



The scale of death's incomprehensible. Nothing but dead people, everywhere. The whole city looks eradicated. Even going the few blocks to my brother's place is like a scene out of the Jonestown mass suicide, or some apocalyptic sci-fi movie.

Occurs to me that I'd never even seen a dead person before this...

I spotted a wrecked ambulance; it crashed into the corner of a building after

running over the curb. What's especially striking is the number of people gathered around it. They must've rushed toward it in desperation during those terrible minutes. I surely would've too if one'd been nearby.

Walking back from Charlie's, amidst my paranoia and fear I began pondering if this disaster was a horrible recurrence of the Black Death—of course, with some big differences. First, the Black Death wasn't so instantaneous, simultaneous, and devastating; its victims first got symptoms like painful sores, and death occurred days later, if I recall my history correctly. So clearly that which hit us two days ago was different; still, are they in some way related?

Given how quickly I seem to have recovered though, my hunch tells me it mustn't have been a disease... Maybe poison gas or something put into the water?

Unbearable seeing the dead children—many of them still cradled in their parents' arms. In some cases, entire families died together. Almost everyone died with the same expression of horror and agony. It's like seeing real-life versions of the painting "The Scream" etched in the faces of the dead.

My own will to stay alive's being inexorably drawn into an emotional black hole.



12:24 P.M.

On my apartment's rooftop now, sitting on the edge, looking eighteen stories down to the ground below. Why live? My daughter's dead, and apparently no one else around here's alive either, God knows why. I've no idea where others are, and...frankly don't care. No desire to stay alive. I'm nothing more than a bio-machine; my life

spirit's left me. Just don't give a damn about anything.

It'd be so easy. Just scoot forward ten inches, and in a few moments it'd all be over. Wouldn't be such a bad way to end this. I'd spend my last seconds "flying," and that's as good a way as any to exit this nightmare. Like jumping off the Golden Gate.

The image of her little body wrapped in that small yellow blanket, and me covering her shovelfuls of dirt at a time, haunts me...just kills me.

6:49 P.M.

"Though I hold you now for the last time, you'll always be alive in my heart."

I was on the rooftop almost seven hours, more than once came within inches of just doing it, at one point even dangling over the edge. *Just do it, just let go...* Finally came back to my room. Though most of me wants to end it, I realize the best thing I can do for Aysha now is to stay alive and dedicate what life I have left to her memory. *As long as I'm alive, in my heart she'll remain alive too.* Together, we'll find other survivors—and answers about what the hell happened.

After hours of contemplating my own suicide, I realized that the depth of my heart's agony and the depth of my love for Aysha are one and the same. Now and forever I can rejoice, since I wouldn't feel such pain, had I never felt such profound love.

While on the rooftop staring at the ground two hundred feet below, I reflected on my core beliefs. One, I believe some will come out of a traumatic event forever weakened; others on the other hand will come out forever strengthened, and that strength's a source of joy. *I resolve to come out of this hell even stronger than before; to make it a source for appreciating the life I still have.*

I'm going to experience an extremely rough emotional roller-coaster ride until perhaps far into the future. I'll go through periods of extreme and seemingly never-ending depression such as now. But I must believe this is just a temporary storm, albeit an unimaginably horrible one. I must hang on for life until things turn around, which I've chosen to believe they'll do.

As awful as Aysha's death is, I can at least take some solace in knowing that she's now resting peacefully and not suffering. It'd be even worse if she'd just disappeared. I'd go insane looking for her and imagining what'd happened. At least in her death, there's finality.

9:51 P.M.

The sun went down over two hours ago. Darkness has come to me again. Another cloudy night. No light anywhere; unbelievable. I



can't even see my own hand if I turn off this damn flashlight. Feels like I've been stuffed into a coffin and buried alive. Entombed in a dark, silent, and gruesome hell.

Standing at my window, staring out into the black void. I keep asking myself: besides the countless dead bodies and dogs, is someone—or something—out there? I've always found the notion of supernatural evil to be ridiculous, nonsense. Ashamed to admit that now I'm not so sure. This horror's simply too freakish and

far beyond any possible conventional explanation. Was it a...demonic force or invisible *Forbidden Planet*-like monster that took the lives all these people? If so, why the hell didn't it kill me too?

I need a way to protect myself—like some firearms. If a de-ranged mob—or God forbid, some unearthly fiend—comes for me,

guns probably won't be of much use, but they'll be better than nothing. Least I'll feel a little less vulnerable at night. A couple of gun stores aren't too far from here. I'll go to one tomorrow.

Sept. 11th

8:06 A.M.

Another hellish night. The darkness and silence again had me terrified, unable to sleep, as did my paranoia. After finally drifting off, I had to get up several times again to change my clothes due to all the cold sweating. So the little sleep I did get was miserable, as has become the norm.

I'll get some sleeping pills later today—possibly that'll help.

11:22 A.M.

I'm at Woodland Park Zoo this morning trying to ascertain how animals fared. My conclusion: whatever it was that hit the other day, humans appear to have been the only casualties. From what I can tell so far, every other creature seems to have survived unscathed. That'd make me doubt now it was a poison gas attack, since otherwise it would've killed animals too...right? Unless, the gas was precisely engineered to kill only humans, but would that even be possible...? Another unknown, but, the more I think about it, doesn't sound implausible. After all, some insecticides supposedly kill only specific bugs like roaches or termites...



Sadly, the zoo animals will soon die anyway—either of thirst or starvation. They look at me like I’m the Messiah coming to save them, rushing to the edge of their enclosures, getting as close as possible. I hate to disappoint them, but what the hell can I do? I’m tempted to throw the body of a zoo visitor into the tiger den, but just can’t bring myself to do it. One reason why: the bodies are decaying.

The pungent, musty stench is foul enough already, and is only going to get worse. Since thousands and thousands of dead bodies are everywhere, the smell and disgust are going to get intolerable. The flies are already gorging themselves. Soon maggots will fill the bodies, and then the number of flies will explode. This gruesome hell’s going to get even worse.

Maybe I’ll use lighter fluid to burn as many bodies as possible. Not only would that possibly improve the scene around here a little and kill some maggots, but also the smoke might be a good way to signal any survivors.

On the other hand, perhaps the smoke will attract...

But...is there really some “evil” lying in wait, human or otherwise? Or is it just a figment of my imagination—an outgrowth of this incomprehensible horror and my complete ignorance about it? I’m so paranoid that someone or something dreadful is lurking in this city somewhere, and will come get me if it picks up on my existence. I’ve got to get a hold of myself, and not let my own imagination destroy my efforts to recover and find answers.

Actually, maybe it’d be better if whatever’s out there killed me, than to continue going through what I am now.

I’m heading back to my apartment to spend a few hours clearing the building of bodies. A grisly task, but if I don’t act now, it’ll only get worse.

4:39 P.M.

Got most, probably all, of the corpses the hell out of this building. Touching and moving so many dead bodies was awful beyond description. Vomited many times. After dragging the blue and bloated bodies down the stairs and outside, or often just heaving them out the windows, I made sort of a pile, and set them ablaze. They're still burning—surreal and ghoulish, like bodies of the condemned smoldering in the pits of Hell. The pile of charred skeletons hardly improves the scenery.

So far the smoke hasn't attracted anything, for better or worse. Am closely monitoring things from my vantage point here in my apartment.

Besides the horrible and now ubiquitous stench of decaying flesh, the neighborhood supermarket's also getting disgusting. The fish and meat are now reeking as they rot. The frozen food's of course long since melted, creating rank puddles on the floor. Before long everything else perishable, such as fruit and vegetables, will start decomposing. Much of the market will soon become a forest of mold, no doubt with rats and other pests as its occupants. Thankfully no more than a few dead are in there—judging from the number of bodies near the entrance and in the parking lot, am guessing most scrambled out as whatever-it-was began to strike. But the decaying food's bad enough. After coming



back from the zoo I spent about twenty minutes moving canned goods and bottled water to the front of the store for easy access, so I can reduce the frequency of needing to enter that increasingly sickening place.

Still no power or running water, needless to say. Obviously no sewer or garbage services anymore either. Jesus, what a pain to not have them—it was so easy before to just assume they'd always be there. I have to go outside now every time biology calls; have to do the same with my garbage, and already I've got a pile—close enough to this building to be convenient, but hopefully far enough away so I won't be living next to a rat-attracting garbage dump. I'm going to start using a couple of containers as human waste repositories, since I'm tired of going outside. I'll use a milk jug for a disposable urinal, and I'll rig up a chair—with a strategically placed hole—and a large coffee can to deal with solid waste.

Still no signs of life on the radio. Still no signs of human life anywhere.

God it's been a horrible day, and it's not even over.

6 P.M.

Damn it—I got busy, and didn't get the guns. Too late now—I don't want to be caught outside after dark. It feels like I'm in the movie *I Am Legend*.

One more night feeling vulnerable...

7:42 P.M.

I just got back from a trip to Aysha's grave in the park. After placing flowers, I sat next to her for an hour. Helped alleviate a bit of the despair and loneliness. Wish I'd buried her in a place that overlooks Puget Sound. Being next to the bearer of life here on Earth—the

sea—would've made me feel closer to her life force.

Still, in the swaying trees and mosaic of living creatures around Aysha's resting place, I can feel her spirit. In the souging wind, I hear her whisper that she loves me, and misses me as much as I miss her.

I miss you with all my heart, Aysha.

Wrote this down while taking in the deep blue evening sky.

“The fresh morning air touches my soul, makes me think of you wherever I go. The setting sun touches me true, my precious Aysha, I'll always love you.”

10:01 P.M.

Clouds came rolling in again as the sun went down. I must take my mind off this darkness. The only way to keep my imagination and paranoia under control.

Pictures of Aysha—I've hundreds of them on my computer, but...no way to power it up. I'll find a power supply somewhere tomorrow. But in this moment, I want nothing more than to see her pictures. Yet another source of unbearable frustration.

10:18 P.M.

I just remembered that a couple of years ago I printed out a photo of her, and sure enough it was in my desk drawer, buried under an assortment of papers. In this picture Aysha is asleep in her crib, cradling an apple. On that day I gave her an apple to hold for the first time. She was so fascinated and enchanted by it that she wanted to carry it with her everywhere—even in her crib.



I'm recalling how a few weeks ago Aysha was trying to build a little house with cushions from the sofa. She tried to stand them on end to make the walls of the house, but they kept falling over. Instead of getting frustrated, she laughed and laughed every time this happened.

The juxtaposition of these two memories reminds me of how delightful it was to have a child still so young that almost anything—even something as mundane as a cushion falling over or an apple—was a new source of joy. There must've been a time in my life too, many years ago, when simple things like that caused me such happiness; even though I'm still fairly young, the juggernaut of time and age has long since taken away my ability to find joy so easily as Aysha did. Only through her happy laughter, did I feel the same innocent joy rekindled in my heart.

I just can't believe she's gone. Just can't stand it.

Let me sleep; let me escape this hell.

Forgot to get the damn sleeping pills today. Needless to say, given the state I'm in, I don't know if they'd help much.

Sept. 12th

7:16 A.M.

Another terrible night—so what the hell else is new? Slept with a baseball bat and a chef's knife next to me, and barricaded the door, but my anxiety hardly eased. Like the previous nights, pitch black and deathly quiet. As usual the only certain sound was sporadic barking in the streets, punctured by vicious fights and bloodcurdling yelps of pain. Then silence, and the creepy cycle repeated.

The worst part's how the silence plays with my imagination; a few times last night I thought I heard a person screaming in the distance, but each time I ran to the window to listen more closely, the

sound didn't repeat. Not being able to control my imagination's one of the most awful aspects of all this—it's like having a demon inside of me, taunting me with images of roaming gangs and concealed monsters, and playing tricks with each sound. As if the memories of that terrible morning weren't tormenting me enough.

I can't believe this is happening. This can't be real. How'd I end up in this damn nightmare?

Got to keep myself occupied; do chores or something. Probably the only hope for putting the brakes on my worsening mental state.

Chores for today:

- 1) Check if any broadcasts are back on air
- 2) Get some firearms, and anything else that might come in handy
- 3) Go to the market

9:26 A.M.

Spent thirty minutes or so painfully adjusting the dial on my radio. Slowly moved it from left to right in tiny increments, hoping to pick up a signal. Clearly nothing to pick up. Just the same static as last time.



I'll start doing this radio check daily; certainly if any emergency services personnel are anywhere, they'll be able to broadcast radio signals—ones that I could possibly pick up even from far away.

But the fact I've yet to detect any signal's hardly a good sign. Before I start dwelling on this and sliding into further despair, must move on to another chore...

1:45 P.M.

Rode my bike to a gun store in Capitol Hill this morning; ended up getting a couple of lightweight revolvers. Also got one really small handgun to carry with me when I go jogging outside—that is, should I ever get the courage to do so. Plus, grabbed a double shoulder holster, a couple of knives, and night-vision goggles. I feel more secure already.

But man, things are so eerie. These skyscrapers and buildings here downtown are like huge tombstones. No people, no noise: just the sound of the wind, birds, and dogs here and there. I feel as if I'm in a weird, and ultimate, solitary confinement. (Prisoners held in isolation long enough eventually lose it, don't they...?)



When I'm in the streets, the cemetery-like stillness is spine-chilling. It makes each step I take sound abnormally loud, perturbing me and prodding my paranoia. I feel like I'm being watched, and I keep thinking that I hear things: a car gliding by a couple of blocks away, the faint sound of a child's cries echoing off the buildings, among others. I'm also starting to see things out of the corner of my eye—like something dark and fleeting amongst the jumble of city structures and deserted vehicles; I'm pretty sure it's just my imagination, but god it's unnerving.

As I rode my bike around on the I-5 and I-90 freeways (never thought I'd ever say that), I observed far fewer car wrecks than I would've expected. Quite a few fender benders and a few terrible crashes here and there, but it appears that most people stopped in a more-or-less orderly fashion despite the chaos of those horrific

minutes. Turns out more crashes are here in the downtown area than anywhere else.

Of course, it did in fact strike during the morning rush hour, so all the cars and trucks made the freeways something akin to slow-moving parking lots. That'd explain the lower number of bad wrecks there. Still, a bit surprising all hell didn't break loose, with everyone plowing to reach the off-ramps for example.

I also notice that most—maybe all—dogs are changing, and not in a good way. They keep their distance, and growl or bark at me. But it's more than just that; something seems...different. Odd vibes, the only way to describe it; like something's festering inside of them. And with no one to feed them or keep them in line, needless to say it's unlikely their behavior's going to do anything but get worse from this point forward. Riding around the neighborhoods, I see lots of scattered trash, so it's clear where they're getting their food now. What'll happen when they run out of accessible garbage to eat? I have to assume that I'll become inviting game.

Christ, as if I didn't have enough on my mind already.

3:24 P.M.

A strange thought just occurred to me: perhaps I'm simply hallucinating all this. Could it be a psychotic malady's causing my current perceptions of reality? Maybe I'm actually in the loony ward of some Seattle-area hospital now, straitjacketed, sedated, and under 24-hour observation... If so, my own mind imprisons me. How do I escape this? Charlie is (was?) mentally ill—possibly the same illness has finally hit me too?

No; this isn't something I'm just hallucinating. My brother's illness never manifested itself like this at all. I've never heard of a psychosis that causes one to hallucinate away all forms of human existence... But then I'm hardly one to know these sorts of things.

But even if I've not yet lost my mind and thus I'm not just hallucinating this hell, my ever-worsening fear is that this solitude, in combination with this unimaginable post-traumatic stress, will cause my mental health to deteriorate to insanity before long.

Besides the chores, I've got to find more ways to occupy my mind. I'll draw inspiration from Charlie. He helped keep his mental illness in check by having a strict routine that he followed every day. So I'll do the same. I'll follow a disciplined schedule of going to bed, getting up, and eating my meals at specific times each day. I'll continue exercising daily just as I did before this disaster, and spend most of my day looking for survivors.

A set plan will give me purpose and direction. It'll keep me moving forward.

4:37 P.M.

Just got through trying out my new handguns, shooting at cans and plastic bottles for target practice in front of my apartment building.



Wish I had a silencer; I feel really weird and insecure breaking this creepy silence with gunshots. After each ear-splitting bang I looked around nervously and listened for anything unusual. Couldn't stand it any longer after a bit more than thirty minutes.

The good news is I'm not a bad shot. A knack, or just beginner's luck? I hope that arming myself at least lets me sleep better at night.

Before it gets dark, I'll make one more trip to the market to get a few things for dinner and breakfast tomorrow.

5:32 P.M.

On my way to the market, I stopped here at Denny Park; I'm putting an assortment of different-colored flowers on Aysha's grave.

Rest peacefully, Aysha. This heart beats for you only.

6:30 P.M.

My God, just as I feared would happen—a group of dogs attacked me.

I'd just biked into the Safeway parking lot when they spotted me and came rushing from a little over a block away. My immediate impulse was to escape into the market or turn and try to outrun them,



but in a panic instead I jumped off my bike and stood still—stupidly hoping that'd cause them to lose interest. Didn't work. With only seconds to spare I began shooting wildly, hitting a few, then thankfully the rest quickly turned away and scattered.

Awful shooting them, even in self-defense. Watching the dogs I hit bleed and die was especially shocking. But *thank god* I had those firearms, otherwise I literally would've been dog meat. I can already tell that even these handguns—with their limited number of small bullets—might not save me if I run into a larger pack next time. Maybe I need a semi-automatic rifle. Where the hell could I get a flamethrower? Maybe Fort Lewis?

Still shaking. I keep imagining what the hell would've happened if I hadn't got those guns today, and if I hadn't happened to familiarize myself with them just a couple hours ago.

It's clear the dogs are going to become an on-going problem, and make my already awful existence even worse.

10:54 P.M.

About to wipe myself off and go to bed.

Man...it's only been a few days, but it already feels like an eternity. Can't believe how soon I've come to miss the simple things that I took for granted before. Like a hot shower—I'm already sick and tired of just wiping myself down with a moist paper towels. I miss the sensual tingle of the warm water on my skin, and watching the lathered soap rinse off. Just wish I could flip a switch and see lights turn on again. (Frequently I catch myself automatically flicking the light switch whenever I enter a darkened room.) I'd also do anything to have a hot meal, and especially to eat it with some company. Something like Cajun-grilled salmon with some sautéed spinach in a nice restaurant with a view of Puget Sound. Having a cold, refrigerated drink would taste so good now too—I keep imagining the tickle of an ice-cold carbonated drink going down my throat.

I've also got to deal with washing plates and utensils with no running water—and in a few days, clothes too; I've hardly any clean clothes left, since I already had a pile of laundry to do when the disaster hit. I hate to use bottled water from the market for these purposes, but until I find a well or stream to live next to, I've no other choice. It's like camping in the desert.

I feel so much uncertainty about so many little things, such as whether I should be using this flashlight now as I write this. From the 16th floor here, could it serve as a beacon for other survivors, letting

them know that another person is alive too? Or will it attract someone or something that's best avoided?

Earlier, in an effort to brighten things up a bit I started playing Beatle songs on an old battery-powered CD player (another hand-me-down from my father), but it hardly comforted me—reminds me of the expression “whistling in the dark.” To the contrary, I find that playing music makes me feel even more insecure, since it might mask out sounds I should be listening for.

...

Foggy outside tonight. Somewhere in the darkness, yet again I feel the chill of an evil presence, especially now as I'm about turn in. Has it enveloped the world like an invisible fog? Or, is it lurking in the shadows like a beast—stalking the streets, concealed somewhere amongst the darkened buildings? Maybe it has duality—somewhere, yet everywhere. Is it aware that I'm here?

I keep telling myself a logical, scientific explanation exists for all this. An explanation I'm bound to find. But the utter scale of this disaster makes me doubt that—it strikes me as something so ghastly that only some sinister supernatural entity could've been responsible.

Try as I might, I can't rationalize away my fear and paranoia.

This loneliness...as usual, by itself terrible enough, but the un-earthly darkness and silence compound it without mercy. The bloodcurdling shrieks that morning also keep echoing in my mind. I know I was screaming too, but I've no memory of it. While Aysha's screams haunt me more than anything else, I also remember those of everybody else—untold thousands of people, all screeching in terror and agony. Like the whole world had at once fallen into Hell and demons were cutting open our torsos



and ripping out our lungs. And that's in fact what it felt like—live evisceration.

Part of me wants to go to sleep to escape this despondency, but even sleeping's dreadful thanks to my horrific nightmares. Every night's a new roller coaster ride through Hell.

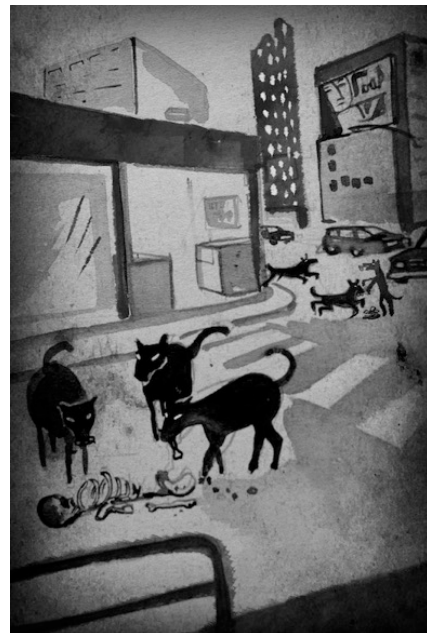
We'll see if these sleeping pills help.

Sept. 13th

8:01 A.M.

Rested a tiny bit better last night—the pills evidently did some good. Having firearms made me feel less vulnerable and that too helped. And, a little after midnight the fog cleared and I finally saw some stars, and that provided an extra bit of needed comfort. But the usual nightmares, fear, and never-ending despair over Aysha and everything else once more overwhelmed my ability to truly rest. I spent the whole night with one of Aysha's dolls resting on my chest...desperate for anything to relieve this throbbing and constant heartache even a little.

It didn't take long to see where the dogs will turn when they run out of accessible garbage to eat; as I look out my window this morning, I see that in addition to the crows and flies, the dogs too are now consuming the corpses. Yet another gruesome thing to see. I didn't know dogs were scavengers, but I suppose with enough hunger they'll eat anything. The sight of them running around with—or fighting over—decomposing human body parts is disgusting beyond words.



I suppose I should be grateful to them and the other varmints for helping to rid the area of these decaying bodies, though I imagine even after all the tissue has been consumed thousands of skeletons will continue to litter the streets for God knows how long. No relief in sight to this gruesomeness.

Later this morning, I'm going to start biking around the city, looking for survivors. First though, I'm going to make a quick and well-armed trip to the market; besides getting the usual necessities, I want to get some fresh fruit and vegetables before they all rot. I'll use someone's car this time even though the market's just a few blocks away; that way I can move multiple days' worth of supplies in one trip. I'm pretty sure I can maneuver around most of the cars that are between here and the market, and move any ones that are otherwise in the way—as I've discovered, a lot of these cars still have keys in the ignition. I'll keep the supplies in the lobby of this building, near the main entrance.

10:13 A.M.

Just got through moving cereal, canned food (including condensed milk and grapefruit juice), about four days' worth of bottled water, and a few other things from the market. I could've hauled much more, but I want to go back there in a few days anyway. A trip to the market a couple times a week will give me something to look forward to.

God...how pathetic that going to the store is the only thing I have to look forward to now.

I shouldn't say that; I must stay positive, and look forward to the things that matter—like finding others and learning the truth behind this disaster. I have to have faith that sooner or later it'll happen...

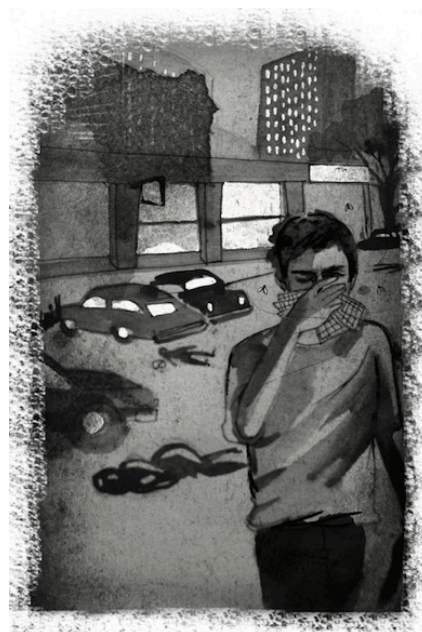
The flies. In the market, in the streets, everywhere. They and

their maggots are devouring the rotting flesh, and fast multiplying. Now I know what the soldiers in the Battle of Somme in WWI must've experienced.

*“The flies! Oh God, the flies
That soiled the sacred dead
To see them swarm from dead men’s eyes
And share the soldiers’ bread!
Nor think I now forget
The filth and stench of war
The corpses on the parapet
The maggots in the floor”* (some WW1 author whose name slips my mind at the moment; something Herbert.)

Rats are also joining the gorge fest. I won't elaborate on the condition of the dead bodies, other than to say that in addition to natural decay, the rats' selective eating habits have left more than a few of the corpses grotesquely disfigured. Intolerably disgusting. Makes me want to detonate an atom bomb.

Looking at all the dead, I'm struck by how the differences that existed between people seem so insignificant now. True, death's always been the great equalizer, but beyond that, it really hits home seeing, for example, the remains of the homeless next to well-to-do individuals in their expensive clothes and luxury cars. Everywhere, I see such things as young next to old, black next to white next to Asian, even occasionally Jew next to Muslim... What striking contrasts that ironically highlight our basic commonality in ways that no words could.



10:55 A.M.

I detect no radio signals. I'll spend the rest of the day biking around the downtown area searching.

11:38 A.M.

Only got as far as the Space Needle before another pack of dogs attacked me. This bunch was much bigger than the one yesterday in the Safeway parking lot. I was peddling too frantically to use my guns...barely got away. After outrunning them on Denny Way I warily circled back via Western Ave. and came straight home. I was scared as hell I'd run into yet another pack. I was outside a total of fifteen minutes.



This town's going to the dogs, literally. Sure didn't take them long to revert to their instinctual hunter-killer roots. Quite a few mauled dead dogs are around here too, no doubt victims of the turf wars among these rapidly forming packs. And the dogs seem to deem me an undesirable element as they stake their claim on this entire city.

Chances are other survivors are dealing with the dogs too. It's hard to imagine that throughout the world, the hundreds of millions of dogs that were docile pets mere days ago could now all be turning into pack-forming, mindless killers. Breeding, multiplying, and growing more savage. Certainly they'll end up killing at least some survivors, including maybe even me. I'm horrified that children will be especially easy prey...

No two ways about it: I have to get better armed, and, awful as it sounds, have to start eliminating as many of the aggressive ones as possible. It's clear they're in no mood to peacefully coexist. Each vicious dog that's eliminated means one less potential killer of a survivor, and one less puppy-making machine.

I'll make another trip to the gun shop either later today or tomorrow.

1:34 P.M.

Pondering again about what struck the other day. Was it possibly an illness that'd latently infected everybody, existing in a sort of incubated state for some period, out of which it abruptly erupted? That'd likely explain such widespread and simultaneous devastation. Just as AIDS or the shingles virus can exist in someone for years before any symptoms appear, maybe something similar occurred. But if so, how'd everyone get it? *Did* everyone get it? And what would've caused it to come out of its incubated state, everywhere at the same time?

Of the possible explanations I've thought of so far—natural or manmade pandemic, chemical or nuclear attack, invisible monsters (feel silly even writing that)—a freak, heretofore never-been-seen disease somehow seems less plausible to me than something like a worldwide chemical weapons attack. In fact, the horror I witnessed the other day reminds me of footage I saw not too long ago of a chemical attack on civilians in the Middle East—people gasping for air, in agony, convulsing, and quickly dying. Still, as before I've significant nagging doubts about that hypothesis too. For one, as I wrote the other day, a poison gas attack or the like probably would've killed animals too, and I haven't seen any evidence at all of that—*yet*. I keep coming back to the same question: would it be possible to design a lethal chemical weapon that'd only wipe out humans, and could be

dispersed everywhere virtually instantaneously? I just don't see how.

If it was an attack, it had to have been the result of thorough and sophisticated planning on an unheard-of scale, and carried out by some incredible but shadowy worldwide organization... Maybe some group of self-appointed "desirables," like the world's ultra-rich and powerful, decided the only way to save the Earth from catastrophic environmental collapse was to eliminate the vast majority of the world's population... I can picture these aristocrats and Larry Ellison-like billionaires taking refuge in some lavish haven in the Alps, eating caviar and sipping on champagne after a day of swimming and tennis, joyfully divvying up their post-disaster worldwide booty.... Hardly the meek inheriting the Earth.

I can't convince myself, however, that scenario's a viable possibility. It seems like way too many things would go wrong, either during the planning, preparation, or execution. I mean, surely someone in the group would've spilled the beans, or intelligence agencies would've uncovered it, before it even got off the drawing board. If nothing else, how in the world could they've put into place the infrastructure necessary to carry the attack out without anyone noticing?

2:05 P.M.

One more far-fetched idea: could a mysterious mixture of contaminants and other chemicals in our bodies have been responsible for what happened? After all, we've been exposed to a whole host of unnatural substances for generations now, and from the moment of conception these materials have been collecting in our bodily tissue. I think back, for example, to the pervasive black dust I encountered in every major city I ever visited—no doubt toxics from that soot and other airborne pollutants accumulated in our cells after passing through our lungs and into our bloodstream. On top of that, the complex man-made chemicals in our food, water, soaps, lotions, and other

things must've also ended up embedded in our bodies, maybe even banefully blending with countless other things (artificial hormones, leached plastics, pesticides, and whatnot) to produce a devastating brew. Throw into the mix all the pills and drugs—illicit and otherwise—that people ingested, and God knows what the hell the result was.

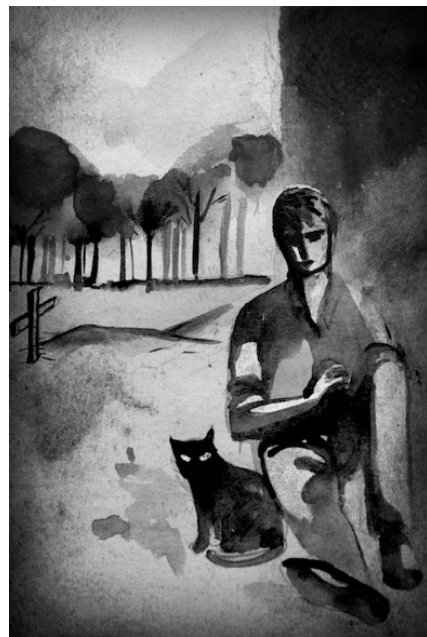
Admittedly, on the surface this sounds ridiculous, but Jesus, who knows? Yet another hypothesis to add to my list of possible explanations.

Anyway, I'm going to take my chances and spend a couple of hours this afternoon biking around. I can't stand the thought of this day going to waste because the damn dogs forced me to abort my search this morning. The notion of them impeding my efforts to find others is beginning to annoy me—big time.

Just let them try to get in my way again. I'm locked and loaded and ready to take on those stupid mongrels.

5:14 P.M.

Made a friend today. On my way home after a couple of hours of some dog-killing and fruitless searching in the Queen Anne and Fremont areas, I stopped at Denny Park to sit at Aysha's burial spot. I heard a meow up in the tree next to me, and a beautiful shorthaired orange and white cat came down and started rubbing against my leg. Like me, in need of a pal, so I brought her home and gave her some tuna. Clearly famished. Never heard a cat purr so loudly.



The poor thing's surely been living in terror, with her owner gone and these ferocious packs running around.

She seems to have made herself at home. I don't know what to name her. I'll think of something. But having this living creature in my apartment makes such a difference already. To have something that I can love and care for, and that returns the affection, is going to be a big help.

On the other hand, it makes me very sad since I keep remembering how excited Aysha would get every time she saw a "kitty." She'd always look for cats when we went on walks, and would gleefully point out every one she saw.

I'm tempted to just call her "kitty," since that's what Aysha would've called her, but...it's too painful to be reminded of that.

6:12 P.M.

Was thinking of naming her Sixclaw, since she's got six claws on each front paw. But I'll call her "Survi," for "survivor," instead.

8:07 P.M.

I just got through exercising for an hour. I wish I could go for a nice run outside in the cool evening air, beneath this gorgeous dark-blue evening sky, but it's too dangerous with all the dogs on the loose. So I spent an hour running up and down the seventeen flights of open-air stairs in my apartment building. Not exactly fun, but it feels good to start working out again. Above all, my strength's come back completely, and that's a welcome, and needed, small source of joy. Getting the endorphins flowing through my body feels great.

10:02 P.M.

Did another radio search. Again, nothing. Damn it.
God, damn it.

11:46 P.M.

Clouds have rolled in again. It's raining now. The dreary, monotonous patter of the drops against the usual backdrop of hushed darkness leaves me feeling even more abandoned and hopeless. The slowly intensifying thunder and lightning don't help. Thank God Survi's here—to hear her purring and to feel her warmth on my lap's soothing. Helps alleviate the loneliness, and adds a patch of brightness to this gloom that surrounds me.

Still, Survi's no substitute for Aysha, or any other human contact. I can't get over my desperation to hold Aysha's precious living body once more. Intolerable. I'd do anything to see her smile and hear her laughter again. I simply can't believe she's gone. Simply can't believe this disaster ever happened, and I've yet to find anyone else alive in a city that less than a week ago had hundreds of thousands of people.

This trauma will remain an excruciating wound on my heart for as long as it beats. Just have to learn to live with it.

But live, I will. In honor of my beautiful Aysha, I will live.

I pray:

God, tonight just once let me sleep without nightmares. Please let me have a few hours of relief from this unbearable pain in my heart.

Sept. 14th

God, what the...?

2:42 A.M.

She's settled down. Why the hell was she ...? What was out there in the hallway, in the darkness? Whatever it was must've left. Right, Survi?

Does it know I'm here? Feel helpless, even with guns.

7:20 A.M.

Still freaked out by what happened last night. I've never heard a cat make such a horrible, terror-stricken growl. During the ordeal, the fact it was pitch black and I couldn't see her made it even worse, except a couple times in the ghostly flashes of lightening I could see her cowering, fixated on the door. I was too petrified to use a flashlight.



She seems ok now. I wish I could say the same about myself.

When Survi was hissing and growling, I felt something horrible—right outside my door. The air got mysteriously frigid, made me shiver. If something plowed into the room, I probably couldn't have aimed straight because of my violent quivering.

What was it? Maybe just a dog? How the hell would it've gotten into the building and up here to the sixteenth floor? It would've had to get through a locked door on the ground floor, and then

through two closed staircase doors to get here. Impossible. Maybe Survi was just having a damn nightmare? Or perhaps it's a PTSD reaction after a week of living in terror on the streets?

Got to be a logical explanation. I hope. But maybe the monster hypothesis isn't so far-fetched after all. In fact, at this moment it's the one that makes the most sense.

After she stopped hissing, and after I calmed down a bit, I tried to get a little sleep. I kept tossing and turning, nervously listening for anything suspicious, till at last falling asleep again due to crushing fatigue. The fact that Survi settled down enough to fall asleep helped me drift off too, though I ended up only sleeping about an hour and a half. I woke up again in a cold sweat; just wiped myself down and put on some fresh clothes.

8:17 A.M.

Wondering what to do today—should I venture out, or stay put? I'm too scared to even open my damn door. Is whatever freaked out Survi still nearby? And regardless of that, I have to confess I'm increasingly dreading the thought of running into dogs, even with my weapons. They're frightening.

Survi's not giving me any indication to be concerned right now—she's sound asleep. Regardless, my trepidation's growing, and with each passing moment so does my desire to withdraw and hide. I feel like just shriveling up and disappearing into nothingness.

8:58 A.M.

I need...to snap out of this. Staying cooped up here won't solve anything. Locking myself in is just going to make me more paranoid—and unstable. I'll turn into a meek, pathetic coward, scared of my own shadow. I must get out, keep looking for survivors. I have to

confront the challenges, however horrific they may be. Have to face up to whatever awaits me—with dignified courage.

I'll start by assuming that Survi was hissing for some trivial reason. I'll look for signs of a dog or other animal.

As for the damn dogs...I'll just have to deal with them. I won't let them—or anything else—dictate what I do, or otherwise rule my life.

On to today's first chore...

After getting attacked again yesterday, I'm thinking that using a bike to look for survivors may not be such a hot idea; I was lucky to get away. Next time I may get caught in a situation from which I can't escape simply by peddling fast.

I could use a car, but since some of the roads and streets are impassable or otherwise hard to navigate (littered with obstacles like vehicles and bodies), a car would be too limiting.

Maybe a motorcycle? Certainly with that I could cover more ground than with either a bike or a car...

OK—getting a motorcycle will be my project for the day. I've ridden one only once, when I was thirteen. Hopefully I can relearn by reading the owner's manual, since obviously no instructors are available.

(After a bit of hesitation, I just opened my door and confirmed the coast is clear—at least in the dark, windowless hall outside my room anyway. So far so good. At first glance, I see no obvious sign anything was here. A mystery I'll never know the answer to..?)

11:08 A.M.

At a motorcycle dealer's now. I barely escaped another dog attack on my way over here. I was heading south on 5th when they came from amongst the hodgepodge of cars that obstructed my vision on Pike St. Like yesterday, they appeared too fast for me to even grab

my guns from my shoulder holster. Like they materialized from out of nowhere. By unhappy coincidence, the area beyond the intersection was littered with an assortment of obstacles like bodies, broken glass, a bus and other vehicles, thus making a speedy escape impossible. Almost like the dogs had diabolically picked that spot to launch their attack. Only by jumping off my bike and slipping through the doors of the bus was I able to get away; one of the dogs grabbed my running shoe and tore it off as I was squeezing into the bus. On the way in, I fell onto the remains of the bus driver and threw up. After regaining my composure, I started shooting from the partially opened bus windows, killing a couple of dogs, and thankfully the rest then disappeared. I'm still missing my shoe, the bastards. My pants are also a bit soiled from my own vomit.



It's becoming impossible to go anywhere without running into aggressive dogs; it almost seems they've become possessed, like Cujos from Hell. Did this disaster affect canine neurology in some strange way? Hard to believe these are the same animals I had as pets growing up.

It's as if they've been waiting for this opportunity to take our place as the new dominant species...like they're hungry for payback after living a subservient existence to us for eons. Further, far more than me just being an "undesirable element," it feels like they identify me as the last obstacle, the final enemy, to achieving total domination over the city. During the last few days I hear their howls echoing through the empty streets with increasing frequency, as if to taunt me and to declare themselves the new masters of the world.

I must look up some information on dogs, and try to find out if a logical explanation possibly exists for their new and odd aggressiveness. I'll go to a bookstore or the library later today.

12:24 P.M.

Going through the user manual of one of these motorcycles. I just started the engine—that's a beginning. Now I just need to practice shifting gears...

2:49 P.M.

Well, I rode home on my new Yamaha motorcycle today. I feel so free and powerful. I love the exhilaration from the wind striking my face and rushing through my hair, and the powerful accelerations pulling on my torso with each shift of the gears.

I can of course now easily outrun the dogs, but the danger exists of losing control if I were to collide with one of them. Given how aggressive they've become, sooner or later that's bound to happen—I just had a close call with a lone aggressive dog on the way home. I thought I was going to run him over when he charged at my front tire, like he was trying to bite it. I need to practice shooting my small pistol with one hand while controlling the handlebar with the other, hopefully preventing what'd be a nightmare scenario: running into a dog and finding myself busted up and strewn out on the pavement with the rest of the pack bearing down.

5:11 P.M.

I just got back from a disgusting trip to the Seattle Public Library. I don't ever again want to go into another unventilated, sealed environment with decomposing bodies inside.

As soon as I pried open the sliding doors, it was like a two-by-four smashed my nose; I vomited and almost fainted because of the overwhelming, sickeningly sweetish stench. After some quick yet intense hesitation, I forged ahead only since I knew where to find the animal books—having taken Aysha there many times; I figured I'd be in and out in a flash. Regretted my choice after about fifteen feet, but kept going anyway.

The following are a couple of notes I jotted down from some books that I grabbed and scurried out with:

1) Dogs are social animals. When pet dogs no longer have humans to take care of them, they quickly form packs with other feral dogs.

2) These packs of former pets usually have no fear of humans, unlike wilds dogs or coyotes. Many will become highly aggressive, and may actually attack without provocation. Feral dogs sometimes eat their human victims (note: especially a possibility now, since they've doubtlessly developed a taste for human flesh after feeding on cadavers).

...

So, based on this and other things I read, it appears I can reasonably conclude the aggressiveness I'm seeing is perhaps unremarkable after all. Still, it seems stranger than what I would've expected. On the other hand, maybe no one—not even dog experts—could've predicted how their behavior would change with the sudden mass disappearance of humans.

A possible pet theory: dogs see the world in terms of hierarchies, so when humans were the baddest gang in town, they were our best friends. Now the dogs sense that they occupy the preeminent position in this new world order, and are seeking to eliminate what's left of their former masters.

Who knows? I just know I've got to deal with them, and hope they're not killing other survivors.

I also came across a couple of additional disturbing facts: in the Seattle area alone, the estimated dog population is close to 200,000. Further, an unfixed dog can give rise to over 65,000 dogs in six years.

Great. Obviously no hope in controlling their numbers. Now that I think about it, I've seen more than a few female dogs in heat, chased by groups of viciously competing males. That's of course being repeated all over the world every second of every day. Millions of dog-making machines, everywhere. Unstoppable.

I can only hope that future generations of dogs will behave more like human-fearing wolves and coyotes, instead of the vicious former pets on the loose here now.

7:03 P.M.

I just spent an hour running up and down the stairs again today. Survi joined me. It was funny watching her—seems she got into it. I'd try to outrun her and leave her behind, but she always caught up and passed me. Having her companionship sure helped my workout pass more quickly. I also did a bunch of push-ups and crunches.

Feels good to exercise—helps me a little to deal with this unimaginable situation, especially my despair over Aysha. Exercising has always filled me with a sense of optimism and a can-do spirit; energized me, both physically and spiritually. Has helped me get through tough times in

the past. As a matter of fact, for a few minutes today it made me glad to be alive, something I'm amazed to feel given this unreal solitude and everything else I'm going through in this nightmare.



For me, *exercise is a celebration of life*—particularly now.

I've always been active. When I was a boy I don't think there was a day when I wasn't at the park playing sports with friends (my escape from a dysfunctional family life). Ever since junior high it's been my routine to run at least 50 miles a week, and I still have the same athletic physique and thirty-inch waistline I did in high school. At my university I competed as a highly ranked decathlon athlete at state and national levels, and won more than a few events. In addition to my daily runs, three times a week my routine includes working my upper body with dozens of pull-ups, push-ups and crunches. I always enjoyed how exercising made me feel, and how it made me look—like the well-conditioned athlete I always strove to be (I wish a woman were here now to enjoy the fruits of my labor). My exercising habits also made me strong, and gave me the confidence to undertake any challenging activity—in fact, physically I felt limitless.

Up until this disaster, my dream was to climb some of the stunning mountains in the Andes—in particular I was aiming to scale the world's tallest volcano, Ojos del Salado in Chile. I also wanted to someday really challenge myself and take on the Cordillera Huayhuash in Peru—like the beautiful and forbidding Yerupaja, a 22,000-foot giant with a knife-edged summit and soaring vertical walls of rock and ice. Yerupaja left an indelible impression on me when I saw it in college while staying in the city of Huaraz for ultra-high-altitude distance training. I believe my excellent lung capacity and upper-body strength gave me the ability to realize my mountain climbing aspirations; to prove to myself that I was still capable of taking on intense activity at high elevations, a few years ago in Bolivia I ran uphill—a *steep* uphill—for an hour straight starting at an elevation of over 12,000 feet.

Was being in such good shape the main reason why I survived this disaster? Seems doubtful, since many professional and university athletes around here were in even better shape than I. If excellent

physical condition were the only difference between life and death, then for one the University of Washington track team should've survived too. Still, a robust constitution and strong heart must've at least *partially* contributed to my survival...

I've always made it a rule to shower at least once a day, especially after exercising. But, with no one around, I'm tempted to just blow off my sponge bath for today. Who'd notice? One fewer thing to deal with.

But thinking about it a bit more, living by the same standards that I've always had'll help me maintain a better attitude. If I stop giving a damn about my personal hygiene, what's next?

Come to think of it, I haven't shaved in a week. I'll make sure to do that at least every other day from now on. If I find any survivors—or rather, *when* I find survivors—I don't want to look like an uncouth and scary resurrection of a shaggily bearded John Lennon. A clean-shaven face will look more civilized, send a better signal, and is more likely to be reassuring.

9:30 P.M.

Despite the exercise-induced high from earlier, I'm starting to feel down again as bedtime approaches. Knowing I'll spend another dark lonely night, haunted by memories and my own imagination, fills me with dread beyond words. For the first couple of hours in bed, I mechanically toss and turn, trying in vain to find a position that reduces my heartache and fear. Part of me doesn't want to sleep, honestly. Too distressful anticipating the hell of my nightmares.

I sure hope Survi doesn't start hissing again; sure as hell hope nothing evil's out there —supernatural or otherwise.

I didn't pick up any radio signals again this evening, and that's a big reason my mood's deteriorating. I need to stop doing this daily radio search; it's become yet another source of crushing disappoint-

ment. I'll just do it every few days from this point forward. Hearing nothing but the same empty static everyday has become unbearable.

10:21 P.M.

Unusually strong wind tonight. Some of the gusts seem freakishly intense. The howl of rushing air and the rattling windows are causing me even more distress than the usual awful quietness, especially with this suffocating darkness. Last night a ghostly chill, now an unearthly wind. This is how another night greets me as I crawl into bed; as if I'm being ushered into a nightly torture chamber.

Survi's my canary in the coal mine. The shaking windows just momentarily interrupt her slumber every once in a while. As long as she's not agitated, I guess I'm ok.

Having her here sure helps. In a way she reminds me of Aysa. Except for those brief—yet interminable—few minutes last night, she seems so happy all the time, always looking for an excuse to play. Always showing affection, always so full of life. It's almost as if Aysa's soul is in Survi.

I'm growing attached to this delightful little cat. I can't believe she's been with me since only yesterday—already seems much longer.

Sept. 15th

7:15 A.M.

Woke up this morning and realized that it's been exactly one week...

God, help me...

11:31 A.M.

Despair... I spent the whole morning crying, desperately wanting to turn back the clock. Once again I feel like a prisoner chained to a railcar; each moment it takes me farther away from my beloved Aysa, and my former life, to a world of ultimate desolation.

And, once more I find myself grappling with the urge to end it all. Just don't want to live anymore. Am within an inch of shooting myself in the heart, I can't stand this pain.

Just grab the gun and do it, damn you.

If anyone else is alive—and someone must be—then they've got to be going through this same hell. Maybe it's already destroyed them. I must find survivors, so we can save each other before it's too late. This despair and solitude are doing me in, I'm at the limit of what I can take.

Survi, thank you for being here and helping me; don't know what I'd do without you, my little friend.

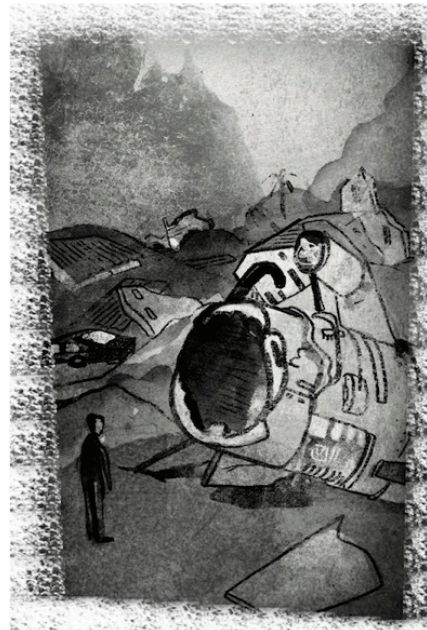
1:16 P.M.

Again I did the one thing that seems to work when I'm in such agony—exercise. For the first fifteen minutes or so I was in no mood to do it; had to force myself. But the more I ran up and down the stairs, the more it helped. It made me realize that if I could survive this first week, I can probably survive anything. That it was a beautiful morning also perked me up, and helped snap me out of my feelings of complete hopelessness.

Now I've got to keep busy so I don't slip back... I'll get started by spending some time exploring the city on my new motorcycle. I just hope it doesn't fail me in the middle of a bad dog situation.

6:48 P.M.

I spent over four hours today riding around downtown Seattle and areas south of here, but found no traces of anyone else alive. Covered lots of territory. Near SeaTac I rode by some astonishing remains of plane crashes; that explains those giant columns of smoke I saw when I regained consciousness—almost seven days ago to the hour. Entire blocks of obliterated houses span a number of neighborhoods near the airport, with pieces of fuselage, wings and innumerable other things scattered about. In one area it appears more than one plane impacted; spied what looked like the remains of at least five large jet engines, all completely charred. The fires ignited by the crashes incinerated a multitude of houses around the main impact zones. All together it looks like B-52's had dropped a bunch of daisy-cutters.



Also, down by the water a little south of Seattle I came across a couple of spectacular shipwrecks—they'd clearly run ashore while going at a fairly fast clip; one buckled slightly at the bow, dumping some of its containers from China in the process.

Besides looking for survivors, I finally got some enhanced firearms. Specifically, two shotguns. I'd hoped to get an automatic weapon, but I decided that shotguns might be more effective; besides, as a teenager I occasionally used shotguns to help my uncle eliminate nutria on his ranch, so I'm more familiar with them as opposed to any other rifle.

These two shotguns have short barrels and pistol handles, so that'll make them easy to carry; in fact, I can even sling them over my shoulder and back. This'll make them easy to ride with, and easy to

grab if the need arises. Each holds six rounds, so that should allow me to fend off a good-sized pack.

As expected, at various times throughout the day dogs chased me, but my motorcycle easily outran them as expected. After putting a bit of distance between us, I stopped and shot some of the dogs anyway; hated to do it, but I must instill fear so they'll hopefully scatter when they see me approaching. And, though not my main motivation for doing so, it was a good opportunity to try out and get used to my new firepower. Made a good choice by getting the shotguns, they *really* do the trick.

Interesting—and disturbing at the same time—to see how the dogs' appearance is deteriorating; they're already losing signs they'd been pets. Digging around in the trash, exposure to the elements, lack of human care, and fighting is beginning to make them look dirty, mangy, and mean. Many are running around with leashes still attached—in a few weeks, perhaps that'll be the only remaining clue that humans once took care of them.

At one point today when I'd stopped to take a quick breather on the waterfront near the aquarium, about two blocks away I saw a large Lab dragging around a small dead Beagle by its rear leg. Struck me as a bit weird so I edged closer and realized that the Lab didn't in fact have the smaller dog's rear paw in its mouth—somehow, the Beagle's paw had gotten caught in the leash clip on the Lab's collar. (How in the world did that happen?) It hung like a rag doll from the Lab's neck, with flies and maggots devouring it. Yet another disgusting thing to see.

Shortly afterwards I came across another dog near King Street station—a medium-sized Akita, looked a little like Hachiko. Its leash was caught in a minivan's side door. It'd partially scavenged a body (its owner?) that lay in its reach. Soon as it noticed me, it stopped tearing into the corpse and went eerily berserk—insanely determined to attack me, but he just couldn't twist or pull out of his harness. Was

as if he was blaming me for this entire disaster, including the death of his owner; like Mother Nature herself had told him to sic me. A bothersome feeling came over me, so I went over and stood inches away, tantalizingly beyond reach, just to goad him. As he tried with crazed determination to get me, I squatted down so my nose was an inch or so from his, just so I could torment him further. His behavior increasingly annoyed me, to the point where I couldn't take it anymore; I began kicking him every half minute or so, each kick harder than the last. After about five minutes, by the sounds of its yelps I could tell my kicks were taking their toll, though he kept on trying to attack. Around that point it hit me: I was *enjoying* making him suffer—both with my kicks and even more with my taunts; it was why I hadn't just shot him in the first place and put him out of his misery. Then guilt started welling up—why the hell was I getting pleasure out of such a stupidly cruel and sadistic act? I've been feeling ashamed since. The poor thing will die a dog's death sooner or later anyway, either of starvation when he runs out of corpse to consume, or when he's minced up by other dogs.

Another thing, unrelated: for better or worse, with the exception of yesterday's trip to library, I seem to be getting used to seeing decaying bodies and dealing with their corresponding smell. Not that I don't still find them sickening, but somehow the edge's come off. Maybe that's what it's like to be a morgue worker after the first week on the job.

Anyway, the good news for today is that the motorcycle is, as expected, a great way to cover lots of territory. Also, I'm happy to report that I handled it well, despite my lack of experience; I didn't once come close to losing control, even when steering the handlebar with only one arm while firing my revolver. The bad news is my quest was again unsuccessful. I can't believe an entire week's passed and I still can't find any clues of human life anywhere. This disappoints and frustrates me more than I can describe. Of the millions of

people living in this area, *surely* someone else must still be alive. Damn it all.

Again I wonder: assuming at least a few others in this city survived besides me, did they flee the area in the first few hours right after the disaster struck? Were they shuttled away, perhaps forcibly? Maybe a huge swath of land including Seattle's been quarantined off. But that wouldn't explain the mysterious lack of radio signals. Now I know the frustration the SETI scientists must've experienced all those years; listening, listening, listening for radio signals that never arrive.

As I'm contemplating these radio-related things, another bizarre thought occurs to me: could radio waves have caused, or been partially responsible for, this disaster? That'd explain how it struck everywhere simultaneously; and after all, our bodies absorbed radio energy just like antennas do, and possibly that somehow triggered such widespread death... Radio wave energy in combination with a noxious brew of contaminants...?

But as with every possible explanation I've come up with, too many things—in this case, way too many things—just don't add up. Like as always, why only humans? Why now?

Such a desperation to know the truth behind what happened...

10:56 P.M.

Bushed. Tomorrow I'll explore the suburbs of Seattle, concentrating on the Eastside communities like Bellevue and Redmond.

As I face another dreadful night of loneliness and pain, I remember a poem quoted by Robert Kennedy after Martin Luther King was shot: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart. Until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

Sept. 16th

3:19 A.M.

In the darkness, I see your face, I hear your cries... I desperately reach for you.

Just woke up from another disturbing dream. This one's different since I remember it better than most. Maybe since it's so simple: I'm in a beautiful mountainous area with Aysha in my arms, I'm running trying to get away. Some evil force that wants to kill her is pursuing us. No matter how hard I run, I feel it drawing near. Before this disaster hit, whenever I dreamt some powerful evil was stalking me, even if I was scared I felt a fundamental strength to confront and defeat it. But this time it's different. I feel powerless to stop this entity from killing her. I know I'm outmatched. Then I see the lion-like monsters. Alone and barehanded, I'm the only thing that stands between them and Aysha. The panic in my heart wakes me up.



I've had trouble remembering the details of my nightmares over the past week, but they seem to have common themes. A recurring one is that I'm alone, feel a profound loneliness, and am up against something monstrous that's much more powerful than I; if I'm not alone, I'm with Aysha and the overwhelming evil is coming to kill her, like in the nightmare I just had. Another theme is where I can see Aysha but can't get to her. As I'm writing this, I'm recalling a dream the other night where Aysha is with some elderly woman who is taking her away; I want to run after them to bring Aysha back, but can't

get through a glass wall that's in the way, no matter how hard I pound. In another dream, I see Aysha walking alone in a dark and dangerous forest; in desperation I call her to come back to me, but she can't hear me. I watch helplessly as she disappears into the murky woods.

These dreams evoke a crushing despair in my heart.

As I write this next to the candlelight, I see my orange reflection in the window against the scrim of darkness. I look so alone and vulnerable. As always, I hear nothing but my own heartbeat and breathing.

I just pray that mine isn't the only beating human heart left in the world...

5:28 A.M.

I haven't been able to get back to sleep after that nightmare.

Problem is, I've got my doubts that it was a mere a dream. The evil...felt too damn real.

But, if an evil force is responsible for all this, again I ask: why hasn't it killed me too? Is it just toying with me, like a brat amusing himself with a bug in a jar? Am I a pawn in a war between higher powers of good and evil?

Or, in my ignorance am I just reverting back to what my ancestors did: explain terrible things like cataclysmic events in terms of evil spirits?

Finding other survivors is key. If I find someone else, I'll know I'm not the plaything of an evil deity, or an unwilling participant in some holy conflict. I'll be able to conclude it was most likely a pandemic or poison gas attack that I, and perhaps many others, happened to survive. I've pretty much ruled out that someone nuked us, at least until I've solid reasons to believe otherwise.

Must find others.

The sun will soon rise. And with it, my hope and fortitude. How much I've come to appreciate the sunrise. The morning's first colorful rays give me the strength to anchor my thoughts in the light of rationality, instead of the frightening nonsense born out of dark ignorance.

Maybe I've some insight into how it must've been for my distant ancestors. I'm reminded of a movie I saw many years ago in which cave people would sacrifice a person every evening so that the sun would return the next day; they lived in fear of it not returning.

Just as it is for me now, 20,000 years ago darkness surrounded my ancestors every night—only the light of the moon and fire accompanied them. And, just as ignorance about the world plagued people then, my ignorance about this terrible disaster afflicts me now. Not knowing where other survivors are especially tortures me.

But my ancestors had one thing I don't have: companionship...



7:58 A.M.

Just had breakfast and fed Survi.

First chore for the day: spend most of this morning walking around my neighborhood eliminating aggressive dogs. I need to continue my campaign to implant fear, and hopefully make myself terrifying to them. Become their worst nightmare. That'll encourage these ragtag collections of former pets to leave me alone. Worrying about the dogs makes me feel like a prisoner here, and interferes with

my efforts to find others. But this dog-killing isn't something I look forward to. A dirty job, but...

10:41 A.M.

Shot about ten dogs this morning. When a dog or even an entire pack comes after me, the shotguns stop them cold. Besides the lethal effects of the buckshot, the loud bangs scare away the ones that the initial shots don't hit. Occasionally my first shots just injure them, so I shoot a second time to stop their suffering; hard to handle their awful yelps. Before long, they should get it through their skulls that I've deadly force at my disposal, and will avoid me accordingly. That'll be a liberating day.

Now that I've got that unpleasant chore hopefully done for today, I'm going to spend a little time washing clothes, and then ride around Mercer Island and suburbs on the Eastside for five hours or so, searching.

11:40 A.M.

Just got through washing a few of my clothes. Washed all of Aysha's. Realized it's probably the last tangible act of love that I can do for her. Cried the whole time as my hands gently worked in the lather and then rinsed her small clothing. I can't believe I'll never have the chance to wash anything of hers again. The water dripping from her drying clothes reminds me of my own tears.

Got to move on to my next chore; too much pain.



5 P.M.

Another day and still no survivors found. So goddamn unbelievable and frustrating. Hate it. More than I can say, I hate this. *God, damn you!*

Need to calm down. Losing my temper and pounding the table won't help. Think—maybe riding around isn't enough. I've just assumed that if others are alive, they'll make themselves known if they see or hear me approaching; but, perhaps that's not the case—maybe they're worried I'm deranged or something, especially when they see these intimidating firearms. Good reason of course to stay hidden, I probably would too... I could get a megaphone and stop every quarter mile or so to announce myself. A simple, "Hello, is anybody there?" should do the trick. Just hearing my voice may give the needed reassurance.

With few exceptions, I've avoided venturing into buildings and other structures to look for people. Such as today—I spent a bit of time circling the Bellevue Square mall, but couldn't bring myself to go inside. I'll of course enter such places so if I see any indication—however slight—of a survivor, but so far I've seen nothing of the sort. The thousands of empty structures everywhere are creepy to say the least, and I've no desire enter them unless there appears to be a damn good reason to do so. I've peered through the windows into the lobbies of skyscrapers downtown as well as many stores, restaurants, and even a few random houses in the area, but up till now haven't seen anything but the gruesome sight of bloated and fly-covered bodies scattered around—just like everywhere else. I can't imagine anybody'd dwell in such places, so I see no reason yet to expand my search to anything beyond the roads and streets. I'm convinced that covering as much area as possible on my motorcycle is the most efficient use of my time and offers the highest probability of success.

Might also be a good idea to make it easier for others to *find me*, instead of me just looking for them... I could get a generator and put some lights on the roof of my building, for example. That'd be visible from many miles away. But...even with my weapons, I still feel insecure about what could be lurking out there, and am uneasy about drawing too much attention to myself, particularly at night.

An additional benefit of getting a generator would be I could start my computer and see Aysha's pictures. Upon deeper reflection however, I just can't bring myself to do it. I'm feeling dangerously close to a total emotional collapse as it is; seeing her pictures would only exacerbate my misery and loneliness, possibly pushing me past the breaking point.

The weight of this loneliness is especially heavy in this megalopolis of death. If I'd been in a rural area to begin with, perhaps things'd be easier. Being amongst all these dead bodies and empty buildings and streets is spiritually so taxing that it's all I can do to keep from sinking into suicidal depression and hopelessness.

Other things also hit me very hard; even something simple like passing by a McDonald's and thinking that maybe I'll never again know the taste of a hamburger, or ice cream. Will I ever turn on the tap and see water gushing out again? Or use a flush toilet? The everyday things of just last week now seem so unimaginably unattainable. Flying in an airplane again appears now as likely as a trip to the edge of the Milky Way.

Everywhere I go, the signs of human absence are becoming all too clear; for example, the yards of homes are already starting to look unkempt, as are the parks—probably due in large part to the strong wind the other night. Besides scattering lots of leaves, the wind blew around trash and other debris too, made worse after the dogs knocked over the trashcans and crows clawed open plastic garbage bags. More than a few lawns and grassy areas are showing signs of needing to be

mowed, and weeds are starting to grow in some previously impeccable garden areas.

Even more painful is passing by stores with baby clothes on display: seeing all those happy little outfits, with no children around here to wear them now, just kills me. The same thing happens when I see a playground—once so full of laughter and happiness, now so empty and lifeless. The daycare centers have...the remains of children's bodies near the jungle gyms and swing sets. Tears well up uncontrollably. I imagine the thrill of children who were playing on the teeter-totter for the first time... Those joyous sounds echo in my mind; I'd do anything to really hear them again now.



The gentle caress of a summer breeze on my face was one of life's simple pleasures but a few days ago; now it sends a chill up my spine like the spirits of countless dead wafting past. God, am I the last person alive in Seattle? Or, even worse, one of only a few left in the whole damn world?

Again and again I tell myself this hell can't be happening. Can't stand it any longer. Like yesterday, I'm thinking I should just use one of these guns on myself. End it here and now.

...

At desolate moments like these, again I'm so grateful to have this happy little cat around.

Survi, thank you for cheering me up when I start slipping into crippling despair. We're going to see this through together, my dear little friend.

10:29 P.M.

I need a way to deal with these godawful nights. Perhaps a new project's the answer. This diary's a project, but I need something else to help me escape. Writing in this diary just reminds me of all the hell.

Maybe a book—reading every night till I can't keep my eyes open's worth a try. I've a large backlog of unread books from years ago.

Sept. 17th

8:14 A.M.

Slept better last night. Looking at the different books before going to bed put me into a better frame of mind. I ended up choosing a book about astronomy—hopefully a topic that'll help take my mind off of things.

I need to get some more supplies today from the market. This morning I've been mulling over how all the canned goods and bottled water represent a kind of non-renewable resource for me—sort of like fossil fuels were for human society. Great while it all lasts, but if this search for survivors turns into a long-term endeavor, eventually I'll have to become self-sufficient and live on sustainable food and water sources.

The analogy's pretty good, the more I think about it. Just as fossil fuels were a gift—or an inheritance—from millions of years of biological decay, the supplies available to me are the result of thousands of years of human progress. The production of the food, the processing and packaging, and the delivery: every stage required technologies that evolved over many centuries. And here I am, benefiting from the thousands of years of effort that now allow me to

survive comfortably, just as fossil fuels allowed humans to advance and live with countless modern conveniences.

The canned food and bottled water most likely have a shelf life of only a few years. So though for now my supplies are unlimited, in five years or so I'll have to start living close to a natural source of drinking water. As for food, my experience working and growing things as a farmhand during the summers at my uncle's should serve me well, so I'm not too worried.

Of course, I hope that long before the shelf life of the food and water expires, other survivors and I will be well on our way to rebuilding society; like not only starting an Earth repopulation program (I wish I were in a state of mind to say that sounds like fun), but hopefully we'll also be harvesting food, and above all, laying the groundwork for our rebirth and a new, bright future.

9:47 A.M.

Feeling lucky this morning. I'll put off shooting dogs or going to the market, and instead begin my search for survivors today right off the bat. Something good's going to happen today. I can feel it.

I'll go to the store tomorrow instead.

5:32 P.M.

Despite my earlier optimism, again I came up empty-handed today. I combed more areas north of downtown, concentrating on the neighborhoods around the university and the lakeside communities of Lake Washington. After feeling so positive when I set out this morning, now I feel as empty and depressed as ever; makes me recall my disappointment in high school when the girl of my dreams snubbed me, except this is of course even worse...far worse.

Anyway, I ending up shooting more dogs today despite my original plan not to do so, only because they displayed less-than-friendly behavior. It seems the aggressive ones are only those that haven't encountered me during the last few days; the dogs that know me, i.e., those living in proximity here downtown, hightail it now when they see me approaching. Exactly the result I was hoping for. My fear-instilling campaign appears to be rapidly achieving results; they're afraid of me now. I'm pleasantly surprised, to say the least; I expected it to take weeks, but looks like I'm there already. Amazing. A little buckshot quickly goes a long way. And I must give credit where it's due: those mutts are fast learners.

The growing resentment I was feeling toward them should hopefully start to ease now.

6:30 P.M.

I just got through eating dinner—some bread, beef jerky, and spinach eaten cold straight from the can. As I ate the spinach it occurred to me I could get a camp stove to heat up my food. Why didn't I think of that before? On the other hand, I'm already a bit used to eating cold canned food now, so getting a camp stove won't be a priority; maybe as winter approaches I'll reconsider.

I'm going to take out the trash, then take a break from writing in this diary and instead spend my evening reading the book I judiciously selected last night. I don't want to dwell on my disappointment after yet another unsuccessful search today; hopefully reading about stars and planets will keep me from doing just that.

Speaking about taking out the trash, my personal garbage dump's growing quickly. Mainly plastic water bottles with cans mixed in. It's going to become quite large before long, since I'm going through so much bottled water—not only for drinking, but also for washing clothes, dishes, and myself. Mind-boggling now to think that the worldwide quantity of non-recycled trash that we humans generated *daily* before this catastrophe must've been literally hundreds of millions of times greater.



I could use paper plates to reduce some of the dish washing, but that'd just swap out empty plastic water bottles for lots of used paper plates in the pile. Should I try to bury it, i.e., create my own landfill, or start making another pile when the time comes? I could just burn it from time to time; of course, that wouldn't get rid of the cans, and the fumes from the burning plastic bottles would be nasty. What's striking is that the plastic water bottles are reusable—what a waste to use them just once. But since no other source of clean water's available to me yet, I've no choice but to live in such a wasteful way for now.

Sept. 18th

7:34 A.M.

When I first woke up it dawned on me that since I now scare the dogs around here, I'll be freer to do things I've hesitated to lately—like go for a run outside. I'm just dying to do that; thanks to my exercise addiction, frustration has built up to the point that I'm feeling like a caged tiger. I can't even remember the last time more than a

week passed without going for a real run. I want to break free, feel myself running hard and fast, and feel the adrenalin and sweat flowing. Running up and down the stairs or even riding my bike, though better than nothing, just doesn't do it for me. Can't stand the thought of waiting anymore. I'll carry my light firearm just in case, but recovering my freedom of mobility will reduce my stress, maybe more than a little.

Looks like it's going to be perfect weather for a run—a beautiful, Northwest summer day, with a clear blue sky, perfect temperature, and no humidity. (Wish I could see a weather report to know if the sunshine's going to last.) I'll run along the waterfront; looking forward to running while taking in the views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. I can hear the pull-up bar near the shore in Myrtle Edwards Park calling my name now.

Before doing anything though, I've got to get more supplies from the market since I ended up not doing it yesterday. Like last time, I'm going to drive so I can bring several days' worth of bottled water and other supplies in one trip.

Parking a hundred feet or so from the main entrance of my apartment building will give me an excellent chance to do some physical labor; moving supplies from the car to the lobby will be invigorating. I'll enjoy feeling my arms carrying the weight; the heavier the better—like cases of bottled water. That'll be a good warm-up for my run and pull-up session too.

I'll take Survi; bet she'll enjoy getting out of this apartment building for a bit.

Going to be a great day for a change.

4:12 P.M.

Devastated. Just got through burying...what's left of Survi.

I was moving supplies into the lobby; Survi was outside with me. As I was placing a case of bottled water near the front door, Survi hissed loudly, and seemingly out of nowhere they struck. I'd left my shotguns in the car, my hands being full. I'd grown complacent, believing I was safe since dogs in the neighborhood now avoid me. But this was a pack I'd never seen before, led by a big Rottweiler. Caught me off guard. Before I could react, it rushed after Survi with stunning, almost supernatural, quickness. With a swift jump Survi started climbing a big maple tree, and for a few moments I thought she'd get away; but somehow she lost her balance and to my horror tumbled back down right into the waiting pack ("No!"). Being unarmed, I had to rush inside, closing the lobby door just before some of the others reached me. Powerless to do anything, through the door windows I watched in horror as they ripped her apart.



Something snaps. Desperation and horror turn to anger...savage anger. Those dogs killed more than my one friend—they'd killed the very reincarnation of Aysha's spirit.

I sprint up the stairs to my apartment, get my pistols. By the time I get back downstairs, the dogs are gone, so I grab my shotguns from the car and go looking. Don't have to go far; after following the trail of Survi's blood I find them less than two blocks away on Battery Street.

Blindly guided by my hate, I first shoot but purposely only injure the Rottweiler, which—in one of the most surreal things I've ever

seen, still has what's left of Survi in its mouth as if she were a trophy. Then I kill as many as I can before the rest scatter. I incapacitate the Rottweiler by aiming for its legs, so I can do what I want: kick it to death. I make sure its death's as slow and painful as possible. I enjoy every pathetic snarl, every tortured yelp. I kick its balls for a good five minutes, till they're mashes of nothingness, then kick till I break its backbone. Keep kicking and kicking, till I break every bone I can. I can't make it suffer enough.

Today the war begins. God, stand as my witness, I'll kill every dog I see. I'm going to brutalize them. One man against a world of dogs.

And I ain't about to lose.

Sept. 21st

Haven't much felt like writing in this diary lately. I've turned my attention from finding survivors, to slaughtering dogs. Looking for survivors was an exercise in frustration, but combing the metro area and boldly going after dogs gives instant satisfaction. I destroy every one I come across, aggressive or not. I hate them. I most enjoy finding virgin packs, i.e., ones that don't know me and are thus stupid enough to attack. What a delight. Sometimes I have to egg them on. After trying various things, pretending to be scared and running away works best: arouses them to give chase. I love the fact they're just stupid animals, and I can get them to do what I want.



When they come after me, I enjoy waiting till they get close before mowing them down with a shower of buckshot. Fun as hell to

blow them apart like watermelons. Been going through bullets and shotgun shells like corn flakes. The tricky part's shooting the leader without killing it. A few times I've failed, and end up killing it with my first shot. But I'm getting better at avoiding that, especially by judiciously using pistols instead of shotguns when targeting the alpha. I savor the moment when they turn tail and scatter like terrified rats, except the ones that are too injured to get away. I especially like it when the injured ones still have some fight left in them. Then I go to work. First I work them over by kicking their undersides hard again and again. What a buzz hearing their pathetic growls mixed with desperate yelps of pain, and seeing how far I can displace their bodies with each kick. I relish killing them in the slowest and most painful way I can think of, and I'm getting good at savaging them while keeping them alive as long as possible. I hang what's left of the ravaged carcasses by their hind legs to show the other mongrels who's the real alpha in this new world.

Sept. 22nd

Spent most of the day again looking for dogs, and experimenting with some new methods to torture and kill them, since kicking isn't as fun anymore. Besides, my thigh got a bit sore from doing it so much, and with so much intensity. Toes hurt a little too. Using a baseball bat instead to beat them to a pulp provides some satisfaction; fun to see how much force my arms can produce with each whack, practicing my swing, imagining I was hitting a grand slam in the World Series. Been devising other ways to kill them slowly too, like dousing different parts of their bodies with lighter fluid after rendering them helpless. Just applying good old-fashioned human ingenuity for a noble purpose...

At first I was shooting to kill all the dogs except the one I deem the alpha, but today I've been trying to avoid killing any of

them on the spot, instead just aiming to blow apart their legs and hindquarters and letting them bleed to death while they yelp and yelp and yelp. The chorus of yowls, what music to my ears. If any still haven't died by the time I finish with the leader, I take advantage to squeeze even more suffering out of them.

Such disgusting, despicable animals. Individually, they were nothing but ass-kissing cowards when we humans ruled; but in this new world they've transformed into pack-forming, vicious killing machines. Well, time to put them back in their place, and remind them who's still boss. Time to cut them down to size—literally.

My contempt for them has no limit. I hate them, and this hatred fills me with an intense, even pleasurable, will to live. Seeing their disgusting human flesh-filled feces all over the place especially gets my goat, so there's nothing I like more than shooting out their haunches when they're squatting to shit. Before finishing them off sometimes I give them a taste of their own damn medicine by mashing their noses into it, or taking a stick and forcing it down their throats. I also love it when they snarl and I get the chance blow their teeth out with a shot from my revolver. *"C'mon boy, smile for me. Y'think you're tough? You'll sure look a lot meeker with a shattered muzzle, just like the others."*

I've noticed a fringe benefit of all this delightful slaughter: better sleep. Every night now I go to bed fantasizing about the killing orgy I'm going to enjoy the next day. It's almost like the lustful anticipation of a date with a new girlfriend. What a thrill to imagine finding the biggest, meanest dog possible and destroying it with no-holds-barred ruthlessness.

Just hit me—maybe the dogs played a part in our annihilation. Perhaps...they were the spreaders of the plague, or whatever it was. But my instincts tell me this disaster wasn't solely due to them; something evil must've concocted it, and then used the dogs to deliver it. And now this evil's using the dogs to kill the few remaining survivors

like me. And they obey—like disgusting toadies that suck up to the new master of this world. All starting to make sense. “Man’s Best Friend.” What a joke. Our best friend till something stronger comes along. Then they abandon and try to kill us.

But they ain’t gonna touch me. Maybe these guns can’t kill the monster responsible for this world-ending disaster, but they do a great job killing the damn dogs, and for now that’s more than good enough.

But we’ll find out if I can kill you, won’t we? Once I’m through with the dogs, I’ll look for you. And when I find you, payback time. You don’t scare me anymore.

Sept. 23rd

Splendid fight today. Was finishing off a pack I found occupying a blind alley downtown when from behind me a German Shepard attacks. ‘Fore I can react it gets a hold of my left forearm arm. Not hurt though, cause I’d foreseen this danger and covered my forearms with tough leather. As it viciously tries to pull me down, I could’ve blasted out its brains with the revolver in my right hand, but instead I drop the gun and grab the large knife I’ve been carrying attached to my belt. With hate-intensified strength, I’m able to lift my left arm high enough to expose its underside (“*Gotcha now!*”); what a rush to feel the knife bury itself deep into its chest cavity. It’s over before it can yelp; while that was pretty gratifying, I wish I’d killed it more slowly as that would’ve been more fun. In fact, I’m kind of fascinated now by the thought of wiping out the pack with my guns, while somehow leaving the biggest dog uninjured and then killing it in a more up-close and personal way, mano-a-mano. That’d save me a bit of ammo too.

Fun as it is to slaughter the bigger dogs, I find it even more enjoyable to kill the annoying little yapping ones that are foolish enough come after me—I wonder if their smaller brains make them that much

stupider. I like choking those to death with my bare hands, and feeling their throats crush under my viselike grip as their legs do a pathetic little jig. Slowly dig my thumbs in, harder and harder—their reward for being stupid, and especially for challenging me. One filthy poodle-like runt managed to bite me today as I was struggling with it, so I gave it special treatment: held it by its throat with one hand while cutting a hole in its belly and disemboweling it live.

Just got through burning my blood-covered clothes, like yesterday and the day before.

A primal, interspecies blood feud driven by pure mutual hate. For their part, it's so clear they want nothing more than to tear me to shreds; for me, I enjoy wiping them out like roaches. That's what makes it so fun—they hate me, but I always win. Most of all, I like watching them die in agony, quivering in shock, and knowing the last thing they'll feel besides the pain is a frustrated, hate-driven torment. Killing the alpha, little by little, pleasures me beyond description. I'm inflicting unimaginable pain on a disgusting creature that hates me as much as I hate it.

I'm slaughtering your pawns. Why don't you come out and do something about it?

SHOW YOURSELF TO ME, BASTARD!

I hate you, and I'm going to kill you.

Sept. 24th

Getting damn good at this. This morning on Mercer Island I fought it out one-on-one with a big, black mongrel; it had just one eye—am guessing it lost the other one in a recent fight, since the wound around its open eye socket looked new. Got it to leap at me and managed to have it grab my protected forearm. Then I quickly stabbed its remaining eye with my knife, blinding it. Man, how fun to watch it yelping in pain. For a couple of delightful minutes I toyed

with it by cutting or stabbing it lightly, and then jumping back as it swung itself around making a pathetic attempt to bite me; got in some satisfying kicks to boot. Finally, I clubbed its head hard with my own rocklike fist to stun it (with an almost Superman-like force I didn't even know I was capable of), and then got a hold of its back legs. Feeling more strength than ever, I spun it around as if I were a hammer thrower—again and again bashing its head and neck onto a tree trunk. What a *rush*. The first impact was the most satisfying, because I could feel its neck breaking. Wasn't much left of its skull when I got through with it.

But even that wasn't the day's highlight. Killed all the dogs in a small pack in Marymoor Park except a shaggy bear-like mutt, which I'd crippled after shooting its legs with my revolver. But it turns out this fight was right close to a litter of puppies in the tall grass right next to the parking lot—probably the offspring of this big male. They must've been about a week old. As the male lay there helpless but trying to struggle, I killed its offspring, one by one, with no mercy.

Hate me? Guess what, I win! You lose! Look—I'm destroying your children, and you can't do anything about it, can you? We both know what your bitches ate to feed these things, don't we? And you know what? When I'm through with your rat-like offspring, I'm going to make you squeal like no dog has before. I'm just dreaming now, as I grab their snouts then twist and break their stupid necks, how I'll make you wish you were never born.

Finished off the male by literally ripping it apart, and the manner in which I did it inspired this beautiful poem:

*I'll tie your front legs to a tree
And your back legs to a car
We'll see if the front legs are attached
As strongly as the back ones are!*

Guess what—it turns out they aren't.

I hate them. Want to rip them to pieces, and that's what I plan to do. I hate them more than I can say.

I'm a tiger of steel, and I prey on dogs. I was born to do this. My newly-discovered fighting ability and talent with guns are no fluke, and those together with the years of intense workouts were meant to prepare me for this sacred war. To give me the strength, stamina, and skills to become a dog-killing machine like the world's never seen. This is my destiny, my calling: to hunt them, to catch them, and to tear them to shreds. I will exterminate them all.

Then this tiger will turn its claws on you. You're mine—hear me? I'll do to you what I'm doing to them, only worse.

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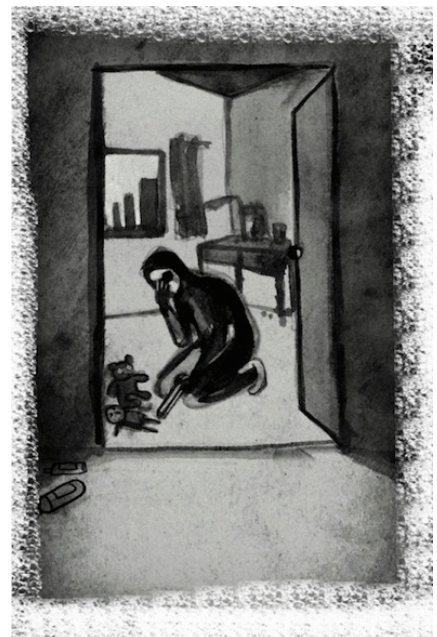
Pure hatred flows through me; I feel its power. It takes away my fear, gives me strength, and shields me with a cloak of invincibility. You can't hurt me now.

Sept. 25th

As I was leaving my apartment in search of more dogs to kill, noticed something this morning that I haven't for a while: Aysha's toys... Haven't thought much about her since that morning Survi was killed.

After staring at her happy, joyful little toys, I fell to my knees crying.

What's...happened to me?



4:32 P.M.

“You are what you choose to be...”

I’ve spent hours thinking about what I’ve become over the last few days. A dark hatred envelops my heart; it’s eclipsed my love for Aysha. Utterly ashamed.

I’ve sunk into a wretched existence. Hatred’s taken control of me, it’s become the passion that spurs me to live, instead of my love for Aysha. I find myself...thriving on my hatred. I’ve lost my humanity, and have chosen to become nothing more than an existence of pure, monstrous evil. I’m no better than Ted Bundy, a bloodthirsty Taliban, or a sadistically murderous North Korean prison guard.

A circle of hate. That’s what I’ve fallen into. The more I hate the dogs, not only do I become ever more immune to the hideousness of my actions toward them, but—and this is the hardest part to admit—the more *pleasure* it gives me to kill them in increasingly gruesome ways. This hate gives me a perverse joy, which just fomented my hatred even further. A vicious circle, in every sense. Me...a savage killer, filled with an ever-increasing, and harder-to-satisfy, hatred for the dogs. When certain ways of torturing and killing them start to become routine, I look for new—and progressively grisly—ways to reignite the pleasure. Like an obsessive drug addict who has to consume ever more dope to get the needed high.

This circle of hate’s a vortex, drawing me in deeper and deeper. What’s my life becoming? With each hateful act, the light of my own life’s growing dimmer. When I can’t satisfy my hatred by mere cruelty, will I turn this hatred toward myself? Perhaps I already have.

I’ve succumbed to the same despicable force that’s always driven people to do unspeakable things to each other. The darkest side of our existence. The only difference here is my hatred’s directed toward the dogs instead of other humans; but it’s no less potent, and no

less sick. The images of what I did to the dogs, especially those puppies, just kill me now. Reminds me of the terrorist militiamen that decapitated young children in Iraq and elsewhere. Am sickened that I justified my monstrous actions by crazily imagining the dogs carry the same loathsome feelings toward me that I've had for them, or that they're the instruments of some evil entity.

Is this what I want to degenerate to? If I'm in fact one of only a few people left in this world, shouldn't I live up to the highest standards that we humans were capable of?

Never again. I will *never again* allow myself to become trapped in this vicious downward cycle of hatred and stupidity. I want to be, I need to be, I *choose* to be better than that.

Let me live in a way that'd make my people, and especially Aysha, proud; let me endeavor to make my remaining life a testament to the human race and to my love for Aysha—even if no one's around to appreciate it.

Sept. 26th

8:25 A.M.

Didn't sleep much last night. Been reflecting upon everything that's happened since this hell struck, and in particular my recent behavior. Recalling how when I was a little boy Mom once told me that I had a heart full of love... God, look at me now. A twisted, miserable excuse of a man.

The monster I became couldn't have been the real me. My gut tells me that both this disaster and the hate that possessed me come from the same source, the same demonic being. Instead of killing me that morning, has it singled me out for an even worse destruction through self-consuming, limitless hatred?

Hell, I don't know. I just know I've got to get out of Seattle; nothing here but lots of death, dogs, and flies. And whatever's out there, I detect its presence growing ever stronger. Its attempt to lure me into a bottomless pit of hatred failed, but what'll it try next? Maybe it only inhabits this cursed city, and I'll be free of its torment once I'm many miles away.

I'm also tired of the haunting memories of that horrible day when...the world died. I'll call it D-Day. Being here in proximity to Aysha's grave also has become an impediment to recovering from my ever-present despair. This despair's come back with a vengeance after I swept it under the rug during my weeklong hate-fest, especially when I reflect back and realize the whole time I was engaged in my killing orgy I saw no signs of anyone else alive.

Need to let go... and move on. Otherwise, I'll stew in these negative emotions forever, and will be drawn into an inescapable whirlpool of despondency. Of course, my love for Aysha will never go away; this love's a living entity inside my heart. But the warmth that I feel from that love will grow if I choose to *live for today and plan for tomorrow*, rather than dwelling in the past...the agonizingly close past I so long to return to, but that I must leave behind—starting today, starting now.

I must find others—they have to be *somewhere*. Statistically, even if I were one in a million, that'd mean several hundred survivors in the U.S. alone. But time to throw in the towel here and go where the probability's highest of finding them—in the great cities of the East Coast and California. I need to do this trip before the frigid East Coast and Midwest winter sets in. If in the (hopefully unlikely) event this first nationwide quest isn't successful, I can spend winter on the California coast, or continue my search in the southwestern states.

As I write this, I realize again that I don't *know* the disaster struck everywhere—there could be some places on Earth where it didn't strike at all. Possibly even entire countries. Perhaps people

from those countries will come to our shores looking for survivors too, before long.

Today I'll plan my trip, and decide on the cities where I'll conduct my search. I'm going to step out of this dead-end existence; going to treat the challenge that lies before me as an adventure. I'll do so with the love of Aysha in my heart, and a love of life in my soul.

Aysha, wherever I go, you'll be with me. We'll see this through. Together, we'll find answers, and we'll rejoice in the life that we still have. Today I also promise: no more hate, forever. From this day forward I make the most human of choices: to use the sacred gift of intelligence to live a positive and creative life, to be the best I can be, and to reject the stupid destructiveness of seductive, ever more monstrous evil.

2:41 P.M.

Walked over to a nearby bookstore and got several maps of the U.S. and various states. Figured out the following: I'll take the I-90 east from Seattle through Chicago to Boston, and then the I-95 to New York City and on to Baltimore. From there I'll get on the I-70 west until I hit the I-15, which I'll take south to San Diego. I'll then head north on the I-5 to L.A., and from there take Highway 1 toward San Francisco to look for a place along the coast to settle for the winter (assuming I find no survivors up to that point). Next spring, I'll get back on the I-5 to go through Portland and back to Seattle.

When I approach Baltimore, I may end up checking out D.C. too, depending on my mood. Among other things, am curious if the president survived. Needless to say, unlikely. If he had, doubtlessly others in the government would've too, and I'd pick up their emergency broadcasts. Is what's left of his body lying in the Oval Office, or maybe in the Rose Garden? Perhaps he wasn't even in D.C. when it hit.

Though my plans will have me on major interstate highways, ironically I might stand a better chance of running into survivors on some of the less-traveled routes, since they pass *through* lots of small towns—unlike the major interstate highways that *bypass* them. Maybe the calamity didn't strike some of these smaller places as horribly as the larger cities like Seattle. So am vacillating a bit about taking U.S. Route 2 east for example, instead of the I-90.

But, the more I think about it, I'm convinced I should concentrate on the big cities first, and on getting to them as quickly as possible. Perhaps sometime in the future I can try some of the smaller routes, if I'm unsuccessful in this first countrywide search.

I'll arm myself to the teeth for this trip, since who knows what the hell I may end up running into. Along the way, I should be able to re-supply myself with ammo at any sporting goods or gun store, though of course hopefully I won't have to. I don't expect to have problems with other supplies—there'll be plenty of markets along the way with canned food, bread, and bottled water. For gas, I can always just siphon from other vehicles when needed, as I've already been doing. Finding vacant motel rooms to spend the night in should be pretty easy too. ("Vacant" of course meaning rooms that were unoccupied on the morning of D-Day—never want to deal with moving decaying bodies again.)

Though I'm mostly excited about this trip, a lot of aspects about it I dread. I imagine I'm going to have to deal with decaying corpses wherever I go. The markets will be full of flies and decomposed, stinking food. The combination of darkness and silence at night will still be terrifying, even if I've gotten a little better at handling it here in Seattle. I'll see grisly sights along the way, such as the remains of children in schoolyards, among countless other things. And there'll be packs of dogs to deal with. Maybe I'll encounter what I dread the thought of: demented, murderous survivors. Or worse, perhaps I'll meet the unknown evil that I fear is lying in wait. Will it

turn out to be an unkillable monster? Or Satan himself?

Despite these apprehensions though, it'll be good to get out of Seattle and hit the road. Who knows what adventures I'll have, or what I'll find out. Trying to imagine this trip is like trying to envision life beyond the grave. Perhaps that's a remarkably apt way to think about it, since I feel like I'm living in a hellish afterlife.

I fear the constant heartache, solitude, and ignorance about this situation are literally going to drive me crazy. If I stay here in Seattle much longer, I don't know if I can keep myself from losing my mind. And, if this journey is to end with my death, I hope to die knowing at least two things: where other survivors are, and what the hell hit us on D-Day?

I'll start preparing for my trip now. Tomorrow, I leave.

Tomorrow...a new beginning awaits.

9:02 P.M.

Spent many hours here today in Denny Park, at Aysha's burial place. Besides leaving flowers again, I just wanted to talk to her. Wanted her to know that I though I'm leaving Seattle, I'm not leaving her.

Aysha, it kills me to leave, but I'll be back someday. Forever you will live in my heart—as long as I'm alive, so will you be. As I told you before, I rejoice in these tears that I shed for you, and I rejoice for this pain in my heart, since they are born from the love and happiness I feel because of you. Your preciousness will always grace this universe. Forever the joy in your heart and your love of life will be felt everywhere.



11:53 P.M.

Just woke up for some reason; went to sleep barely two hours ago. Probably because I'm feeling a bit anxious in anticipation of my trip. I hope I can get back to sleep—I'll need to start this long journey well rested.

Outside my window, the moon's bright tonight, though not quite full. The moonlight shining on the dark, empty skyscrapers and streets makes the downtown area look like something out of a nightmare—like a dead city from the Underworld. No wonder I've the eerie sensation that a diabolical presence exists close by. The usual stillness really adds to the effect. What a stark, life-and-death contrast to the exciting sounds of the bustling metropolis that used to fill the air, and to the beautiful, high-rise-dominated view of the city lights I used to enjoy every night.

Maybe this is a sign, telling me that it's high time to leave Seattle. As this is my last night here before I depart tomorrow, it makes me sad to think that this ghostly scene may become my most enduring memory of this city.



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