All the World Gone

Prologue

It happened slowly. The first signs of trouble began many decades before I was born. War occurred throughout our history, it is a part of who we are. It wasn't until the year 2038 that war became a greater problem than it ever was before. WW3. War in what used to be the Middle East became larger and larger, killing hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Other countries jumped at a chance to show their power and stop the warring and killing, but their involvement only made everything worse.

We were sending out spaceships to try and find a new planet that we could call home. Barely any prospect planets were ever found.

Now it's 2112 and the world still remains in chaos. The production of war supplies as well as the projects started to create new weapons to defeat the opposition crushed the economy. The impoverished population soared as the wealthy were barely touched. Rebellions were common in the United States, where people believed they had a voice. The government sought to destroy these conflicts and rebuild the world to be what it once was, but they knew it wouldn't be possible without the help of something big. They called it the Purge. This is where my family comes in.

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"Dad!" I called. "I have to go to school! I'm gonna be late!"

"I'm coming, one second!" He yelled back.

I waited in silence as I heard muffled shuffling sounds coming from the ceiling. It creaked as he moved frantically above it as dust poured down. I jumped back to avoid it. I hated the new house.

Just then, a loud, powerful knock broke the short silence. I grabbed one of our kitchen knives and walked slowly towards the door. I jumped as the angry fist pounded against the door one again. I looked through the peep hole to see two men dressed in black suits standing stiffly outside the door. Both men has the seal of an eagle on their jacket on the left side of their chests. I knew who they were immediately.

"Dad! Two people from the U.S.S.C. are here!" They were the closest thing we had to a government since the collapse. Those who thought they could still help created the organization to help America become the stable and safe home it used to be. I pushed my face close to the door, "One second!"

At this, my father raced down the stairs. He walked swiftly to the front door and tucked in the parts of his shirt that still hung freely.

"Sorry, Willa. School might have to wait," he said as he opened the door. "Hello," he said with a fake smile. "Is it time already?"

The men grunted and stepped inside. "Julian Cage, you will need to come with us."

"Oh come on, you don't have to be so official," he said, irritated.

"Julian," one of the men said calmly, "we're not here to chat. We have to go."

"Okay, but Willa is coming with me," he said as he put his hand on my shoulder.

"That's fine, just come quickly."

"Dad, are we in trouble?" I asked cautiously.

“Oh no, nothing like that.” He paused. “Just the opposite actually.”

We walked briskly to a car that was waiting for us in front of our house. It was black with dark, tinted windows. I placed my hand on the cold exterior of the car and the side began to compact until there was a hole big enough for both me and my father to climb into. It expanded back again and the men sped away. The whole rise was silent. No one said one word about where we were going or why. I thought about what was happening at school right now and did not miss it. I was at the top of my class, I could afford to miss a day.

We drove for over half an hour, speeding through tunnels until we were somewhere I had never seen before. We pulled up to another tunnel and the men stuck their head out of the widow and faced towards a sort of camera. A beam of light fell on each of their eyes and stayed there a few seconds, and then disappeared. They drove forward into the dark tunnel until we reached the entrance to a large building.

“This is the U.S.S.C headquarters,” one of the men said. They opened their doors and got out of the car so we followed them. Despite the fact that we weren’t in any trouble, I couldn’t help but be nervous.

We walked up to the door and the men repeated the eye scan, then the large door opened and we walked inside. Two other men dressed in the same black ran toward use and frisked us harshly. “Clean!” They both yelled. We continued to walk through intricate hallways until we reached a large conference room filled with people swarmed around a giant table. Everyone turned to look at us.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Julian Cage!” Someone yelled. The crowd erupted in cheering.

“Welcome, Julian,” a man said. “We are proud to have you here to witness all the great work you have done. I’m Edgar, head of the U.S.S.C.”

“Nice to meet you, sir.” My father shook his hand. “I am honored to be here.”

For the past year, my father had been working with the government to create something, a cure. He was assigned to create a cure for a virus the government had created to eradicate all of the problems of our world. The Purge. My father had worked on space and aircraft repairs before his government employment, a job that paid relatively well and allowed us to have a modest life. The U.S.S.C., the Unites States Salvation Committee, had been probing the country for someone who they could use in the labs, and they saw brilliance in my father. They didn’t give him a choice whether to take the job or not but he didn’t care. We were forced to move into the city but I was offered a high education so I dealt with it.

We gathered by the table, looking down at it to see an electronic display of the entire earth.

“After today, this will be ours again!” He yelled. The crowd yelled in return. Edgar pressed his hand down on the table and left it there for a few moments. The screen began to scan his hand and when he was done, the earth was riddled with little red blips. They all had an odd series of numbers underneath them. “Are all of the essentials in custody?” He asked a woman standing next to him.

“Yes, sir,” she replied with a nod. “Everyone grab your masks!” Everyone began to rush to the wall. Compartments opened to reveal masks that my father had created, able to breathe in the toxic air and filter in the cure. My father ushered me to the wall and handed me a mask. I put it

on my face as he did the same and tightened in harshly. My stomach fluttered with every movement.

“Ten seconds until Purge,” Edgar said with a grin. The woman who spoke earlier handed him a mask and he fastened it to his head. He reached toward a button and commenced the countdown. A few seconds passed until…. 3…2…1….

The red blips turned green and released a purple gas that swarmed the surrounding areas. Loud beeps sounded. On every continent, the purple gas consumed the land. I closed my eyes, trying to block out what I knew was really happening. Billions dead. Innocent people. I tried to believe it was for the survival of the human race, but how could this much death be considered survival? I clenched my eyes as tight as I could, but tears still streamed down my face.

Just then, a loud cough penetrated through the alarm. We all turned to face the source. A man lay on the floor, crumbled in a ball. He hacked viciously, blood trickling from his mouth. Another began to cough as well, and then another.

“The cure is ineffective!” Edgar screamed. “Launch Exodus mission!” Everyone who wasn’t coughing up their insides tore off the masks and ran through the door we had first come through. My father grabbed my hand and pulled me with them. We ran down more hallways until we reached a room, the walls lined with doors. Escape pods.

He opened one of the doors and pushed me through it and began to step in when a hand clasped him on the shoulder and pulled him back. It was Edgar.

“I’m sorry, Julian. We need to separate you two.” His face was filled with apparent sadness.

“What the hell are you talking about? I’m staying with my daughter!” He turned around to step back in the pod but Edgar yanked him back. My father turned to look at him. “Don’t touch me.” Anger plagued his voice.

“Julian, look, don’t worry. You will both be transported to the prospect planet, but we need you to travel on different ships,” he said calmly. My father did not respond. “If you are both on the same pod and something malfunctions then….”

“Then you will have no one else to modify the human race to fit any unfamiliar conditions on the planet,” my father finished.

“Yes, I knew you would understand. You know what it’s like up there. We need at least one brilliant mind to make the environment livable. Please. Lyla will keep her safe,” he promised. Lyla was my mother’s best friend since before I was born.

Without another word, my father turned to face me. He hugged me tight and kissed me on the cheek, then ran. Edgar gave me a quick nod of his head and left with him. How did he know what it was like up there? Was he working on the Exodus mission too? He was too far away to ask, so I would have to wait until the arrival.

A few others piled into the 10 feet diameter pod, everyone sitting shoulder to shoulder. Fear spread through me like wildfire, the Exodus mission extremely unlikely. Another countdown began, the numbers ringing in my ears like a bell in my brain…. 3…2…1….

The floor began to rumble beneath us. Loud sounds of metal clashing and the engine igniting echoed in the small pod. Little circular windows sat a few feet above the floor, but revealed nothing. We began to rise. Soon, a chaotic ground came into view, small fires burned strongly on the streets. Cars lay wasted on the sides of once busy roads. People run and scream frantically as

the ones they loved shriveled on the dirt and blood spilled from their mouths. A grey sky cloaked the sun, casting a never ending shadow on those below. I had to look away. Other pods rose slowly with us, and continued to do so until we were clear of all bridges and building tops. We were approaching the final peak of a bridge when the pod began to shake. Small screams escape mouths as we looked out a window to see one of the pods falling quickly to the ground, engulfed in flames. I watched as it crashed to the surface. I could only hope none of its passengers were my father.

As we passed the top of the bridge, the accelerators let out a loud purr. Without warning, we shot into the air, our surroundings blurring around us. The grey sky turned a vibrant blue as we flew passed the cloud line. The sun burned brightly through the riveted windows. We turned away to shield our eyes but I couldn't help but move closer, to feel the long lost warmth touch my pale skin. Higher and higher we rose until we were within only feet of the top of the atmosphere. I could see nothing beyond it, just blue.

The pod began to speed up, until we came closer, closer, closer. I closed my eyes as we crashed through it, rattling the pod like a children's toy.

We had finally cleared it.

The sight was unlike I could ever imagine, miles and miles of nothing but black space filled with small glimmers of light. Gasps escaped the mouths of every passenger. Through the window, we could see the 10 other pods floating around us and relief flooded through me. I was unsure of space travel, though some say that the U.S.S.C. had been conducting searches for planets since the breakout of WW3.

Everyone knew what was to come next. The Sleep. The coma-like state we must go in to endure the 17 year journey to the new planet without one taste of food or water.

"Chronic Sleep begins in ten seconds. Ten, nine, eight, seven…," a robotic voice spoke.

The air in the pod began to cool, the windows began to frost. I closed my eyes and clenched my fists as the air began to nip at my skin. I felt my body begin to relax, my heartbeat begin to relax. My mind screamed at the frigid air stung my skin but I could not bring myself to move.

"one." My vision blurred and my eyelids became heavy as my mind began to drift. My eyes closed one more time, then all I saw was nothing.

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"Willa. Hey, Willa, get up." My mind was groggy and my vision was blurry. I tried to pry my eyes open but I closed them tight once again as unbearable light seeped through the pod door. I could only see the vague figure of someone crouched next to me. "We're here. Welcome to Janis, our new home. It's named after the Greek god of opportunity or something…maybe even just a way out," the familiar voice said jokingly. Suddenly, my mind cleared. I shot up.

"Eli!" I grabbed him by the neck and hugged him tightly. He hugged back. "I was so worried, I thought you weren't on the pods!" We let go.

"Yeah, my mom, her, uh, fancy new job raised us up a bit," he said bashfully.

"Well, I'm so happy that you're here!" I gave him another quick hug.

"Yeah, well, I'm on guard duty while we're here. I have to pull my weight, make sure I 'wasn't brought up here for nothing'," he said, mocking the deep voice of Edgar.

"Oh, my god, we're here!" I jumped up and ran to the door of the pod. I closed my eyes and braced myself for a new, scary world for us to explore. I opened them and gasped as I did so.

Trees swarmed every inch of the ground around the small clearing where the pods landed. The sky above was tinged with light green, no more of the blue skies once had on earth. The ground was covered in grass and dirt. The air was thin, as if I was ducking my head under a blanket, and staying that way for many minutes.

“Willa!” I turned to face the strained voice.

“Lyla! We made it! We’re safe.” Lyla stared at the ground. “What’s wrong…?” I became sick to my stomach, knowing what she was going to say.

“You’re father...,” she paused, “he was on the pod that didn’t make it past the atmosphere.” Tears welled in both of our eyes. “I’m so sorry, Willa.” She grabbed me and pulled me in close to her. She held me tight as I sobbed into her shoulder. I couldn’t think. The only true family I had left, gone. “I’m so sorry.” Her voice shook. It was hard to catch my breath.

We stayed together and grieved in the tents that the guards had set up as exploration parties were released into the dark, thick woods to search for resources. After what felt like hours, I left the tent to talk to Edgar, looking for anything to occupy my mind.

“Edgar, I—“

“I’m so sorry about your father, Willa. Truly, I am,” he said with what seemed to be pity.

“I’m—" I choked, “I’m fine. Is there something I can do? I have to be able to help with something,” I said, trying to keep my voice from quivering.

“Yes, actually. Don’t leave camp,” he commanded sternly. “We need you for future projects. I’m sure you’ve noticed the air? We won’t even be able to run to the bathroom without

passing out from lack of oxygen. This atmosphere was the closest thing to earth's, but we still will have to change fast if we want to survive."

"You want me to modify our lungs?" I said in amazement.

"Something like that, but not until we are sure we have the resources to live here and we get settled. Until then, don't leave," he said softly, but still some seriousness stained his tone. "One of the guards, Clark, will accompany you wherever you go to…to keep you…safe." He walked away.

I turned around and began to walk away when a scream sounded in the distance. Someone stumbled into the clearing, uniform torn into shreds and blood gushing from his limbs and face.

"We were, attacked," the guard heaved. "By creatures, barbarians. Everyone else, was…taken." And with that, he fell to the ground, unconscious.

"Everyone, go to the pods and shut the doors! Guards, organize yourselves and prepare to leave!" Edgar yelled. "Clark," he said to a young guard with their back straight and salute ready, "protect Willa at all costs and *do not let her leave this camp*," he demanded.
Clark nodded and saluted, "Yes, Sir." He ran over to me with a gun slung on his shoulder. Edgar nodded went back to organizing the guards.

He ushered me into the pod and forbade me to leave. I nodded, rolling my eyes. Suddenly, worry shot into my mind. "Eli, where's Eli?" I inquired desperately.

"He was among the exploration party that was attacked, ma'am," Clark said with minimal expression.

“What? We have to get him!” I paused. “And don’t call me ma’am. We went to school together for eight years, Clark.”

“We have to get all of the guards back. That’s why they’re leaving,” he said with a smart tone. He would follow orders at every cost, but I had to think of a way to escape. An idea popped into my mind.

“Don’t you want to be out there? Risking your life to save your comrades? That would show everyone how capable you are. He would promote you to his second in a heartbeat,” I persuaded.

“I know what you are doing. You aren’t leaving.”

“I know you want to be the best, and you never will be if you just stay here in the safety of our camp. You need to prove what you can do.” I pleaded in my mind. He didn’t respond for a few moments.

“We leave at dusk.”

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We gathered up supplies and left with ease, every guard on the search. The trees were dense and strong, slowing our movement. A yellow sun sat low in the sky, sinking minute by minute, creating a mix of yellows, blues, and greens that were cast above us.

Trees shook all around us, I tried to just blame the wind. We had broken through the tree line to a dirt path. “I know they went in this direction to follow any signs of native inhabitants, but—“ He stopped abruptly and fell to his knees. Blood trickled from his mouth and spurted out in a cough. I jumped back and screamed. A spear with the tip as sharp as a razor protruded from his stomach. He fell to the ground, lifeless. I began to run in the opposite direction from which

the spear had come. I ran as fast as my feet could carry me, and after only a few moments, fell to the ground, exhausted. My chest heaved up and down violently as I tried to catch my breath. The edges of my vision darkened and blurred. Distorted figures appeared all around me, but I was unable to make them out before my eyes closed.

I awoke on a cot, a soft bed made of furs. I bolted upright as I recalled what had happened. I looked around frantically, trying to find a way out. I sat in a cave, dimly lit by torches. No natural light shone into the cave from any direction. My heart raced as feet pounded on the cold floor. Suddenly, a soothing voice echoed on the walls. “Willa,” it called. “Welcome to our new home.”

I turned to face the voice. My mind raced as I saw the source. My father. White noise filled my ears as my eyes weren’t able to focus on anything.

“Willa, don’t be afraid, I’ll explain everything…. Just say something,” he said calmly.

I forced words out of my mouth, “How, how are you here? Lyla told me it was your pod that exploded. Why…why would she lie to me? Why--?” My voice faltered as a new figure came into view. I slowly backed away, my hands still shaking though they were pressed against my sides until they turned white. The figure was tall and wiry. Its skin was tinted with a light blue, covered in white furs, similar to the ones I laid upon. His head sported long hair, tied up in a ponytail. Its face was much like that of a human, two eyes, a nose, and a mouth…his ears. His ears were long and slim like that of a wolf, they flipped back and forth with each step I took. “You, you’re the beasts that attacked the guards!” I screamed in horror. “They’re monsters dad! Eli, where is he?” I yelled in anger. “Where is he?!”

“Willa, Willa, I’m right here,” called Eli and he ran into view from further inside the cave. “Don’t worry.” He came up to me and hugged me tightly. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know your dad was here.” He quieted to a whisper, “He killed my entire group. I didn’t know he would take me—“

My father cut in, “Eli, please. Let me explain.” He sat on a wooden chest that sat against the uneven wall. “Willa, prepare yourself for what I’m about to tell you, okay?” I nodded. “The cure failed on purpose. All of the time I spent working on it, wasn’t really time at all. It was nothing, a combination of purposeless chemicals. I knew earth was destined to die. They had only furthered its destruction, until it was too late…until all the world, gone.” He paused. “I knew the Exodus plan would send us here. I’ve been communicating with the Janis for years over the ansible, you know, the space communication system. I made a translator to enable us to understand each other.

“Because of me, they knew that we were coming, and I knew they wouldn’t like it. I told them that if they let us join them, we would rid Janis of the other humans,” he explained with a grin.

“Why would you do that, dad? Why would you kill everyone we know? The only chance of human survival?” I asked nervously.

“We have always been nothing, honey. Pushed down and then pulled back up by the ear for years by the tall and proud men that think they rule this world. They don’t, we will.” He stood up.

“They knew I willed the cure to fail, they had been suspecting it and I knew it. Edgar followed me to my pod but as soon as he left, I bolted to a different one.”

I knew what he was going to say. “They tried to murder you. They blew up your ship on purpose. They wanted you to pay.”

“I told you they were monsters.” He motioned to the creature. “This is Silas, he is the leader of the Order of Ixil, the largest, most powerful clan on Janis. He has already agreed to help me, help us.” He walked up to me and stood no more than a few inches away.

Even with him this close, I still couldn’t recognize his face.

“We are going to wage war on the Earthlings.”