

## CHAPTER 1

### JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE LIFE

A dim glow flickers across my eyelids as my sleep is roused by a clicking clock by my head, ever present and ever accurate. I can tell my torchlight is going out, as the light fades and is replaced by complete darkness. I decide to pry myself from the sheets, as I detect the click-clack of the night creatures outside my thin wooden walls. I relight my bed torch, and check the clock to notice that it reads early morning, yet the first rays of the sun have not even glimpsed over the horizon yet. I take the clock's haste as an opportunity, as a reminder that with each night that passes, the numbers of the enemy grow, as they ponder and scheme, waiting for me to make my mistake, the move that will place me directly into harm's way when the least protected, and take one of the few remaining benevolent life forms from this world. With this in mind, I gather my clothing, just a simple chest plate of iron with a leather cap and shinguards, from the labeled chest, just one in a row that I've toiled for months to gather the resources to fill, and open my front door to confront my evils.

Just another day in the life.

## CHAPTER 2

### A MUCH NEEDED CHANGE

Filling my chest plate pockets with the spoils of battle - just a few bones and feathers - I return to my house for some long overdue renovations. Drawing from my huge reserve of cobblestone I had accumulated, from all the long hours of chipping away at the endless stone expanse of the underground, I take note of what the current layout is, and the changes needed. I had constructed a stone floor-and-roof, with walls of wood to insulate from the winters and save on material. The floor layout was a two story quick-cross, and a single spiral stairway descending into oblivion for so called convenience. While the safety of a monitored, indoor mine shaft was a huge boon, the same depth could take a life with a single false step, and I had made a mental note to construct a railway to the bottom in the hopes of a hastier entrance, and eventually, a powered railway to assist in the exit. This was a far ways off, however, as my luck had me finding a huge variety of ores and resources, from coal to copper, but my two desires, gold and diamonds, had eluded me, but I knew it was only a matter of time. I shook the matter from my mind, and went to work by bits and pieces, keeping a steady pace and playing one of my precious records to keep myself entertained. A strange thing, those records, a seemingly designed construct in an otherwise randomly natural world. Regardless of their origin, they kept my rainy days brighter and played over the sounds of the groans and hisses outside, or worse, dull, grueling silence.

I finished my renovations, mainly composed of replacing my crude cobblestone with refined stone, allowing me to chip away at the primitive feeling of my home that had lingered for many weeks since I had moved from my dirt and wood hut, just a few miles south. Strangely, even that short distance offered a huge change in climate, going from a sunny-year-round tropical paradise to a temperate zone with a very harsh winter, almost inhospitable. This was part of my want of upgrading my place, though, as the

longer and more difficult winters allowed for greater freedom from the creatures, as they would take to the natural caves scattered about to retreat from the cold. The large lake in front of my house could be entertaining, though, as the sheer size of it when frozen allowed you to slide clear from one side to the other.

Returning my tools to the chest proper, I looked out my sun window and take note of the position of the sun, taking a mental note to construct a more mobile measure of the time than my crude wall clock that had the mobility of a tree.

I survey my handiwork, glad to have taken the opportunity before the fall of winter to restructure my home. The day almost done, I settle into my bed near my working furnace to heat the large space of my home, the soft sheets I had tediously woven comforting and wrapping me. Not before long, sleep takes its next victim.....

I wake with a start, hearing a banging on the front door, the back door, every surface of my home not smooth stone rattling and clattering as the hellish calls of the walking dead reverberated the wooden surfaces in the room. I knew that they couldn't get through the stone, but the wooden door could potentially be simple enough to figure out, so I hustled to my bedroom door, picking up a sword along the way in case they had managed to get in. As I sprinted towards the source of the noise, it grew louder and louder before the last room, as I skid to a stop, when nothing could be heard over it, nothing but my heart wildly beating.

### CHAPTER 3 A SILHOUETTE IN THE MIND

Just as I reached the last room, however, the noise dropped to dead silence and I could hear nothing but my own ragged breaths softly echoing off the walls. I paused, not knowing what to make of this, and hesitated before backing up to the threshold of the last door. Those precious few seconds nearly cost me my life. The front door literally exploded in wood shards as the front wave of the night creatures surged in, carrying with them terrible howls, and the stench of death itself...

And yet, I curiously think after the fact, when they spot me, they do not charge to avenge their fallen brethren, or even for simple want of blood. They simply....stare. I can do nothing, as my bow is too far to retrieve and my sword has a slow attack, as well as a pathetic range. I decide to retreat to the next room to get a chance at setting up an ambush for any pursuing creatures, but I bump into the wall behind me and feel around for the door, keeping my eyes on the enemies in front all the while. Oddly, I notice my wall has become far softer, almost like it has been curtained....I snap my sword arm back in the realization that I have been surrounded, but it is too late, as my reflexes are outmaneuvered by their simultaneous parrying, knocking my sword from my hands, and landing it.....at his feet.

Gazing up from the floor, I take first notice of the being that had seemingly orchestrated this entire event. I realize that it was him I had been seeing when I had been scavenging in the night...his gaunt figure. His strange, spindly limbs. And the eyes....the eyes that felt as if they stared into the depths of your soul. Ever watchful and ever knowing, it did not surprise me that had been the leader of this attack, as he was the only seemingly alive creature present, the rest being things of pure instinct and

want, no thought involved. I know that should I survive this encounter, however unlikely, it is only fitting I give him a name. A name befitting his stature, his gaze, his presence itself. The feeling that the wrong move you'd make in its presence would be the last you'd make. Endermen. That's what I would call him, or, if I was truly the unluckiest bastard to have lived, them.

## CHAPTER 4

### A SEQUENCE OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

The Enderman walked up to me, in a long, strutting way, with its too long legs and strange color, a pitch black tone, and leaned down to my position on the ground, looking with a wide set stare that had eyes of red, or at least that began as red and time had faded to a dull pink, like a glowing pair of orbs filled with both malice and curiosity, as if it was an almost...intelligent being staring back. I knew then that this, this would be my test, something that I must overcome or be obliterated by, and yet at that moment we did nothing but stare into each others sockets, as if gauging what the other might or could do. I made the first move, not truly knowing how the creature ... perhaps not creature. Perhaps just a man in a different form. Looking at me in just the same way. I made the first move by clambering to my feet, and the man stepped away to give room, as if waiting for my initiative. I took the opportunity as quickly as possible, snatching my sword from the now empty space, hopping back up and raising it level, while backing towards an inside door. He did not know what to make of this, simply peering at me all the way, like a deer stuck in a torchlight. I touched the door handle, and with the click it made unlatching, the Enderman realized my intents, and with a ghostly, rasping voice, whispered a single syllable, unintelligible, but with a clear meaning: kill.

The ring of undead launched itself at me in a single drove, and grasping the handle and yanking, before turning around and jumping headlong over the sill, slamming the door behind me and barricading with my back, as a great slam against the other side pushed me from the frame, and it took every last ounce of my strength and then some to keep the door closed. Before not too long, the scratches of bony hands dragging across the door make me realize the futility of my attempt, and I make a final mental note to shore up the doors with iron before survivalism kicks in, and I propel myself with the force of the creatures across the room, through the front door, and out into the pitch black of wintry night, my sword my only possession in tow.

## CHAPTER 5

### COLD DESPAIR

I sprinted through my gate, the soft wind whooshing past my ears, the gradual groans and grunts of the creatures receding into the distance behind me, obscured by an ever present fog that thickened over great distances, making long distance sight nigh impossible. The fog was probably the greatest advantage of the monsters, making the great mass that had attacked unknown to me until they were breathing down my neck. The trees whipped past with a wind drawing up, blowing from the north....directly at my

back. With the wind was carried the slowly loudening noises of the creatures, which I expected in pursuit but not at a pace near matching my own. With their newly found leader, however, I could not rely on old notes of the activity and behavior of the monsters, as anything could happen, and so I must expect it to happen, or let my unpreparedness kill me.

I slowed my run to a jog, then a trot, before finally walking out of sheer exhaustion, the adrenaline wearing off. Noting the position of the sun relative to where I was, I calculated I was head west by southwest, a direction I had never previously explored. My armor was clinking the whole way, until I could be distracted by nothing but the rhythmic noise, when I began to notice a significant change of environment, the trees becoming sparser and sparser, some dead trunks being overtaken by...sand dunes? Then as I broke out through a stand of trees, my sight line cleared to reveal a massive desert, easily covering what I thought to be half the continent, judging from my few coastal sea travels.

The desert was a vast rolling ocean of sand, with only the occasional tree sprouting from the sand and rock. I had to make up my mind then and there: would I continue into the desert or be returning to my home to repel what I could of the creatures? Even should I venture into the desert, I could not last forever. I would have to return, soon, or risking losing everything I had ever earned and fought for.

I decided on the further venture into the desert, as my presence in it may attract the creatures to it, giving me the ability to go around them, and find my home less populated, and easier to take back. I began the slow drudge through the desert, stopping at regular points, keeping an eye out for anything of use or help.

As I crest yet another dune, the wood border just barely on the horizon, I notice a shimmering patch of sand, almost like it was heated, yet with the sun peeking over the horizon, it cannot be the light....water. It's an oasis! I rush to the the side of the pool, taking in gulps of water, sandy but drinkable, with my strength restored to me after the hours of ambling in the desert. I sit down under a bush that has sprouted up, facing away from the sun, and remove my heavy armor, but keep my sword in hand. With the hilt, I begin scrawling out a rough plan of what lay before me....

## CHAPTER 6 REINFORCEMENTS

Weary from my planning and slow, repetitive motion of scribbling in the sand, I go back over in my mind again and again my plan, mostly improvised, but something to work off of nonetheless. Satisfied i've made the best of it, I pick myself back up and begin to ..... I hear a low, guttural growl directly behind me. Unprotected, but armed, I slowly, slowly, swivel around to see the source. It's a wolf, in contempt, irritated, and hungry. It is of a lean build, a long but narrow head, with a short tail and a coat of dark grey with a streak of grey down its spine. I can see that it has made a bad decision venturing this far out into the hostile waste, and that my survival now rests in its fate. I tentatively reach out for my armor, but the wolf bares its teeth and lets out another, deeper growl, and I decide it would get to me faster than I to it, and I retract my hand. I suddenly remember that in my armor was a little bone, picked from one of my kills that

previous morning, that might satiate the creature and make it go away, if not make me look so appetizing. I begin to reach back for my armor, the wolf growling again, and rifling inside my chest plate for the bone, my hand hitting upon it and pulling it out rather quickly. Seeing the bone, the creatures growl became even more tense, louder and deeper but with a tinge of a whimper to it, crying out for the food. I toss it in front, and the wolf scampers back for a moment, before timidly edging up to it, sniffing it, expecting it, and finally taking it in its jaws and snapping it in two, swallowing it whole. I am oh so glad that bone was not in my body....

Now at least a little bit less hungry but alive, the wolf sprang forward about five feet away and sat, looking quite expectant, ears tilted down and totally silent. It's as if food made it docile, although to be honest, I could say the same thing for myself, so that was no surprise. Looking at the wolf, it didn't seem quite as dangerous with its coat flat and eyes perky. Almost...pet-like. I figured what the hell, what's the worst that could happen? So I snap my fingers and slap my knees, the universal look for come, and before I know it, 150 pounds of fur and meat is flying headlong at my chest. The sheer impact knocks the wind out of me, and I slam back onto a billowing sand dune that makes me start coughing horribly. The wolf is now on my chest, sitting, staring at me with full eyes. It opens its jaws wide, teeth dripping with gore and spit, tongue flipping about in anticipation, and goes for the...lick? I don't understand. I thought I had made my last move, and yet, the mutt seemed to like me, at least enough to not make me dessert. This would be an interesting relationship....

The wolf finally backed off after much pushing and prodding, sitting on its haunches with an expectant look and a pleading face. Its like it wanted me to give it something, yet I had nothing to give.....a name. It wanted a name.

"How...\*cough\* how about a name? Is that \*cough\* what you want?"

My voice was raspy and dry, having sat unused for months, since I became bored of just sitting idly and talking to my own reflection in the water. The wolf sprang up onto its feet, tongue lolling out, as if acknowledging yes, and so I make a note to begin thinking of something as best I can do.

"Well, I can't make any promises, but I'll think of something. Right now, we have to get going, alright? Come?"

I collect my belongings, intently watched the whole time, slipping on my armor and placing items back in my pockets. I begin to walk forwards, looking back at the animal, and see it standing idly, head tilted, just staring. I sigh and begin to get into a slow jog, but just as I turn to the front, I can hear a sloshing of sand and panting rapidly approaching, before breeze past my right side and a blur of grey streaked with black tells me it understood perfectly well.

Looks like its going to be an interesting return journey.

## CHAPTER 7

### TAG TEAM

As the forest grew on the horizon and the sand became interspersed with dirt and rock, the sand becoming a memory, I was forced to come to terms with the fact that I would be fighting back a monstrous force that I had no idea where it was, where they

came from, or even how many there were. Realizing they saw me flee in one direction, it would be wise to take a large circle around to the back of my home, in the hopes of catching them by surprise, or at least to get an idea of the force I was up against. The wolf, eagerly keeping pace with a quiet pant, was quick to the match his movements to mine, and....wait, his? I hadn't actually bothered checking if it was male or not. Peeking over, I quickly amend it in my mind to female, something oddly unexpected, as I would have thought the females would keep with the males or die from attacks from other creatures. It would seem as if mine had some more wits about her, not unsurprising if she tracked me to the desert just for a bone, where I would be weakest and not expect any life.

As the desert completely gave way to forest, I began a slow, arcing loop about where I thought my house was, taking the rolling hills to the left, before peeling off after scoring a particularly choice slab of beef from an unsuspecting heffer with an arrow now in its neck. I fed the two of us and recuperated myself fully, but as I began again, she stayed back, seemingly oblivious to any of my calls. A name would do her well, but what? I didn't truly recall my own name, it had been so long since I had been called it...

Thorn, maybe? She was certainly being a pain in my ass right about now...maybe Gale? She could certainly run like no other.

"Gale! Come, girl!"

She stayed put, turning up her nose at the name. What could she possibly like...

"Rose!" I said, in my quietest voice, barely louder than a hoarse whisper, "Come!"

She gallivanted towards me, tongue lolling out, yet barely rustling the leaves beneath her feet. I gave her no opportunity to trample me again, and set off in the same direction, the forest blurring by. I would have to set about the task of a collar sometime, but in the meantime, I'd-

A noise like that of a twig snapping jarred me from my running daze, as I unsheathed my sword and hunkered low to the ground to keep quiet and make my presence unknown. Groans penetrated the underbrush, and a high pitched creaking and clattering told me that it wasn't just one I was up against, but at the same time, I was not alone either. I quickly planned out an attack strategy, dependent on where the creatures were, and psyched myself up for the move. Breathing slowly and then more and more quickly, I leapt out of the brush, and saw two of them, each with their backs to me and slowly walking with a clumsy and careless step. I took the skeleton first, with a single glancing blow to the base of the spine, cutting the legs from the torso, the two pieces clattering to the ground.

I turned around, and the other creature had been made aware of my presence, and lunged at my throat with two outstretched arms. I had no time to react, to defend or parry, as the creature suddenly was thrown sideways, away from me, and I noticed Rose clinging to its back, teeth burrowed into the nape of its neck, growling deeply and thrashing her head in an attempt to snap the neck of the undead. I sidestepped around her right, bringing my sword heavily down on the skull of the creature, having heard it land with a sound like both a squelch and a thud.

I yanked out the haft, the blade tip slick with a rotted mess of blood and gray matter, and went to wipe it on my leather leggings, when a sharp, biting pain came from

my left heel. I twist around, and realize just what has happened. The skeleton's upper half had pulled itself along the ground, then attempted to take a chomp out of my leg. I shake my leg, dislodging the teeth of the creature, and brought my right foot around and kicked the sternum. The skull popped off the torso, which went bouncing away. The skull lay there, jaw chattering away, before I stooped to pick it up, bringing it level with my own head. The eyes were empty sockets, but had a faint glow in them, as if some energy had implanted a consciousness - if a primitive one - and left it to its own devices. The jaw clicked open and close even faster, seemingly more and more angry with every second it was so close to its prey, but couldn't clear those six inches. Finally, when I thought it might leap out of my hand from such rage, I smirked, dropping it directly down, and punted it as absolutely hard as I could. As it sailed through the air, I could have sworn I heard a scream....but that was probably just my imagination.

Glancing back at Rose, I saw she was nosing about the undead's body, seemingly without success, so I snapped off a forearm bone from the limp skeleton, tossing it to her as a small reward for her help. She yelped, and immediately began gnawing on the bone, happy as I could imagine an animal could be. We were going to have some fun.

## CHAPTER 8 STAKEOUT

As we began our journey towards home, the best pace I kept was barely that of Rose's, as the pace of a dog can far out run that of mine, and she oftentimes would gallop around a corner, vanishing from sight for a moment or two, before I would catch up and force her to stop, or I would die from exhaustion before any sword or arrow. As I came over my final hill, the sounds of the creatures wafting over the hillside, reverberating off the dense thickets of trees, told me that they had not budged from their prey's, me, home. The sounds were a veritable cacophony, as the number if trees, echoing their howls and screams, coming from all directions, lent to the feeling that we had been surrounded for many steps and were simply walking into a trap. Regardless, I knew that I had to take back my home, as the sheer amount of resources I had gathered would be a devastating loss.

Stepping over a fallen log, my foot came to rest on a single twig, and as I felt it giving way to my weight, I stepped placing pressure on it, hearing the slow, eerie creak of the wood overlaid by the sudden silence of the creatures. Wait, they couldn't possible have known I was here, could they? I had barely made a noise. Yet, there it was, no noise but my own heartbeat and measured breaths. I had to move, though, so I decided to keep giving weight to the fallen branch before I was detected.

SNAP.

The sound of the split wood echoed around the clearing, a brief moment of silence. And then, just as I had let out a breath I didn't know I was holding, a single chorus of a scream came from my home and the woods beyond, blood-curdling and hair-raising. I immediately unsheathed my sword, before settling into a stance, Rose slavering next to me, teeth bared.

So much for a quiet entrance.

CHAPTER 9  
SNICKER SNACK