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Reach for the Sky

A STORYBIRD BOOK



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Chapter 1

The first thing I was greeted by was bad news. The rations were being decreased for, the 3rd time this month. The messenger who brought the news, Quan, tried to assure me that everything would be fine. But I knew it wouldn't. I was the one of the storekeepers, and I knew that we wouldn't have the food to last another year.

“By the way, Caan’s holding a council. It should be around an hour from now.” Quan told me. Caan was the oldest member in our sad little group of survivors - he’s almost 45 years old, a scientist, and therefore, our leader.

“Is it about the rations?” I asked.

“You’ll see.”

Many years ago, an airborne virus has spread around the world. All governments had issued an nation-wide lockdown. Everyone had retreated underground. No one in our little group of survivors had seen the sky in their life.

An hour later, I was in the Dome, a huge structure were we had our meetings. I sat down with the rest of the settlement, when Caan started the council.

“As I’m sure some of you have noticed, our rations have drastically decreased. If we continue at this rate, we’ll be dead in 4 months.” Some gasps ran through the crowd. “So,” Caan continued, “I’m creating an expedition. They are to explore the caverns for supplies, or even, a way out. Do any of you wish to volunteer for this mission?” 3 volunteered, and 3 went, out to the caves where they would never return.



Over a week had passed. Suddenly, one of the expedition, Vess, came sprinting back to my shelter, panting and bleeding from several cuts.

“There are... *creatures* in the caves!” He gasped. Caan bolted toward my shelter, having been alerted of the news by others.

“What about the others?”

“Dead, all dead.” Vess coughed. “I found something.” He reached into his backpack and pulled out a sheet of paper. I didn’t see it long, but it looked like a map. Caan grabbed it and stared at it so intensely, I thought it would burst into flames.

“Emergency council, immediately.” Caan announced. Once everyone had gathered into the Dome, and Vess had been treated for his wounds, Caan started. “Of the expedition, only Vess survived. But the sacrifice of the others is not in vain. They’ve discovered the lab.” Expressions ranged from shocked to confused to grieved. Some people thought that the lab was the only way out of the caves. Some didn’t know it existed. All weren’t sure it existed. “I’m sending another expedition, this time directly to the lab. We only have the supplies for two. One will be Vess, due to his knowledge of the area. Do we have any volunteers for the other position?” This time, no one raised their hand. “Then we vote.”

So... yeah. I don’t know why everyone wants to get rid of me, but here I am. At first there weren’t any issues. We hiked

through the caverns for around 3 days, when we saw them... the creatures. They were basically bats with larger mouths and teeth, with withered, black skin.

“Keep quiet,” Vess warned. “They have sensitive hearing. Even the smallest fart will cause them to attack.” I appreciated the humor, but I then I laughed. The creatures’ heads simultaneously turned toward us. One creature dropped toward us. Then another. Soon, an entire swarm of them were diving at our heads. “You *had* to do that!” Vess muttered as we ran.

“This is not the time for this!”

“Whatever.” We ran into a little ditch and dropped onto our stomachs, covering our heads with our hands. A few moments later, we crawled out with a just a few scratches.

“We’re totally off course,” Vess told me. “There’s about 10 minutes of walking to get back on the path.”

“Actually,” I said, studying the map, “We might be able to shortcut through here.”

“Huh,” Vess stared at me a moment. “You know, there’s a reason everyone voted you for this expedition. You have lots of useful skills that’ll definitely help on this task. No one voted just to get rid of you.”

“Um.... thanks.”

“Anytime.”



A week later, we arrived at the lab. It was pitch black, so Vess went in ahead of me with our flashlight. A few minutes later, I heard the hum of the generator, and the lights flickered on. I stepped into the lab. There were tables with old papers and ancient computers, and test tubes with strange wires attached to them, with syringes lying on the tables.

“Come on, we need to find a way out.” Vess said, snapping me out of my stupor. We looked around, but the most of the doors were locked, and we didn’t know where to start. Eventually, Vess suggested that I check out one of the computers for info. I walked over to an old computer called an... “iMac Pro”. The screen crackled to life, showing me a paused video. I unpaused it.

“Day 43, Log 28,” A shrimpy-looking man was standing in front of the ancient screen, wearing a white lab coat. “Recent test results have gone in. The test subjects have shown almost immediate reactions. Showing symptoms of nausea, loss of breath, and low temperatures. One interesting side effect seems that the newly discovered virus causes the victim’s skin to turn withered at the site of infection.” I scrolled through some more, trying to find out more about this ominous virus.

“Day 51, Log 30. A glitch has occurred in the system. Virus now airborne. We have sealed the outside doors, including the ones in Section 2. Awaiting further instructions.” I had finally figured it out. This virus was the disease that caused the government to issue a lockdown. I scrolled through the computer’s data files, trying to find more info on the onimus

virus, when disaster struck - Vess' fingers were withered black, his arm rapidly becoming withered as well. He dropped to the floor, clutching his arm. I grabbed him and dragged him toward the door with faded writing, reading: "Section 2". I pounded on the door, but it was still sealed. But, in all the chaos, I forgot about the creatures.

A long, wailing screech pierced the musty air. Soon, a huge mass of screaming creatures were swooping toward us. I pulled out a shovel from my backpack, but it wasn't much use. I whacked a few of them out of the air, but they just kept coming, to the point where I just ducked under a desk and covered my neck and prayed. The creatures clawed and bit, but eventually, they retreated. I had about 40 cuts, but that wasn't important now. Vess was still by the door, curled up in a ball. I crawled toward him, but I collapsed from exhaustion. That's when I noticed it - the hole. A small hole, barely bigger than my palm, where the virus must've escaped into the air. I tried break the door down with my shovel, but that didn't work, so I started the long and painful process of digging through the dirt in the floor. It took about 15 minutes, but it seemed like 15 hours. I crawled through, pulling Vess behind me. When we got through, Vess was gasping for air, and I knew he wouldn't last long. I pulled him to the stairs that led to the surface, but by then, he was gasping for air.

"Leave me," He gasped. "Get to the surface. Just let the creatures kill me." I was gonna make some cliché, "I'm not gonna

leave you!” type deal, when something he said turned some gears in my head.

The creatures had withered black skin, a sure sign of disease. How were they not dead? I crawled back under the door and grabbed one of the creatures. It took me a while to find it, but I eventually found a patch of skin behind the head that wasn't withered. I fumbled around for a syringe, and filled it with blood from that part of the skin. I crawled back under the door, it was a desperate attempt, but I injected it into his arm. I crossed everything that could possibly be crossed, and hoped. 5 minutes. Hopefully, his blood cells didn't attack this new blood. 10 minutes. Was that just me, or was his temperature dropping? 15 minutes. Finally, his skin returned to normal. I breathed a sigh of relief. I pulled him up, and together, we headed toward the surface. The sky was dark, with a huge circle of light, and little lights surrounding it. I drank it all in, amazed at how vast the sky was. I laughed. There may be disease, but now, with the cure, we could reach for the sky.



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