

## Ending the Apocalypse

We walked slowly up the hill. It was another day, another cool and quiet day. All color seemed to have been lost. There was sunlight, but it was through a wall of dark clouds that never went away, and blocked the once blue skies. About the only thing nearly comical left was the few people running around in cardboard boxes telling us the end was near. But the end had already come.

Well, life as we knew it had ended. The world would still be habitable for a hundred or so more years. Maybe more, maybe less, no one was really sure. Mainly because most of the experts had died, but also, the extra energy (or explosives) left from the last blast could still blow up the world. Now, tomorrow, or next year; as I said, no one was sure.

The UN converted nuclear energy to the main energy source on the planet to prevent global warming and then some idiotic world leader decided to start a war over some event that happened hundreds of years ago. Things really had gone downhill after the nuclear war. The sky clouded over, millions of people died, some plant and animal species were wiped out, and everything the world once was, was left demolished. Despite the random explosions, life had continued, though utterly changed in the rubble of cities and empty expanses of former countries. There was no more electricity, and in the numerous wars leading up to the explosions, many of the “alternate” sources were destroyed, so we were on our own.

It hadn't even rained in months. The plants and wildlife had nearly disappeared in most places. There weren't more than a few thousand people.

There was no way to live if you weren't part of a clan now. They were what was left of the warring countries that couldn't seem to end their fights which seemed to be more over placing blame on who blew up the world now, but no one was really sure who did it.

As we neared the top we heard sticks cracking on the other side of the hill. I looked at him and he looked back at me and nodded. I took the safety off my handgun.

If you would've told me that I'd be shooting guns and running around with an ex-mafia clan a year ago I would've thought you were insane. I had always dreamed about having some kind of strange adventure during my life, but it was something I had given up on actually happening.

Marth was the only person I had known before that survived, he was a friend of my brother and me. Marth was a strange boy from my school in the grade above mine with my brother. He was sixteen, a year older than me. He was tall, had spiky brown hair and he was well built, probably because of all the times he had to help me get into the tree house. He lived down the street, and during the summer all three of us would go into the old tree house at

midnight and talk until morning or play videogames for days on end. Marth had lost a lot of his fun loving and optimistic attitude after the explosions and had become more of a protective big brother to me than a friend.

I met everyone else later; they became my clan, my family. No one was exactly sure why only certain people survived, but that's how it happened. It may have been an immunity of some sort in the blood, or maybe just luck, but again, no one was really sure.

I aimed my gun at the peak of the hill and fired a warning. I could hear whoever was on the other side of the hill jump back in alarm and shout - it didn't sound threatening... it sounded familiar...

"Who's there?" Marth called, his blue eyes glinting in the daylight.

A Japanese boy came up to the top of the hill, smiling.

"Kaz!" I exclaimed, as he shook his hair out of his face and laughed. He was a tall person, but he was very pale.

Kaz was part of the family that took Marth and me after the explosions. We met him in an old playground while wandering around. He was wearing his normal black sweatshirt over his t-shirt and jeans. His uncle had previously made him wear suits and never liked him dressing this way, but lately we had talked him into being a bit more lax.

"What would you have done if you shot me?" He asked, still laughing, "For that matter, Marth still looks like he might..." Kaz stared after Marth, questioningly.

Marth gave me a look and continued up the hill. Marth never liked Kazuma, and I wasn't sure why.

"Cho," said Marth coldly as he passed him.

Kaz frowned, "Lambardi..."

I shook my head, "so, where were you headed Kaz?"

"Well, the boss sent me to get you guys, but... I was planning on a detour anyway... want to come?"

"Detour to where, Cho?" Marth asked, turning.

"You're welcome to come too," Kaz said, "but... I can't tell you that."

"Why?" Marth persisted.

Kaz shook his head, and started to walk away. I looked at Marth, and then turned to follow Kaz, but Marth stopped me.

“Don’t you remember what happened last time?” he whispered, gripping my upper arm tightly.

I nodded, “Yes, I remember, but what does that...”

“It has everything to do with it. He won’t tell us where he’s going and you still want to follow? What if something happens again?” Marth interrupted.

I shook my head and pulled his hand off me. I didn’t care. What was the point of living without excitement? Anyway, it wasn’t really Kaz’s fault. I looked at my right hand as I walked. It was still scarred badly, and I still had to keep it in a brace, I could still use it, though it was very weak. I flexed my fingers and winced.

“Kaz, wait!” I called.

He turned around and looked up. “Hey! I’m glad you’re coming... Though, I wish Marth didn’t hate me... this isn’t going to make it much better though... he’s very protective of you...”

“Ignore him... so where are we going?” I asked. He opened his mouth to say he couldn’t say, but I stopped him, “At least tell me why we’re going?”

He nodded. “Well... I think I might’ve found something...special.” his eyes sparkled brilliantly.

“Right...” I replied.

We walked through the ruins and out of the city area to a formerly rural area. The rubble became sparser as we kept walking. After about an hour I started to get skeptical of the “detour”.

“Um... Kaz?”

“Yea?”

“What about meeting the boss?”

“He’ll be fine... he’s your dad... and anyway, he... he wasn’t looking for you, I was.”

“He’s not my real fath...”

Kaz interrupted me, “True, he’s not your biological father, but he is literally your adoptive one. Seriously...”

“I know... I just never had a father, so I don’t consider him so either. It’s too much of a new concept...” I laughed. “Let’s hope Marth doesn’t go and worry him...”

Kaz smiled, then his face reset to its normal determined self as he took off toward the patch of leftover woods.

We jogged over to it, and upon reaching the edge, Kaz stopped me.

“Now we’re going to enjoy this hiking trip to the middle of nowhere, okay? WALK.”

I laughed; I knew he was just trying to get me to have something normal. He grew up in the mafia, so he was amazed by what I took for granted. He was looking out for me almost as much as Marth, but trying to have fun to make it less obvious.

We walked straight into the woods for awhile, and then he started taking turns, until we reached a path.

“So, what do you think is going to happen with the clans? – the world for that matter?” Kaz asked me.

“Hm... well I think the clans are going to fall apart really... the world... is basically doomed.”

“That’s very optimistic of you. Why do you think the clans would die out?”

“Because eventually someone will realize how stupid this all is.”

Kaz nodded and stared ahead.

“Sorry,” I apologized.

“Eh, no problem, I guess I never really thought about where all the family – or clan rivalries came from... I was just brought up to hate those who aren’t a part of my family...” He shrugged and looked down. Then looked up again quickly and grabbed my wrist. “Here it is!”

He lead me to the tree line ahead quickly and then released my wrist.

I gasped and he smiled broadly. Who would’ve thought there was a waterfall like that outside of New York? How was it possible that something like this could’ve survived? It was amazing, and I stood there with my mouth open, speechless.

“I knew you’d like it...” He said, gazing at me intently, as though reading a book.

I laughed, took a running start, and before he could stop me, I dove off the cliff, and he followed.

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Several hours later we trudged back into the ruins, still soaked, but talking and laughing loudly. I dried my gun off and shook my head, my face growing more serious, back to work.

I combed my hair out with my fingers and pulled it back into a ponytail.

“Marth?” Kaz asked, and I looked up.

Marth was sitting on a rock, tying a bandage around his upper arm. He finished then looked up, and jumped down from the rock.

“What happened Marth?” I asked.

“Nothing. Your father wants you two though, c’mon.” He said coldly, his eyebrow raised at seeing us dripping wet.

“Swimming...” I muttered, and he nodded coldly at Kaz.

“Kazuma, the boss isn’t happy.”

Kaz bit his lip and nodded. He was the boss’s nephew, and the boss was very strict with him.

“Go,” Marth ordered, and Kaz walked away swiftly toward headquarters.

“You shouldn’t have gone with him, wherever it was.”

“It was safe,” I said, and then continued at the look on his face, “and *nothing* happened.”

He nodded, but I could tell he didn’t trust me completely.

We walked in the direction that Kaz had gone, but more slow.

“Where’d he bring you?” Marth asked carefully.

“To a waterfall outside the city...”

“Really?” Marth asked, interested.

“Yea... and I kind of got carried away and jumped in...” I explained, looking at my clothing.

Marth laughed, and our conversation died out with his laughter at the gate to the mansion.

As we neared the door, it flew open and Kaz was thrown out of it. We froze.

“You’re a failure, Kazuma! I don’t want to see you until you do something!” The boss shouted out after him. I ran up to him, Marth stayed where he was.

I kneeled next to him. “Are you okay?” I asked. He was bleeding from the lip and various other cuts.

He winced and brought himself to sit up. “Yeah, I’m fine. Eh, he’s all yours... have fun.” He brushed the hair out of his face and wiped the blood off his lip. Smiling, he said, “He’s in one happy mood, that’s for sure.”

I shook my head and helped him up. He brushed himself off and looked at Marth. “Your turn,” he said to him, and then walked toward the gate, leaving us to go inside.

I headed inside ahead of Marth, unafraid. I did not fear him, I knew he’d never hit me, not only because I was a girl, but because I could talk him out or into anything – and that’s why he respected me, and took me in when my family died in the explosions.

There wasn’t really anything to fear about the boss anyway. He was a short and stocky man with a noticeable gray receding hairline. He acted tough and pushed everyone around to keep his leadership unquestioned, but he was truly a pushover.

I could sense Marth was hesitant. Probably because Kaz was the boss’s nephew and the boss was usually nicer to him than most of the clan. I walked right past the guards and people in the hall as they stared. No one tried to stop me.

“Sir,” I said, to announce myself.

“Lex... I...” He began.

“Stow it. You know that’s not the way to win anyone over. Especially Kaz.”

“I know... I...”

“No, you don’t know. Otherwise you wouldn’t have done it, would you?”

“No, you’re right... Lex... I was just worried about you, and it was irresponsible for him to do that, he *was* supposed to bring you here, not go gallivanting around the state. It wasn’t safe.”

I shook my head and walked to the window. “I can take care of myself.”

“Alexis, I don’t care. You’re a girl – you should be more careful and...” he paused, finally noticing how wet I was, “you should try to act more ladylike...”

I laughed, and he joined in as well, he knew that that was impossible. Marth stood silently by the door.

“Marth,” the boss said, calming down, “could you go find Kaz for me?” Marth nodded and left.

“Lex?” the boss asked.

“Sir?” I acknowledged.

“Well, you can stop calling me ‘Sir’ for a start... I’ve told you this already, call me dad... father...” he paused, I raised my eyebrow, and he continued, “...or if you must... Victor.”

I nodded. “Okay, *Victor*.”

He shook his head. “Let’s walk around the garden for awhile.”

Victor had one of the only large water sources left – which was why people worked for him. It was also why he had a garden.

We walked around quietly for awhile, and then he grabbed my hand.

“Lex!” the boss exclaimed.

“Ouch... could you please let go?” I said, wincing; he had grabbed my right hand.

“Oh,” he said, letting go. “Sorry about that... I forgot... how is it anyway?”

“It’s fine.”

“Well, that’s what I’m worried about. I wish you didn’t have to be involved with this kind of stuff. You’re too smart for it... I wonder if there are any schools left...?”

“There aren’t,” I replied firmly.

“Oh...”

“What were you going to say before?”

“Oh... I...” he began, but Marth and Kaz dashed out of the back door towards us.

“Sir!” Kaz called, “SIR!”

Marth shook his head. “You’re going to want to hear this...”

“What is it?” I asked.

“One of the other clans found one of the explosives...” Kaz answered.

I stared, Victor closed his eyes, and Marth looked at the floor.

This wasn’t good. If they decided to use it, it could wipe out what was left.

“Wait. What if we talk to them?” I asked.

“I don’t think that’ll work Alexis...” the boss began, but looked at me and stopped. I was set on this, someone had to do something. I would not let the world be destroyed because of this.

Marth continued for him though, “Alexis, it’s our nemesis clan, it doesn’t even matter, if we got close enough to talk to them, we’d be shot.”

“We have to do something...” Kaz said. “Even if it fails, we have to try.”

“I refuse to see you all get yourselves killed.” Marth replied.

“Enough!” Victor interrupted. I want you all to go to headquarters and stay there.” I started leaving with Kaz and Marth, but Victor stopped me, “No, not you. I didn’t finish talking to you yet.”

I nodded, smiled to Kaz as he looked back, and watched them walk away, conversing quietly.

“Alexis, he’s just worried about what happened last time you tried to be the voice of reason.”

“I know.”

“Though Kaz is too, but he’d rather see you try then be held back... because then you’d at least have our help...”

“I know.”

He chuckled.

“What?” I asked.

“That’s why they fight, you know... because of you.”

I looked at him weirdly, unsure of what to say. I wasn’t sure I understood what he meant.

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A few hours later I walked toward the center of the city with Marth and Kaz. The boss had told them to accompany me to meet the other clan members – because this was important to me, and anyway, I was good with words.

“Hey, I knew about the explosives... that’s why I brought you to the waterfall... I...” Kaz blurted out.

“How is that a reason...?” I began asking.

“I knew too,” Marth interrupted, “They saw me, that’s why I was bleeding when you guys got back...”

“But why did you bring me to the waterfall Kaz? Why didn’t you just tell me or the boss first?” I questioned.

“Because the world could end – we could die,” Kaz sighed, “I guess I just wanted to have fun – for you to have fun...”

“So that’s why you’re so optimistic...” Marth cut in, “to ‘live life to the fullest’... is that it?”

“Yea...” Kaz replied and trailed off as we ascended the hill from the morning for a second time. I realized we hadn’t actually gone over the hill, and then remembered where Kaz had come from.

We reached the top of the hill and I looked down.

“It’s down there, isn’t it?” I asked.

Kaz nodded, and we headed toward the ominous cliff ahead. Someone fired off a warning shot, but we continued to the edge.

“Who are you?” the man called.

“Three kids. Look, we’re not here for a fight. We’re here to try to reason with you,” I answered.

“Wait. I’ve seen those two! They’re part of the other clan” another man called out.

“Really...?” said the first man with a smirk. “Three kids... well that one,” he said, pointing to Kaz, “is related to the boss of that clan.”

Kaz nodded. “But that’s not why we’re here.”

I continued, “They’re only here for support. *I* came here to ask you to just defuse that thing.”

“Why would we do that? Cause a little girl asked us to?” the man asked, laughing.

“No,” I answered, “answer me this. Are you worried about being here tomorrow? Aren’t you worried that next time something blows up, you won’t survive? What about the world? It’s not going to be around much longer as it is.”

The man stared, “No, not really. All of us lost everything we had. Everything we worked for. Do you *think* we actually care what happens now?”

“Did you have kids?” I asked, ignoring his response.

“I...” he choked, and his eyes became glassy.

I nodded. “What about everyone else? Even if you guys don’t, don’t you think they – *we* – want the chance to live? All this clan stuff is stupid. It’s just a way to avoid taking responsibility and trying to fix what happened.”

The man closed his eyes and nodded. “I get your point...”

“I mean, the world is... damaged. It probably can’t recover... but...” I paused. “At least we can try,” I finished, looking at Kaz, who smiled. Taking on his optimism wasn’t too hard.

“A long road to recovery...” the man started and laughed. “I think it won’t...”

“but there’s a chance...” I started, but something wet hit my face and I froze.

I felt something wet hit my face again and I looked up. Slowly everyone else stopped and did so too. It was raining... and the clouds were moving. We all stood motionless as the sun rays broke through the clouds. We stood, blinded, staring at the sky.

Marth clapped me on the back, and Kaz picked me up and spun me around. The man looked at us and smiled. A few other people cheered.

Something so simple was basically a miracle – a sign, and everyone in that moment, was the same.

Perhaps there is hope for the world after all...

### Afterword

I've learned a lot about energy in school. I know how to calculate the kinetic and potential an object has, as well as many other energy related problems. For the past few years my science/technology classes have always covered the alternative energy topic. We've talked about the pros and cons of many energy sources, including wind turbines, solar, nuclear, and/hydro.

My story was based off an older story of mine that I had started writing and also on what nuclear power could do to our world. The nuclear weapon possession crisis around the world particularly interested me because I don't like the idea that one day a country could get in a pointless war with each other and end up blowing up each other – or the whole continent. It doesn't seem like much of a solution. I also don't think it's a good energy source, because no one knows what to do with the radioactive waste and it's a very dangerous process – if one thing goes wrong and the power is used on a large scale, it could be as dangerous as using the power as a weapon. There are survivors to the explosions in my story, and I realize that that isn't possible, but I needed characters, otherwise, I tried to be as realistic as possible. Hopefully, nuclear power doesn't become the choice energy source of the future.