

The Forever Man  
Book 1: Pulse

© 2014, Author Craig Zerf/C. Marten-Zerf  
Published by Small Dog Publishing Limited at

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without express written permission from the author / publisher.

**Book 1: The Pulse**

**Chapter 1**

Master Gunnery Sergeant Nathaniel Hogan stood outside the new American embassy at Nine Elms, London and stared at the boats drifting down the river Thames. He was dressed in his standard combat utility uniform or 'digies', so called because of their MARPAT Digital camouflage. He was wearing the darker woodland version as opposed to the light desert one, even though, strictly speaking, it was for winter use only.

Hogan was a large man. Raw boned, six foot four, around two hundred and forty pounds. And, at only twenty-six years old, one of the youngest Master Gunnery Sergeants in the corps. His black hair was cut in the standard marine style, short back and sides, the length not exceeding three inches. He was clean-shaven. His eyes, deep set under thick eyebrows, their dark green color like emeralds in pools of shadow. High cheekbones suggested Native American ancestry backed up by his broad, white teeth and straight Roman nose.

He did not carry an assault rifle but, on his hip rode a Colt 1911M25, the latest update of the venerable 1911. Still chambered for the 45 cal round but with a staggered magazine holding ten rounds and also with an inbuilt compensator.

He glanced at his watch. Eighteen hundred hours. The last of the public had left. Sunset was forecast for twenty hundred. Change of guard was scheduled for the same time.

Hogan was in charge of eight marines stationed at the embassy. It was what the corps called a 'reward posting'. Eighteen months of cushy duty in one of the most fun cities in the world. Tonight he was knocking off after change of guard and was heading into the city to meet an English

girl. Emma Rittington. Tall, blonde, horse rider's build. His English friends referred to her as Posh Totty, his American ones said that she was 'Fancy.' She had a three-bed apartment, or flat, in Sloane Square and seemed to want for nothing. But that was not what attracted the marine sergeant to her. His attraction to her was based almost entirely on the physical. In all fairness, she had admitted to the same about him. Plus, being an American and a non-commissioned officer had, in her words, 'caused daddy a veritable lavatory full of anguish', something that seemed to give her an inordinate amount of pleasure.

He gazed once more at the Thames. The clouds in the sky reflected in the fast flowing water below, a brown mottled facsimile of the firmament above.

And then a rainbow of color skittered across the surface. Like a thousand gallons of oil had been instantly dumped into the water. An orgasm of color. Hogan glanced up to see the sky ablaze with light. Flowing forward, retreating, spreading and coalescing. He had seen this sight before, although never with such clarity. And never in broad sunlight. He had seen it when he had been seconded to the embassy in Moscow. It was the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. He stared at it, entranced, as it rippled across the sky. Vast. Overpowering. And utterly silent. With such a vast display he expected some sort of accompanying sound. Thunder. Wind. Some sort of environmental drum roll. But nothing. Not a sound.

He cocked his head to one side and concentrated. The silence was eerie. In fact, there was no sound. Nothing at all. The constant background of a city in motion was not there.

Two and a half million cars and buses. Two thousand eight hundred construction sites, one thousand road working projects, one hundred and twenty thousand air-conditioning units, over one hundred passenger carrying commercial aircraft.

Silent.

Then the sound of running footsteps. Marine corporal Manson sprinted up and came to attention in front of him.

'Gunny, the power in the building is out and the emergency generator hasn't cut in. Complete power failure.'

'Right, Manson. Tell the men to stay at their posts. Then find the janitor and see what you can do with the generator. Double time.'

Manson didn't move. It was as though he had been frozen in place, staring with wide eyes over Hogan's shoulder. And then, like a man pointing at his own death, he raised an arm. Hogan turned to look.

The sky was raining aircraft. Ten, twenty, thirty of them. Hundreds of thousands of tons of steel plummeting down from the skies. Spinning clumsily to earth. Succumbing to the laws of gravity that had hereto been conquered by three hundred thousand horsepower jet engines.

The first one struck the city. Kensington. Dust, then flame. Finally, sound. A massive thumping wall of sound as the one hundred thousand liters of aviation fuel exploded. Within seconds the next aircraft plowed in. And the next. And the next.

Brentford, Fulham, Shepherd's Bush. Belgravia.

The sounds of the explosions thundered through the city. But there was no corresponding sound of sirens. No klaxons of fire engines. No warning

bells. Nothing but the sound of fire. They were too far away to hear the screams of the dying.

Hogan grabbed the corporal by his shoulder and shook hard. 'Manson. Ten-hut. Now, go inside. Tell the civvies to stay indoors. Get sergeant Johnson to open the armory. I want all marines in full battle gear, M16s, four extra mags, colts, two extra mags. Bring me my gear plus a M249M22 machine gun plus three 200 round belts with bags. Move.'

Training took over rational thought and Manson saluted and sprinted off, heading back into the embassy.

Hogan trotted across to the main gates. On the way he pulled his cell phone out and looked at the screen. Dead.

The two marines there saluted him. Arms shaky. Faces ashen with shock. But discipline still intact. He saluted back. 'Ronaldo. Jessup.'

'Sir,' asked PFC Ronaldo. 'What's happening?'

'Can't be sure, marine. I suspect an EMP strike. Some sort of electromagnetic pulse.'

'Are we under attack, sir?'

Hogan thought for a few seconds. 'Remains to be seen, soldier. Could be natural causes. Could be a nuclear detonation in the atmosphere. Johnson and Manson are tooling up, they'll bring your kit. I want you all in full battle gear. Stay at your posts. I'll be back.'

Hogan strode back towards the embassy doors. Halfway there, Johnson and Manson came jogging out, festooned with armfuls of kit. Johnson carried on to the men at the gate. Manson helped Hogan on with his kit. Modern tactical vest with scalable armor plates. Camelbak hydration pack complete with inline water purification system. First aid kit. Enhanced combat helmets. Ammunition carrying vest with extra ammunition bags attached. And finally, the M249M22 light machine gun.

'Sir,' said Manson. 'I ran into the sparky. He said that the generator is FU. Circuits all burnt out.'

Hogan knelt down and placed the butt of the M249M22 on his knee, wracked the charging handle, released the feed tray cover and clipped a belt of ammo in. As he stood up he saw Liz Tutor, the Deputy Chief of Mission, approaching. She descended the stairs rapidly. Low heeled sensible shoes. Below the knee pink dress suit. Brown bob as sleek and hard as a helmet. Teeth as white as a Hollywood wanabee.

'Gunney.'

'Ma'am.'

'What is going on?'

'Looks like some sort of EMP strike, ma'am. An electrical pulse that seems to have taken out all of our electronic capabilities. The generator has burnt out, all comms are down and aircraft are falling out of the sky. I have put the marines on full alert.'

'Are we under attack?'

'Not enough intel, ma'am. But if I had to guess I'd say that it's a natural occurrence.' Hogan pointed at the sky. 'Aurora Borealis, ma'am. If it were a nuke then the sky would be clear.'

'So, what do we do now?'

'Not sure, ma'am. Perhaps we should ask the ambassador.'

'Can't. He's not here today. Meeting with the British PM.'

‘Well then, ma’am, I suggest that we batten down the hatches and wait a while. See what transpires. Keep everyone indoors; we have enough food and water for at least ten days. I’ll get one of the boys to break out the gas lamps and cookers. Tomorrow we see what happens and react accordingly.’

Liz nodded her approval. ‘How long before help comes?’ She asked.

Hogan took a deep breath. ‘Ma’am, there will be no help. Particularly if this has been a worldwide phenomenon. No transport, no comms. We’re on our own, ma’am.’

Liz shook her head. ‘Don’t be silly, Gunney. We are Americans, the most powerful nation on the face of the planet. I hardly think that a mere power outage is going to bring us to our knees. However, I accept that we stay here tonight. I am sure that we shall hear good news by tomorrow.’

She turned and clipped back up the stairs into the embassy.

Hogan went and stood by the gate next to the two marines.

The sun sank slowly behind the horizon.

And London glowed with fire. Every now and then the still night was rocked with an explosion as a fuel station or gas line erupted sending vast balls of flame heavenwards.

And as the night progressed, the two thousand year old city began to burn its way back into the dark ages.

But what humanity did not yet know, was that the pulse was not only affecting earth. It was also calling. Across unimaginable distances measured in both time and dimension.

The Pulse had called.

And someone had heard.

\*\*\*

Commander Ammon Set-Bat of the Fair-folk stood outside his flag tent and looked up at the sky. It was dull. Blue and ugly without its usual wash of psychedelic colors pulsing through it. There was barely the vaguest hint of the Life-Light at all. Maybe a tiny coruscation on the horizon. But then that may have been wishful thinking, admitted Ammon to himself. For without the Life-Light in the skies the Fair-Folk had nowhere to draw their power from. Their magik was useless without the powers of the lights. Weak and insubstantial. If they were to survive then they would need to follow the Life-Light to another place where it was strong and enduring. And there they would prosper. The Fair-Folk had done this before, many, many times throughout their ancient history. Where the Life-Light went, so did they.

But in all fairness, said Ammon to himself, there was little chance of that happening and, even if it did, there was even less chance that his people would survive the ongoing war that they were in. Perhaps this was the end.

No! He took a deep breath, brought his attention back to the moment and continued to survey the valley below. He had no use for a telescope as he had long since perfected the art of ‘Farlooking’ and could identify a species of butterfly at a distance of over half a league.

As the commander of the army, Ammon was a member of the Council of Twelve that ruled the Fair-folk and their minions and, at the moment, his

army had been stretched across the narrow part of the valley of Southee. On each side of the Vale rose the Sethanon Mountains, a natural redoubt between the High Kingdom and the Midlands. This valley was the only practical way through. So here he had placed his troops.

Five battalions of Orcs totaling one hundred thousand strong. Six thousand heavy armored Trolls with their twenty-foot pikes and massive shields. The Trolls would provide a wall of armor that he hoped the enemy would break against like a tide against a cliff. To the rear, forty thousand Goblin archers, their small-recurved bows already strung, bundles of arrows at their feet.

And finally, the Constructs, noticeable by their shining white tunics and slow behavior. These ever-smiling, pale skinned creations of the Fair-Folk would carry water, bandages and extra arrows to the combatants. Afterwards, if there was an afterwards, they would be used by the Orcs and goblins for their more...comely offerings.

There were no Fair-Folk in the battle formation. Their talents lay in ruling, creating, commanding, controlling. Not for them the savage cruelty of front line combat. And even if they had wanted to participate in a more physical way they could not have made much difference.

The males stood around four feet tall, hairless smooth gray skin, no discernable musculature, massive dome shaped heads, no perceivable ears or nostrils, small mouths and large black eyes. Their bodies merely an ambulatory system for their extraordinarily advanced brains. Brains capable of controlling those lesser than them, capable of psychokinesis, pyrokinesis and, most importantly, harnessing the power of the 'Life-Light'. Although, as Ammon had been musing, in recent years, the Life-Light had been fading, its power waning. And with it, the power of the Fair-Folk.

The female of the species was seldom seen. Smaller and much lighter skinned than the male with smaller elongated heads. They were kept indoors, away from the sunlight and, when they did wish to venture outside they were transported in curtained palanquins or sedan chairs carried by two battle Orcs.

Like the males, the females lived for well over three hundred years, during which time they usually laid three or four embryonic sacs. These sacs were fertilized by the males who squatted over them and sprayed them with their seed. The Fair-folks pleasures were far more esoteric than mere sex, something that they deemed suitable only for the lower ranks of beings.

Today marked the end of a year of continual war. A year of constant, bitter failure as, yard-by-yard, the alien Elvish had conquered the Fair-Folk's kingdom. Forcing them back by virtue of numbers. They were no more than competent combatants, tall and almost unbelievably slim with heart shaped faces, flaxen hair as fine as cobwebs and small pointed teeth. But their numbers combined with their hive-mentality made them a formidable foe. Their battle strategies were poor but, due to the fact that their minds were linked via the hive-queen, their reactions as a group were uncanny. Breaches in their lines were filled immediately, replacements always arrived at the perfect moment and supplies were always delivered at the exact time needed. They never panicked; they seldom fell for any

subterfuge or ruse and their morale stayed at a constant high as they drew strength from the queen.

Ammon exerted his Far-looking powers and saw them coming. A murky amorphous mass of warriors, dressed in their customary dark green. Moving as one, like a shoal of fish, or flock of birds.

They had first appeared, a year before, in the Lower kingdoms. There had been a period of solar upheaval, days had shortened, nights had grown colder and the constant sky glow of the Life-Light had ceased for almost six days.

Then a hole had opened. A literal doorway, albeit a huge one, between the kingdoms and the godforsaken place that the Elvish came from. They had poured through the gap, taking the majority of the coastal towns of the Eastern Lower Kingdom in a matter of days.

Ammon had assembled his troops and force-marched from the highlands to meet the host on the Midland plains. He had quickly learned not to fight the Elven hordes in huge set battles. Their numbers were too large and their hive-minds ensured that their mass maneuvers were always perfect.

So instead he had fought a hundred smaller battles, always picking his ground with great care. Mountain passes, river confluences, forests. Anything to stop his dwindling army from being enveloped by the vast numbers of enemy.

And, as the year had gone by, the rainbow flickering of the Life-Light had grown dimmer in the skies. In the time before it used to coruscate across the heavens, a constant surge of color, like lamp oil spilt on water, bringing with it the power that the Fair-Folk used to drive their magiks. The raw power of the universe. The power of the Life-Light.

He sensed rather than heard Seth Hil-Nu walk up to his side. Seth was the paramount mage of the Fair-Folk and he, more than any others, had been diminished by the dying of the Life-Light, his magnificent powers waning day by day. In the times before, when the Life-Light was strong, he could have conjured up a raft of fireballs that would have burned the Elven host from the valley. He could have brought the mountains down on them or caused a storm of lightning to blast them from existence. Now he was simply a source of wisdom, capable of the odd small magik if the circumstances were right.

‘Well seen, Seth,’ greeted the commander.

‘Well met, Ammon. How long before battle commences?’

‘Mere minutes, mage. Mere minutes. Pray tell, can you amplify my voice so that the troops can hear me? I used to be able to do it myself when the Life-Light was strong, but now it is a skill that escapes me.’

‘Sad are the times when you have to ask if I can still perform such tiny magiks,’ answered Seth. ‘But yes, I can make you heard. Not through amplification, but they will hear what you say.’

‘Thank you, mage.’

The Elven swarm continued to pour into the valley, running on fast lithe feet. Drawing closer.

Ammon waited and then, ‘Archers, make ready.’

The four thousand goblins each lent forward, picked up a dozen or so arrows and planted them, head down, in the turf in front of them, ready for rapid fire.

‘Archers, string.’

Four thousand arrows were notched.

‘Draw.’

Four thousand bow strings thrummed with tension as the archers drew to full draw and held.

‘Rapid fire, now!’

The average competent goblin archer can unleash an arrow every three seconds. The flight time from archer to target was approximately nine seconds. This meant that, by the time the first four thousand arrows struck, there were already another twelve thousand in the air. Like a swarm of steel tipped locusts, blotting out the sun.

They struck the Elvin ranks with a sound like hail hitting a cornfield. A thudding and tearing as they punctured flesh and bone. But still the horde ran on, climbing over their dead as they did so.

Ammon waited until the foes were almost too close for the archers to safely fire at without risking hitting their own troops.

‘Archers – cease-fire. Trolls, prepare.’

The six hundred Trolls stepped forward, each standing over twelve foot tall, weighing in at over nine hundred pounds, ten foot high shield of steel and twenty foot long pikes with massive broad blades. They locked their shields together with a massive clash of steel that reverberated around the valley. Pikes were held over the interlocked shields.

‘Trolls, advance.’

Over five hundred tons of heavily armored muscle shambled forward. Trolls did not, could not, run. Instead they shuffled, feet never leaving the ground. As a result they were always solidly grounded. In an advance such as this, nothing could stand before them.

A solid wall of sound rolled across the valley as the Trolls crashed into the lightweight Elves. Pikes rose and fell, slicing, cutting, destroying. And slowly, ever so slowly, the Elven hoard was pushed back.

But not for long. The sheer weight of numbers eventually slowed the advance and then halted it.

Ammon was ready for this.

‘Orcs, support the advance.’

The twenty five thousand Orcs ran forward. Not unsheathing their battle-axes. Instead they simply ran into the Trolls, dropping their shoulders and pushing. The Trolls pikes continued to rise and fall, slashing a pathway through the horde. The extra power of the Orcs continued the advance, driving the Elves back, crushing them underfoot, compacting them together so tightly that they could no longer wield their weapons.

Then, with the timing brought from years of experience, Ammon spoke his next command.

‘Orcs, unsheath your weapons. Trolls, unlock your shields. Orcs – attack.’

Twenty five thousand Orc voices bayed their battle cry as they ran forward through the ranks of the Trolls and into the massed Elves, two-handed battle-swords swinging with abandon, the battle madness on them all.

‘Kamateh,’ they cried out their war cry as they hacked and killed.

‘Kamateh, kill, kill them all!’

The Elven horde broke and ran. Darting away like a massive shoal of bait fish before a pack of sharks.

And commander Ammon gave his last order. 'Archers, harry them. Fire at will.'

The Elves retreated under a rain of steel tipped death.

## Chapter 2

His name was Kobus Pistorious. He was fifty-four years old and he had emigrated from South Africa to England some twenty years previously. For the bulk of his life Kobus had been a mercenary in Africa. From Angola to Zanzibar. He had fought in over seventeen conflicts and as a result he was rabid racist and anti-communist. He was also a very good soldier.

Now he had semi-retired. He ran an online company that sold pet toys to the type of English person that talked to their pet and fed it at the table. Kobus was not that type of person. But one had to make a living.

When the pulse hit he was driving home from a dentist appointment and was just outside the cathedral city of Canterbury. He was waiting at a level crossing when his car cut out. He tried to restart it but it was totally dead. Not a spark.

He pulled the bonnet ratchet and stepped out of the car. The first thing that struck him was the silence. Not the silence of the grave but a comparative silence. The silence of the bush. Something that he had not heard since his days in Africa. The silence of a land without modern civilization. No cars, no radios, no horns honking.

Kobus had worked with special force units before. British SAS, American Rangers. And they had discussed this exact scenario. So, his first assumption was very close to correct: an EMP.

His second assumption was incorrect, but essentially it made little difference to his reaction.

'The bloody communists,' he said out loud. 'They've just gone and bleeding nuked us.'

He went to the rear of his car, opened the trunk, took out his double barrel shotgun and loaded it with buckshot. Then he stuffed a few extra rounds into his pockets, picked up an empty tog-bag and headed for the nearest drug store that happened to be just around the corner.

He opened the door and walked in. It was dark, especially near the back where the prescriptions were filled out. He strode down to the rear and threw the tog-bag onto the counter.

'Fill that up with broad-spectrum antibiotics, oral and intravenous. Also one hundred 25-gauge needles and one hundred ten mil disposable syringes. If there's any space left fill it with painkillers. Real ones with codeine, not aspirin or crap like that.'

The pharmacist stared at Kobus, his mouth open.

'I'm sorry, sir, but that's impossible. You'll need some sort of prescription or...'



The South African raised the shotgun up and pulled the trigger. The light fitting above the pharmacist head exploded into a thousand tiny shards.

‘There’s my bloody prescription. Now fill it.’

The pharmacist, face as pale as death, started to stuff boxes into the togbag with shaking hands. His assistant, a middle aged lady who had been standing behind him now lay on the floor, her hands covering her head, whimpering.

Kobus replaced the used shotgun cartridge, his hands moving quickly and assuredly. Doing something that they did well.

As soon as the bag was full Kobus ran from the drugstore, heading for the local cash and carry food store that was on his way home.

He slung the bag over his shoulder as he barreled into the food store, grabbing a large shopping trolley as he did.

A young colored man behind the till called out.

‘Hey, man, sorry but the power’s out. Till’s not working so we can’t allow any shopping. Sorry, mate. Should be back on soon if you’d like to wait.’

Kobus turned to face the man, bringing the shotgun to bear as he did so. The young man shrank back.

‘Listen, Sambo,’ said Kobus. ‘Firstly, the lights are never coming back on and secondly, I’m not shopping, I’m helping myself. Now keep your cheeky black African face out of mine and maybe I won’t kill you.’

The young man, whose name was actually Charles, born and bred in Kent, England and never having been within six thousand miles of Africa, simply said nothing. His face a blank mask.

Kobus ran down the aisles filling the trolley with tins of meat, vegetables and bottled water. When it was full he walked out the front door, pushing the squeaking trolley in front of him.

He was feeling good. Exultant even. For once he was truly ahead of the game. Drugs, food, a weapon. Happy days.

He didn’t even hear Charles walk up behind him but, at the very last moment some sixth sense flashed a warning and he started to turn.

It was too late. The Niblick wedge golf club with the steel shaft and the dual reinforced bar at the back, struck the South African directly on the temple, smashing the skull and killing him before he struck the ground. He collapsed in an untidy heap on the sidewalk.

Charles stared at the body, aghast at what he had just done. Frantically he scrabbled for his cell phone to dial 999. But there was no signal. And there never would be. Ever again.

Kobus Pistorious was the first person, post pulse, to have been killed for looting. But his name would not go down in history. In fact no one would remember him. Not even Charles who died three days later defending his shop from a mob of looters.

A new history had begun.

### **Chapter 3**

### **United States of America**

Airline crashes - 400 000 dead  
Collateral damage from crashes - 180 000 dead  
Patients in operating theatres - 25 000 dead  
Patients on life support - 1 400 dead  
Vehicle and train accidents - 18 000 dead  
Other - 12 000 dead

**TOTAL DEATHS USA - 636 400**

### **United Kingdom**

Airline crashes - 80 000 dead  
Collateral damage from crashes - 120 000 dead  
Patients in operating theatres - 5 000 dead  
Patients on life support - 300 dead  
Vehicle and train accidents - 8 000 dead  
Other - 2 000 dead

**TOTAL DEATHS UK - 215 300**

## **Chapter 3**

Kamua Johnson had turned nine last week. He lived on the twenty-second floor of the Lambeth Towers development. A Thirty-story, horseshoe shaped tenement block that overlooked the sprawl of Brixton. Designed in the sixties as part of England's Brave New World policy. Blue plywood window surrounds, bare concrete. Planters on the ground floor complete with stringy trees, withered from pollution and lack of nutrients.

The original artist's impressions had shown lithe figures pushing buggies, playing ball, skipping rope. White, Asian, African. Shaded by tall Plane trees, the ground covered in freshly mown green lawn. The figures were smiling. All of them.

The reality was a crumbling urban nightmare of damp and decay. Disintegrating concrete, bare earth, puddles of rank water that never drained away. A pile of broken shopping trolleys. Without wheels. Twisted and crippled. Teenagers in hoodies. Hands in pockets. No one smiled. None of them.

Kamua shared the apartment with his parents and his grandmother, Gramma Higgins. His parents in one room, Gramma in the other. He slept in the sitting room.

Gramma suffered from Dementia or Alzheimer's disease. She was also a type 1 diabetes sufferer. But as long as she took her pills and her insulin injections she was manageable.

The problem was that Kamua's mother administered Gramma's drugs and neither she nor her husband had come home last night. Kamua had tried to phone her work, using the emergency number that she had left, scrawled on the yellow post-it and stuck to the mirror in the hallway. But the phones were dead. Both the landline and the cell.

So Kamua had waited, staring out of his window. He had seen the planes come down and the fires starting. But they were not close enough to worry him. And he was not yet old enough to appreciate what was happening. He didn't like the fact that the lights would not work. He was scared of the dark. Monsters lived in the dark. And by the time the sun was fully set he could see nothing in the stygian darkness of the streets below. It was as if he were floating on a raft above a calm black sea of emptiness. Silent. Blind.

Grandma had kept asking for water but, after one glass, the taps no longer worked. The miracle of running water ceased as the pipes ran dry and the pumps at the water towers functioned no more.

So Grandma had pleaded with him. Imploring him for water as her body tried desperately to flush the sugar out of her system. As the night progressed. Her lack of memantine pills had allowed her dementia full rein and she started to scream and swear at Kamua, flashing her withered genitals at him, licking her lips lasciviously, calling him son of Satan and begging him to defile her.

Finally the little boy had locked her in her room. By morning she had stopped banging on the door.

Kamua decided that he needed some help. Adult help. He knew that his mother always filled Grandma's prescription for her meds at the drugstore on the corner. The man behind the counter always smiled at them and greeted mother like a friend. Kamua would go to him and ask for help.

He took the keys, closed the front door, went to the elevators and pressed the call button. But nothing happened. No lights. Nothing. So, with a child's acceptance, he started down the stairs.

It took him fifteen minutes to reach the ground floor. He left via the front of the building. Immediately he saw that things were not right. Cars were stopped in random positions all over the road. The glass fronts to the shops were all broken or the steel shutters were pulled down and padlocked with massive brass locks. The street was littered with smashed consumer goods. A radio, half out of its retail package, a broken TV, splintered beer bottles, the pavement still damp from the spilt contents. Kamua didn't know what looting was. He had never been taught the concept. All that he could see was that the dark had made bad things happen.

The drug store was shut. The steel doors had been pulled down and locked. There were bright shiny scars on the doors where people had tried to smash their way in. But the doors had held.

Kamua stood in front of the store for a while. Some people walked by. Mainly teenagers. Some single adults. No one even looked at the little boy. They did not know him. He was not their responsibility. Eventually Kamua turned and walked back to his apartment block, went in the front and started the laborious climb back up.

On the twelfth floor he came across a fat man lying on the stairs. His hands were curled in front of his chest and his face was bright red. He was making strange grunting noises. Kamua was scared but his politeness won out and he greeted the man.

But the fat man just stared at the little boy and grunted, his breath rasping in and out like he was drowning. Kamua stood with him for a while and then continued his upward travel.

He unlocked his front door, closed it behind him and went and sat on the sofa. He stared at the TV. Blank. Lifeless.

He would wait for his mommy.

And then everything would be all right.

\*\*\*

There were three of them. Two of them had spent the bulk of their adult lives fighting their way up the corporate ladder until they had achieved the level of success that was measured by the position and square footage of your office. The higher up, the more senior. The bigger the footage the more valuable. Both of them, Mary Blithe and Conran Fisher, had offices on the same floor. The 63<sup>rd</sup> floor of the London Shard. However, Conran's office measured out at six square foot more than Mary's. Hence, he was senior. Just.

The third person was Winston Dube. He was the cleaner for the observation deck of the Shard situated on the 72<sup>nd</sup> floor and measuring around 8000 square feet or roughly ten times the size of Conran's office.

So, according to the logic used by Conran and Mary – Winston was the most senior of the three. By quite a long stretch.

However, none of this mattered. All that mattered to the three of them was the fact that they had been trapped in the elevator around the 50<sup>th</sup> floor. It was pitch black. They had been there all night.

And they were now starting, quite understandably, to panic.

'I need to pee,' said Mary. Her voice less of a statement and more a whimper.

'Hold it,' retorted Conran. 'Help will be here soon.'

'What makes you think that?' Asked Winston. 'I mean, we've been here all night. I'm not sure what the time is but I guess that it's late morning. Something's wrong, man. Something is seriously wrong.'

'Well what do you suggest?'

'Nothing to suggest, dude. All that we can do is wait.'

'Exactly.'

'Yeah,' answered Winston. 'Exactly.'

The smell of urine enveloped them. Acrid and pungent. Like distilled fear.

'Sorry,' whispered May.

She started to cry.

And they waited.

\*\*\*

HM Belmarsh prison, or Hellmarsh as the inmates call it, is a category A prison situated in the South East of London.

The prison service manual states that Category A prisoners are: "Those whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or national security. Offences that may result in consideration for Category A or

Restricted Status include: Attempted murder, Manslaughter, Wounding with intent, Rape, Indecent assault, Robbery or conspiracy to rob (with firearms), Firearms offences, Importing or supplying Class A controlled drugs, Possessing or supplying explosives, Offences connected with terrorism and Offences under the Official Secrets Act.”

In other words, Belmarsh prison is filled with some very bad people.

But there is nothing to worry about. Belmarsh is a state of the art facility. High walls, well trained guards and a system of electronically controlled Mag-locks that secure every door on every cell. Even in the event of an EMP or similar power outage there is a hardened back up battery that keeps the cells secure. The batteries last for sixteen hours.

Or until 10.00 am in the morning.

It is now 10.01 am.

Belmarsh houses approximately 880 inmates.

Or, to put it more correctly - Belmarsh *used* to hold 880 inmates.

## Chapter 4

Hogan had managed to snatch a couple of hours of intermittent sleep but he was still feeling strong. Unusually so. His vision crystal clear, his body humming with energy. Alert. Ready.

The water was no longer running so the indoor plumbing could no longer be used. The marines had erected three chemical toilets behind the embassy. They had also taken stock of all of the bottled water, sodas and food, worked out the necessary requirements for everyone and concluded that they had enough food for seven days. Ten if they severely restricted rations. The bottled water would only last another four days.

But water shouldn't be a problem. After all, they were a mere stones throw from the river Thames and a couple of Aquatabs in a drum of river water would purify it to a potable stage.

Liz had asked that one of his marines go outside the embassy and conduct a recce. Hogan had decided to do it himself. And after thinking about it for a while, he had furthermore decided to conduct the recce in full combat gear as opposed to civvies. He wasn't sure exactly what was going on out there and a marine never wants to be outgunned.

His men rolled back the gate and he slipped out. There was no one on the street. It wasn't a residential area. He walked down Nine Elms road and turned right before the boating lake into Chelsea Bridge road. He crossed the bridge over the Thames and walked into Chelsea.

There were groups of people walking along the embankment next to the river. Some groups as small as two or three. Other groups, or gangs more likely, as large as thirty, maybe forty people strong. Some people glanced at him but the combat gear and SAW light machine gun caused their eyes to keep moving so as to avoid confrontation.

As he continued he passed the Lister private hospital. A man in a white coat stood on the steps, smoking. Deep bruises of fatigue under his eyes. Face pale. Unshaven.

'Hey,' he called out. 'Soldier.'

Hogan walked towards him. 'Sir.'

'Where are the rest of you?' The doctor asked.

'There is no rest of us, sir,' replied Hogan. 'I am an American marine gunnery sergeant seconded to the embassy. I'm doing a recon.'

'Have you got any idea what's going on?'

Hogan shook his head. 'Huge power outage, sir. Probably an EMP. Are you all right? How are things going in there?' Hogan pointed to the hospital.

The doctor shrugged. 'Not good. Thank Christ that we're so small. Two operating theatres. Lost both patients when the power went and the backup generators didn't kick in. But we don't have anyone on life support so small mercies.' He took a pack out and offered.

Hogan shook his head. 'Gotta go, sir. But if I were you, I'd batten down the hatches. Lock the doors and windows. Things are going to get ugly soon and any place with drugs is going to be fair game for the criminal elements.'

The doctor nodded his understanding.

Hogan turned and carried on walking. Not looking back.

As he approached Sloane Square he started to see more people on the streets, mostly walking aimlessly. Like car crash survivors or seriously hung over party goers. Most of the shop windows were broken and the convenience stores had been totally emptied as people stripped them for drinks and food. Drugstores had been similarly denuded, the thin veneer of middle class civilization peeling back in less than forty-eight hours to reveal the savage survivor lurking beneath.

He saw the first dead body lying on the road outside the Sloane Club. Older man, business suit, glasses. Hands clutched to his chest in the classic heart attack position. A mere twenty yards on, another body. This time a teenage male. Body twisted and broken. Obviously the victim of a severe beating. Blood lay pooled around his head. Dark. Already drying to a crust.

Hogan took a right turn and double-timed it through Belgravia. He paused every now and then to get his bearings, amazed at how few people were on the street in an area that was normally shoulder-to-shoulder. He assumed that they were hiding in their apartments, waiting to be told what to do. He ran into Eaton place and turned right, heading towards the Belgravia police station in Buckingham Palace road.

He went past the Budget rent-a-car and noted that the windows had been smashed in, the offices trashed. He wondered dimly what anyone had expected to find there worth looting. Rental agreements? Car freshener?

The police station loomed up on his left and he jogged around to the front.

Two young constables stood in front of the building, standing at the bottom of the steps. They were both carrying the new upgrade of the L85. As Hogan appeared around the corner they both whipped their rifles up and drew a bead on him.

'Halt!' Shouted the one. 'Put your hands above your head.'

Hogan stopped in front of them. He didn't raise his hands.

'Hands up,' screeched the youngster.

‘Settle, son,’ said Hogan. ‘No need to overreact. My name is Nathaniel Hogan, marine Master Gunnery Sergeant American Embassy.’

‘Get down on your knees,’ continued the constable.

Hogan shook his head, ‘Do me a favor, son. Fetch your inspector. I’d like a quick chat.’

‘Knees!’

‘In your dreams, boy,’ replied Hogan. ‘Marines kneel for no one.’ He swiveled his M249 to bear on the two constables. ‘Your inspector. Now, constable, before I lose my sense of humor and decide to play rat-a-tat on your ass.’

The constable who had not yet spoken turned on his heel and sprinted into the building.

Hogan stood facing the remaining constable. Relaxed. Weapon brought to bear. A slight sardonic smile on his face.

Within a minute the other constable returned followed closely by a man in an inspector’s uniform. He was much older than the young guards. His hair cropped short, gray at the temples. A moustache, small gold rimmed round spectacles. He carried a Heckler & Koch MP5.

He nodded at Hogan. ‘Master sergeant.’

‘Inspector,’ replied Hogan.

‘How can we help?’

‘I’m attached to the American Embassy, inspector. Simply doing a recce and thought that I should run by and see if you have any idea what’s happening.’

The inspector took his spectacles off and rubbed the lenses on his shirtsleeve. ‘No idea, sergeant. Our chaps think that it may be a nuclear strike of some sort. No communication, no power. Frankly, we’re in the dark, both literally and figuratively.’ He replaced his specs. ‘What about you chaps?’

‘Same old, inspector. But one thing I know for sure, it’s going to get worse. Much worse. Well, I better be going. Got an embassy to take care of.’

‘Hold on, old chap,’ said the inspector. ‘A afraid that we can’t have you running around London with a machine gun. We may be in the throes of some sort of disaster but that type of thing is illegal, don’t you know? Hand your weapons over and you can continue.’ The inspector pointed his sub machine gun at the marine and the two constables followed suit.

Hogan simply smiled and shook his head. ‘I’m going back to the embassy. Don’t be an asshole, inspector. The time for certain laws has come and gone. And any law that says you gotta try to take the weapon off a marine has long since passed its sell-by date.’

The sergeant walked backwards, slowly and then turned and jogged off. Back towards the embassy, heading down Pimlico road. About half way down the road he ran into a group of around thirty teenagers. All male, around fourteen to sixteen. Most of them were pushing supermarket trolleys piled high with looted electronic equipment. Laptops, tablets, televisions and projectors. State of the art gear reduced to the level of inefficient paperweights by the pulse. A lesson in stupidity.

He slowed to a fast walk and they parted before him like a shoal of baitfish before a shark. One of the braver ones flicked a mocking salute at him. Hogan grinned.

‘Been shopping, boys?’ He asked.

‘Fo shore, military man,’ quipped the saluter. ‘We’s been getting ourselves some end-of-the-world discounts. Figure that when this is all over we’s gonna set up shop, make some serious money.’

The marine raised an eyebrow. Said nothing. What was the point? He gave a small wave and started jogging again. Within ten minutes he was once again crossing the Chelsea Bridge. When he looked down at the Thames he could see many more people than before. Thousands lined the banks with buckets and bottles, seeking water because the pipes were now completely dry. There were around nine million people in London and approximately fifty miles of river frontage. This means that, if everyone went to the river to claim some water there would be ninety-four people per every yard of water frontage. It won’t be long, thought Hogan, before fights are going to break out. Serious fights.

He double-timed it back to the embassy and his men let him in.

A group of embassy employees were gathered at the bottom of the steps. Talking in hushed tones as if at a funeral. They were obviously waiting for him.

‘Sitrep, Sergeant,’ said Liz.

Hogan thought for a few seconds before he spoke. He needed to get his message across without causing a panic.

‘Things are on the verge of meltdown, ma’am. Water supplies throughout the city have been depleted. All of the food shops are empty. Looting has taken place on a grand scale. The police seem more intent on protecting themselves than laying down the law and, to be honest, there’s not much that they can do. I guess that full-scale riots will start in the next couple of days as water becomes critical and people converge on the river. Days after that people will be fighting over what food is left. And then medication. People will kill for insulin for their children, antibiotics, pain relief. I reckon that people will start trying to get into the embassy over the next couple of days. Especially if they see that we are inside and alive, they will assume that we have supplies of food, water and drugs. We do, but as you know, not much. The London embassy was never designed for a siege. If we were in Iraq or such, things would be different. But we aren’t. And that’s about it, ma’am.’

‘So what do you advise, gunney?’

‘We move out, ma’am. There’s twenty-seven of us including my boys. We need to get into the country or to the coast. The city is going to become a living hell over the next few days. My marines can protect everyone but we won’t be able to provide food. There simply isn’t any left. Out in the countryside we have a better chance. Not much, but better.’

The Deputy Chief of Mission shook her head. Sighed. ‘Really, gunney. I must say, you are a disappointment. Firstly, they are not your marines, sergeant. They are the United States’ Marines. And, secondly, your only advice is to run away? We are Americans, sergeant. We do not run away from problems, we stay and we fix them. Now, this is what I want; put together a plan on how we can sort this out. Put together a foraging team



and send them out to find food. Buy it if necessary. Start stockpiling water from whatever source we can. I am sure that our government will be sending help soon. This is an interim problem, sergeant, not the end of the world.’ She smirked at him, her face a mask of scorn. ‘Carry on, sergeant.’

‘No, ma’am,’ said Hogan. ‘I don’t think so. If anything I have understated the situation. We have over eight million people in less than six hundred square miles. The roads will be packed with people streaming from the city. Think Moscow, second world war. No sanitation, armed gangs, Looney tunes with no more access to their Valium. Total chaos. The sooner we all leave the easier it will be.’

‘Mountains out of molehills, gunney. Now, are you going to do as I say?’

‘With all due respect, ma’am. You are out of your bloody mind. We need to put this to the vote. I know that, technically, you outrank me, but things have changed. Ma’am, things are all messed up. We are drowning in crap and all that you can do is complain about the smell.’ Hogan raised his voice. ‘Listen up, people. As you know, I have just completed a recce of the surrounds and I can tell you that this city is fast turning to crud in a basket. I recommend that we skedaddle out of here ASAP, head for the countryside. It’s gonna be tough but to stay here is to die. I will be leaving in half an hour. Those who wish to come are welcome. Those who want to stay, may God protect you.’

The marine sergeant pushed his way through the crowd and into the embassy. Two of his men met him inside, Manson and Sculley. He gave them a quick rundown of the situation. Neither reacted in the way that he thought they would. They avoided eye contact. Uncomfortable.

‘Speak, Manson. What’s the problem?’

‘No problem, gunney. It’s just that, well, sir, don’t you think that command will send someone to sort everything out? I mean, the fleet or something? If we watch our rations we could have enough for a couple of weeks and by then the brass will have sent backup.’

Hogan shook his head. ‘Manson, I don’t want to sound like some sort of disaster-monger, but what if there is no fleet? What if this EMP has affected everyone. Then there’s no help. Not now, not ever. And by the time that you realize it things will be too late. You’ll all be screwed. Trust me, we gotta get out of the city.’

But Hogan could see that he’d lost them. The enormity of the situation had caused a general shutdown. A lifetime of relying on “them” to take control meant that their perceived best course of action was to wait for “them” to bring help. Hogan didn’t say anything else. There was nothing else to say.

The master sergeant went to the small armory, grabbed a USMC equipment pack. He loaded it with an entrenching tool, sunglasses, a selection of canteens, two Strider SMF knives, extra water purification tablets, matches, two more first aid kits, two extra mags for his 45, three belts of ammo for his main weapon and another one hundred rounds for the Colt. Finally a pack of five First-Strike meals and a handful of the new Soldier Fuel energy bars and a carton of cigarettes.

He strapped the pack on and left the building.

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

