

**Oak Ridge Apocalypse:
Dusk of Man**



QUARANTINE AREA



**BE ORGANIZED
BE PREPARED
BE SAFE**

CLASS Z ZONE

by W.H. Gilmore



An ExtrovertedNerd Publication
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Dusk of Man

Oak Ridge Apocalypse: Dusk of Man W.H. Gilmore

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This book is dedicated to my good friend Rob, who introduced me to the whole zombie phenomenon, and to Max Brooks for his amazing books “The Zombie Survival Guide” and “World War Z.”

Luck is a very thin wire between survival and disaster, and not many people can keep their balance on it.
~ Hunter S. Thompson

[T]he relentless note of incipient hysteria, the invitation to panic, the ungrounded scenarios - the overwhelming and underlying desire for something truly terrible to happen so that you could have something really hot to talk about - was still startling. We call disasters unimaginable, but all we do is imagine such things. That, you could conclude mordantly, is the real soundtrack of our time: the amplification of the self-evident toward the creation of paralyzing, preëmptive paranoia.
~ Adam Gopnik

In fact, I suspect that our only hope is disaster. Cruel tho' it is to say it, there has got to be a vast die-off in the human population - likely including us and our families - before the survivors find themselves in a world where a new and humble and 'religious' adaptation with nature is possible.
~ Edward Abbey

Prologue

1:30pm, September 10, 2016

Jack Brooks peered out the front window through the blinds of his home. The large group of shambling figures was still milling about. They had only been out there for about ten minutes. He had nearly gotten the kids ready to leave before they showed up. Now he would never be able to get the kids to the car safely. He could see it, just thirty feet from the front door, but it may as well have been thirty miles for all the good it would do his family.

Jack missed his wife, Rebecca. He hadn't seen her in a week. She never returned home from work, or even called to say she had run into trouble. He had only waited this long to give her time to get back. Now it looked as if he couldn't even get his three young kids out of the house. At least those things seemed content to stay outside. For the moment they weren't trying to get inside. He glanced back and saw little Ethan playing with some colored blocks by the sofa, stacking them in his approximation of a tower. Ethan had just turned two the day before, and it hurt Jack's heart that he couldn't even give his baby a birthday cake. With the power out they couldn't cook anything, and the food in the fridge was starting to turn. The food in the freezer might still be edible, but it all needed to be heated up in some way first. All the crackers, chips and other snacks found in homes with small children were long gone. Along with that the house phone was dead and the cell phone circuits stayed tied up. He gave up trying to call out because his battery was nearly dead. He had no way of recharging it.

Ben, his ten-year-old, was standing in the doorway to the kitchen, looking at him expectantly. Ben still looked at him as boys often see their fathers – as all powerful and invincible. He trusted his father completely. Even still, Jack could see the worry and lack of sleep showing in his son's eyes.

"Son, where's your sister?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know," Ben replied. He was clutching furtively at his shirt, likely unaware that he was doing it.

Sarah was the free spirit. Being confined to the house for a week with no power, no entertainment to take her mind off of things, and her mother missing with no explanation, was the hardest on her. It was a lot for an eight-year-old girl to cope with. They heard a small scream come from the kitchen, and the back door slamming shut. Jack started that way, but Sarah came bolting into the living room and ran into his arms. He heard a sharp thud coming from the back door.

"I didn't mean to," she cried as she hugged him.

"What didn't you mean to, honey?" he asked.

"I just wanted to go outside for a minute," she stammered.

"What do you mean you wanted to go outside? Did you open the back door?" The something slammed into the back door again and they heard the tinkling of broken glass.

"It's not my fault," she cried defiantly.

"Did you go outside?" he asked again more sternly.

"Only for a minute, but they weren't looking," she said.

Just then the front door shook from another something hitting it hard. Jack went back to the window and saw four shadowy figures on the porch, and more were on their way.

"We have to go upstairs now," he told the kids. He scooped up little Ethan who started crying for the loss of his leaning tower of blocks. "Go up to Ben's room now," he directed the kids. Another thud shook the front door violently. He heard the door frame splinter.

Jack herded the kids up the stairs as the front door exploded inward. Zombies stumbled in the door and turned towards the stairs. He watched as the first one started to climb clumsily up the stairs.

"Ben, take Ethan," he said, handing the baby to his son. "Go to your room and shut the door."

"Are you coming?" Ben asked. He was trying hard not to cry.

"Just go," he said again. "And do not open that door, no matter what you hear, do you understand me?"

"Please come with us," Ben pleaded.

"Promise me you will not open that door," Jack demanded.

"Don't leave us daddy," Sarah begged.

"Promise me!" Jack yelled.

Ben couldn't speak, he just nodded.

"Now go," Jack said again. He looked back and saw the first zombie gaining the top landing. "I don't have time to argue with you." With that he unceremoniously pushed his children into the bedroom and shut the door.

The last time Ben saw his father alive, he was turning to face the zombies as the door clicked shut. His dad shouted, "Leave my family alone!"

Ben hugged little Ethan tighter to his chest. Ethan's crying had subsided to sniffles, his little tower of blocks having been forgotten. Sarah looked back and forth from Ben to the door, tears running down her face.

Outside the door they heard the scuffling of feet and their dad's grunts. They heard fists hitting flesh and bodies colliding with the walls. The scuffling grew fainter as it got farther down the hall, away from the bedroom. Their dad cried out in pain. Then they heard the loud thuds of several bodies falling down the stairs. But, then there was silence.

Ben could feel Sarah pressed against him as they stood in the back corner of his bedroom, not knowing what to do.

A few moments passed and Sarah asked, "Is daddy okay?"

"I don't know," Ben replied, listening to the quiet after the storm.

"Is he coming back?"

"I don't know."

"I want mommy," Sarah sniffled.

"So do I," Ben said as he hugged her closer.

Then, a faint shuffling sound came from outside the bedroom door, like feet dragging on carpet, like somebody building up static electricity to shock you.

"Daddy!" Sarah cried out.

"Shh," Ben hissed.

Sarah started towards the door and said, "I want daddy."

"Sarah, no," Ben admonished her.

Sarah screamed as the bedroom door crashed open. A zombie came shuffling in. It turned to face the children and moaned. Chills ran down Ben's spine at the sound. He looked frantically around for a way of escape, but there was none.

Part One

5:45am, August 31, 2016

The Paul Sinclair Reeves Research Laboratory was just one of several secure facilities at the Y-12 National Security Complex maintained by the Federal Government in Oakridge, Tennessee. All of the programs and projects in the Y-12 Complex were highly classified, and the work done in the P.S.R. Labs was no exception. Government research had been conducted in the Y-12 Complex since 1943, and included such programs as the Manhattan Project. Y-12 separated the uranium-235 for Little Boy, the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945. In the age of the internet, much of the research was centered around computing, and especially cryptology. However, great strides were being made in the field of biology, and that was the focus of the P.S.R. Labs.

P.S.R. handled the world's most dangerous and deadly viruses, from smallpox and H.I.V. to strains of influenza, and a variety of synthetic compounds that were truly terrifying. They were on the forefront of research that promised an antiviral breakthrough on the level of what penicillin did to bacteria and infections. Their most recent gem was a compound under the code name R-83. This compound was part of their research into an engineered virus that would target and neutralize cancerous brain cells. It was the eighty-third iteration, and still nowhere near ready for human testing. But Dr. Keith Hines, PhD, the Director of Research for the P.S.R. Labs, was optimistic that they were close, what with twenty research scientists and a hundred lab techs working 'round the clock. If they got this right, many forms of brain cancers and tumors would be a thing of the past, and a Nobel Peace Prize would look really nice on Dr. Hines' mantel. But P.S.R. also had their dark side. They also worked to create viral cocktails to unleash widespread death on enemies of the United States. The irony was not lost on Dr. Hines that they simultaneously worked to save and end lives.

Due to the dangerous nature of the substances being handled, strict protocols were in place for accidental spills or physical exposure and infection. Every sample was labeled using a system of codes. The codes told how the substance was able to enter and infect the human body. One could tell at a glance just how communicable any given sample was. The P.S.R. Labs used four codes in a descending order of danger.

At the top of the list, and the most dangerous, was the code 'AR', which stood for Aerosol, and the samples labeled with it could infect you for simply breathing the air that it had evaporated into. The vials containing these samples had a red ring around the top for easy identification, and thankfully they were not often seen in P.S.R. Then came the code 'EP' with an orange ring. It could absorb through the skin, or epidermis. Next down the line was the code 'MM' with its yellow ring. These samples could infect a person through a mucus membrane such as the eyes, nasal passage, or another bodily orifice. At the bottom of the list, and the least dangerous, was the code 'BL' with a white ring. These samples had to enter the body directly into the bloodstream, either by injection or contact with an open wound.

Jeremy Collins checked his watch, 5:45am, and finished logging out the tray of small glass vials. There were twelve samples, each containing fifteen milliliters of a clear liquid. It looked like water, but looks were deceiving. Jeremy double checked the label for the code. It was marked 'Compound R-83 (BL)', and had a white ring around the top. Jeremy was relieved. He hated working with the red capped vials. The handling procedures for the Aerosol samples were cumbersome and difficult. Jeremy preferred to leave the testing of those samples to other people. Besides, they were also dangerous. He stepped out the door of the cold storage room and walked up the hall towards his work area.

Jeremy was twenty-three years old and only a year out of college. It was remarkable that he had a job in a top secret facility with a security clearance so young, and with such little experience, even if he was just an entry level lab tech. He looked the part of the geek that he was. He was actually borderline nerd. All he needed for full nerd status was a pocket protector and some tape on his glasses. He was five feet eleven inches tall and a little chubby at two hundred and thirty pounds. He had sandy blond hair, wore wire rim glasses and still had the remnants of his teenage acne. He wore khaki pants with a polo shirt and a white lab coat. The glasses and acne were just two of his problems held over from his teens. A third was arrogance. Rather than be thankful to have such a good job so young, Jeremy was bitter for still having to do the "crap jobs", as he thought of them, and for still being on third shift.

It takes no brains at all to carry around a tray of samples and push a few buttons on a centrifuge, he thought. I've worked at P.S.R. over six months. I'm obviously more capable than these idiots, but does

anybody ever notice me? Of course not. Their incompetence amazed him. Just a few days before, Jim Foley had misread the labels on a set of samples he was supposed to be working on. He wasted an entire day adding a UV reactive marker dye to each of a hundred samples, the wrong hundred samples, and in doing so ruined an entire batch of cultures that had been growing for three months. That major setback cost the program more than time. It cost a great deal of money in materials and man hours to recreate those cultures, not to mention the cost of properly disposing of the ruined bacteria. *If I were in charge, I would have canned his ass,* Jeremy thought.

It just served to prove that Mr. High and Mighty, the Doctor Keith Hines, PhD, was far too soft. Jeremy couldn't understand how such an incompetent man became the Director of Research at P.S.R. "Give me a couple of years, old man," he muttered, "and I'll have your job".

Jeremy turned the corner at the end of the hall, still preoccupied with his frustrations and brooding over the injustices, and didn't notice the sheen of water on the freshly mopped floor. Jeremy's foot slipped and he went down hard on his right hip. He jarred his teeth and bit his tongue. The tray flew out of his hands and crashed to the floor. One of the vials shot out and shattered on the floor. Jeremy stood up and rubbed his butt, wincing. He could taste blood, and he looked at his khakis and saw the wet spot from the floor. "Damn it!" he exclaimed. Jeremy looked up and down the hall for the yellow, wet floor signs and saw none. "Fucking idiots," he muttered. Then Jeremy saw the broken vial. "Son of a bitch," he cursed. Thankfully it was a small mess. Fifteen milliliters of liquid doesn't go very far, and the floor was already wet. He quickly scanned the hall again, this time to see if anybody had noticed the accident. There was thankfully nobody in sight.

Nobody needs to know, he thought. Jeremy scooped up the caddy with the eleven remaining, intact vials and went to deposit them on his workbench. He rubbed his aching backside as he went. "I don't get paid enough for this shit," he muttered as he got a broom and dustpan out of the janitor's closet.

Protocol dictated that he had to report the incident to his supervisor immediately. But then they would call in the goons in the hazmat suits, and he might even get quarantined for several days. *Not going to let that happen,* Jeremy thought. *Not with a brand new World of Warcraft expansion waiting on the computer at home. Definitely not over fifteen milliliters of liquid and a little glass.*

Jeremy ducked back into the hall and checked that he was still alone. So far so good. There were not very many people on third shift, so if he was fast about it he might get it cleaned up without anybody noticing. He quickly swept the glass into the dustpan, paying close attention to get it all. "Damn it," he cursed again. Some of the glass was too fine and wouldn't go into the dustpan, no matter how he swept it. He ran back to the janitor's closet and grabbed a wad of paper towels. He hurried back and dabbed at the mess, trying to coax the last shards into the dustpan. "Come on!" he said in exasperation. Impatiently, Jeremy swept across the mess too hard and a sliver of glass went through the now soggy paper towels and into the tip of his right index finger. "Shit!" he exclaimed, jerking his hand back. He looked at his finger and saw the tiny bead of blood welling up around the sliver of glass. "Damn it all to hell," he said. "Fucking janitor! Why the hell couldn't you put out a damn sign?"

Still cursing the lazy janitor, Jeremy threw away the paper towels and emptied the dustpan in the garbage can. Then he put up the broom and dustpan and went to the restroom to wash his hands. He examined his finger. *Hell, it's just a scratch,* he reasoned. *It's not all that bad. Didn't really even go all that deep, and it's not even bleeding anymore. I'll just keep an eye on it. It's probably nothing.*

Knowing how paranoid the powers that be were, Jeremy decided not to tell anybody about his little scratch. *They won't keep me in a cage like an animal if I can help it. Not over something so trivial.* Jeremy went back to his workstation and retrieved the tray of samples. He checked his watch and it read 6:00am. Quitting time wasn't for another two hours, but it wouldn't hurt to take off a couple of hours early. He went back to the cold storage room quickly and logged all twelve samples back in. Then, he dropped his lab coat off in the locker room, grabbed his cell phone and keys, and headed up to the security checkpoint. He glanced in Dr. Hines' office on his way by. *Good, he's not in,* Jeremy thought. *Too early for Mr. High and Mighty to grace us with his presence.* He got to the security desk without running into anybody else. Jeremy walked around the corner and smiled at the beautiful Officer Pamela Jennings.

"Mr. Collins, leaving early?" Pam asked as he approached the counter. Jeremy liked her and hoped one day to get her out on a date. *I'll have to ask soon,* Jeremy thought as he leaned on the counter between them.

"Yeah" he told her. "I've got a doctor's appointment in a couple hours. I need to go get ready for it," he lied.

“Okay,” she told him. Pam opened her shift notes on the computer and started typing in the entry for Jeremy’s early departure. “Good luck at the doctor,” she told him. “Hope it isn’t anything catching.”

“Yeah,” Jeremy said, leaning farther over the desk trying to see a little more cleavage. “It’s just a routine checkup. Nothing major.”

“Well, if you’ve got your badge, go ahead and buzz out,” Pam said. She turned around to check the in box on the wall to look for something she didn’t need, just to put some distance between herself and that awful stare.

“Yeah, I’ve got it,” Jeremy said as he admired her chest.

“You go on,” Pam told him hoping to get rid of him. “I’ll just note it in the log that you’ve left. Good luck at the doctor’s.”

“Thanks Pam,” he said. “I’ll catch ya later,” he called and winked at her on his way to the door. Jeremy swiped his badge and opened the door after the light turned green. He headed straight for his car, not waiting around for anybody to stop him.

Pam watched him leave and sighed with relief. “What a creep,” she muttered. Chills ran down her spine, thinking about his eyes crawling all over her chest. She picked up the phone and punched in the number for Dr. Hines office and waited for the tone to leave a message.

“Dr. Hines, this is Officer Jennings. As per protocol I am informing you that Mr. Collins has left early at 6:10am.”

Jeremy jammed his key in the ignition and winced, because his finger was a bit tender. He looked at it and saw that it was a little pink around the scratch, and it itched a little. *What do you expect from getting scratched by a sliver of glass? That’s normal. It’ll be alright,* he thought. Jeremy still wasn’t aware of his mortality; a fault many young people share. He threw his car in gear and pointed it towards the exit.

Twenty minutes later Jeremy parked his car in his reserved space at Centennial Village Apartments where he lived. It was a very nice gated community, certainly more than he could afford if mamma wasn’t pitching in a few hundred dollars every month for rent. But she had agreed with him. The extra security was worth the expense. Besides, the credit cards were eating him alive, and he had promised her as soon as they were paid off he could pay his own rent. *You just can’t be too careful these days,* he thought. *What with working an important job with a security clearance and all.* Besides, it was a post 9/11 world. Of course the club house with the hot tub and pool tables was a nice perk, as was the view of Solway Park and the river across Edgemoor Road. He would love to get Pam into the hot tub in a bikini, or better yet, no bikini. Jeremy grinned at the thought as he got out of the car and walked towards his apartment.

Jeremy was still grinning as he let himself into his apartment and locked the door behind him. He pressed the power button on his computer on his way by and went to the bathroom to take a leak. When he got back the computer was ready. He plopped down into his comfortable leather chair, intending to chase all of his problems away with several hours of playing World of Warcraft. He checked his email but there wasn’t anything important. Then he fired up the game and checked the auction house to see if there were any bids on his old Orc Armor. He needed the gold for a new mount. Then he glanced at his desk clock before losing himself to his war to defeat the Alliance.

7:08am, August 31, 2016

Dr. Hines sat down at his desk and sipped his coffee. He was a thoughtful man and liked to take a few minutes when he got to work every morning to collect his thoughts. He worked to organize his day before getting started to be more productive. His brown hair had very nearly all turned gray in the last ten years, but at least he still had hair. His dad had been completely bald before he was forty-six. Dr. Hines' features were strong; some would say almost handsome. He was not overweight, but you would not mistake him for athletic either. He wore a white shirt with a black tie and slacks to work every day. Dr. Hines took pride in his appearance and was always well groomed, and he kept his clothes well pressed. He liked to keep everything neat and orderly. Well organized was how he liked to think of it. He saw the message light blinking on his office phone and flipped his little notepad to a fresh sheet. He used it as a little running To-Do list, and found that it was a helpful tool in his effort to stay productive.

Dr. Hines reached up and pressed the message button on his phone. He had three messages and took notes on his To-Do Pad as he listened. His brow furrowed as he listened to the third and final message that was from Officer Jennings. He picked up the receiver and dialed the security desk number.

“Security,” Pam answered.

“This is Dr. Hines. I got your message. When did Mr. Collins leave?”

“It was just after six. I noted it in the log,” she explained.

“Okay. I wonder why he left. We have work to complete here, and all these absences are hurting our productivity,” Dr. Hines replied.

“Well,” she said. She was quiet for a few seconds. “He said he had a doctor’s appointment. I imagine that a doctor’s appointment is a reasonable reason to leave early.”

“What doctor’s office would be open for a 6:00am appointment?” Dr. Hines asked her. “Never mind Officer Jennings. Thank you for your help.” He hung up without waiting for a response and logged into this computer terminal. He pulled up the work assignments that were listed for Mr. Collins for the previous evening, considering who he would reassign the jobs to.

Let's see what we have, he thought. Dr. Hines noted the serial numbers of the samples that Jeremy had been assigned to test and walked out of his office. *Why would he lie about going to see a doctor?* he wondered. *Something is weird.*

Dr. Hines went to the cold storage room and looked at the log book. *Okay, he logged out the R-83 samples at 5:45am.* The next entry really puzzled him. *Why only fifteen minutes? He couldn't have run the test in only fifteen minutes.* Dr. Hines opened the cooler door and located the tray containing the R-83 samples. He quickly spotted the empty hole, but counted them anyway. He pulled the tray out to inspect it closer, and checked that the serial numbers matched the work order. *This is not good*, he thought as he noticed the cracked corner of the tray. He placed the tray of samples back in the cooler, and to be thorough he checked the adjacent tray of samples coded S-83. All twelve of them were there. *Why would he take the R-83 but not the S-83? That doesn't make sense.*

“Ms. Jennings,” he said as he rounded the corner. “I need Mr. Collins' phone number, and I need to use your phone.”

“No problem, Doctor,” she said, starting to become concerned, seeing Dr. Hines grim demeanor. He always looked cool and collected, so something had to be seriously wrong for him to look so worried. As she pulled up Mr. Collins' security profile on her terminal she asked, “Is everything okay?”

“I don't have the whole picture yet,” Dr. Hines said brusquely. “The number?”

“Of course,” Pam said. She handed him the receiver as she dialed the cell phone number.

Mr. Hines looked at his watch. “Mr. Collins has been gone over an hour, and there's a missing sample,” he told her as the phone rang. “We'll need to tell Mr. Irons. This is a security problem, so he'll need to be brought in.”

Pam nodded and started to understand the gravity of the situation.

7:25am, August 31, 2016

Jeremy typed 'AFK' into the game's chat box, indicating that he was 'away from keyboard,' or as some preferred to call it, 'a free kill.' He looked at his ringing cell phone. It was a work number and he felt a lump rise up in his throat. He had wondered if they might call. He hadn't expected it so quickly. He noticed his finger next. It was swollen, and the whole end of his finger was an angry red color down to the first knuckle. He felt a dull throbbing of pain as well. *What the hell was that stuff?* he thought. He looked back at the phone. *Could they possibly know?* He doubted it, but suddenly he was very worried. *Okay, get a hold of yourself. Don't answer it. Let it go to voice-mail. It may be no big deal, just a lecture for leaving early without getting approval.* Jeremy waited a few minutes that felt like an eternity until his phoned chimed, indicating a new voicemail. He accessed it and listened with growing alarm to the voice of Mr. High and Mighty himself.

“Mr. Collins. When you get this message call P.S.R. immediately and ask for Dr. Hines. You left early, did not complete your work assignments, and there is a missing vial. You were the last person to log it out. I need you to verify that it was in the cooler when you left. Call back as soon as you get this message. It is urgent that I speak with you!”

Jeremy stared at his phone for a minute, not wanting to believe what he had just heard. *Do they think I stole it? Oh god! What if the police are already on their way?* Jeremy jumped up to run to his bedroom to pack and nearly fell flat on his face. He stopped to steady himself. The room spun for a few seconds before his head cleared. Then he ran to his bedroom and threw socks and underwear into a duffle bag with a couple pair of khakis and a couple of extra shirts. He grabbed the emergency credit card his mom had given him out of the desk drawer on his way by. He grabbed his phone on his way out the door, barely taking time to lock up. He completely forgot to log out of the game, much less shut down the computer. The only thing on his mind was getting away. Running. He had completely gone into panic mode. When he got to the car he double checked his wallet for the credit card his mom had given him 'for emergencies only.' "This is most definitely an emergency," he said to himself as he got in the car and started it up. Jeremy quickly drove towards the Interstate. He checked his fuel gauge, and it was good. He had enough to make it to Chattanooga at least. He wanted to get as far as he could before he had to stop. It was a long drive down to Tallahassee. Mamma always liked a surprise visit, so he thought he would just pop down for a while. *Maybe the finger thing will go away by then,* he hoped in vain. He checked his dash clock as he merged into traffic on I-40 towards the I-75 split.