

Synopsis of New Wilderness

June 10th of that first year seemed like any other summer day, until every animal and bird on the planet turned on mankind. From house pets to zoo creatures, wildlife to circus animals, everything that wasn't human wanted kill anything that was. Three days later, the hymenoptera—bees, wasps and ants—joined in. The death toll was immeasurable. Civilization collapsed.

Ten years later, humanity lives in fortified encampments. People venture out only when necessary, and then only in protective gear and heavily armed.

In what used to be British Columbia, Canada, the settlement of Compton Pit has found a way to protect itself against the animals and insects. Ultra-sonic projectors, called Screaming Mimis, surround the Pit and create a barrier repellent to aggressors.

Inside the Pit, Dr. Theodore Odega works feverishly to discover the cause of the Change.

Lena Wong runs communications, keeping contact with as much of the world as she can by bouncing signals off what few autonomous satellites still orbit the planet.

Darcy McCullough, chief of security, guards The Pit against two-legged predators.

Sid Halbert, known as the Boss, runs the show.

Ethan Toffee, chief of the hunters, supplies the Pit with meat while using the psyches of those around him as his personal game farm.

Richard “Caps” Scagling, auto-mechanic extraordinaire and cartoonist, tries to balance the world's horror with humour.

Noah Thurlow, electrical engineer, supplies them all with electricity by maintaining and improving the Pit's enormous solar panel array.

Noah is infatuated with Darcy, but she doesn't return his feelings. She's still in mourning for her lover, Travis Jones, who was killed by rats in caverns under the Pit.

Despite the security of the sound net, Compton Pit has its problems. People can go “tooth crazy” and foolishly leave the settlement. Others have to be locked outside. The Pit is waging a physical war with Fenwick Prison, a nearby settlement, and an economic war with the Reservoir, the region's chief stockpile of fuel and motor vehicles. Peter “Gascan” D'Abo, boss of the Reservoir, has long had his eye on Compton Pit's treasures.

October Neriah, the Pit's chief of transport, is ambushed and murdered on the highway by scavengers from Fenwick Prison.

Burle Campbell, chief of stores and one of the Pit's most trusted citizens, betrays them to Fenwick, but once discovered, turns double agent.

The Pit wins its war with Fenwick, but the conflict results in the destruction of the Pit's solar panel array and a number of vehicles. Desperate for trucks and new solar panels, Sid, Darcy, Noah, Caps, Lena and Toffee—dubbed the Deep Six—set out for the dreaded city of Vancouver, from which nobody has returned in the last decade. En route they encounter cartographer Donald Graff, who's traveling in the opposite direction.

The Deep Six penetrate Vancouver and acquire the materials they need. They plunder the University of British Columbia for an advanced solar panel prototype, and while there, discover the remains of a group of scientists who appear to have committed suicide subsequent to some intensive research.

Peter D'Abo learns from Donald Graff that the command core of Compton Pit is absent. D'Abo mobilizes an armored convoy with the intention of annexing the Pit.

As the Deep Six prepare to leave Vancouver, they're waylaid by silent people who abduct Noah and Lena and leave the rest for dead.

Inside Compton Pit, things are not going well. Without the trusted leaders to hold the place together, conflicts of personality escalate into a civil war.

Dr. Odega, on the verge of his greatest discovery, loses his mind and flees the Pit, stealing one of their best vehicles and indirectly killing a hunter.

Sid, Darcy, Toffee and Caps search the city to find their lost comrades.

Peter D'Abo arrives at Compton Pit, sets up a siege within the safety of the sound net and demands total surrender.

Lena and Noah suffer at the hands of their captors, a whale-worshipping cult who practice human sacrifice.

Sid, Darcy and Toffee rescue Noah and Lena. Caps is critically wounded.

Compton Pit turns off the sound net and the animals wipe out D'Abo and his crew.

The Deep Six return to Compton Pit with their bounty. Caps is taken to the infirmary, his chances of survival uncertain.

*And I will send the beasts among you,
which shall rob you of your children...
and make you few in number;
and your ways shall become desolate.*

Leviticus XXVI, 22

1. Yellow-Brick Road

They lay side by side on blankets, both naked save for the briefest of swimming apparel.

“You’re in no hurry to go in yet?” asked Caps. His companion didn’t answer. “Yeah, me neither. Pass the lotion?”

Noah tossed the bottle of deep-tanning oil onto Caps’s blanket. The artist squeezed a small puddle of the stuff onto his belly and rubbed it into his skin.

“Oh, yeah,” said Caps. “This is the life!” He stood up and applied a fresh coat to his legs. “It’s not as good as Hawaii. You ever get out there? Guess you’d have been too young for surfing. Surfing, that’s something I miss.” He stretched his arms out and rode an imaginary wave, gyrating to keep his balance. “And the girls! All that heat and not a bead of sweat on ’em when they do that dance.” He did a fair imitation of Hawaiian luau music and a graceless imitation of the dance. “They do at night, though. They sweat like crazy. Dancing around these huge bonfires. They really get moving then.” Caps swung his arms up and down and jerked his pelvis from side to side.

“Okay!” Noah barked.

Caps stopped his prancing. “Okay as in ‘I give?’ ”

“Yes! Uncle. You win.”

“Double for a month. Yummy. Makes my nipples hard just thinking about it. Yours too I see.”

Noah’s teeth started to chatter. Far above the solar panels, uncontested in a cloudless sky, the November sun mocked them with light but no heat.

“I’m glad you caved,” said Caps. “I’m freezing to death out here.”

“You—” the rest of Noah’s reply was cut off when a pair of coveralls hit him in the face. A moment later a similar projectile hit Caps.

“What the hell do you two think you’re doing?” Sid Halbert demanded.

“Alright, the Boss.” Caps jiggled his head in time with a Californian lilt. “Dude, grab some ground, catch some rays.”

Noah struggled into the coveralls. The legs were twisted and his frantic kicking only made things worse.

“This isn’t a joke, Richard,” said Sid, made angrier by Caps’s levity. “What happens when you both come down with pneumonia? Of all the stupid bets to make...” he trailed off as Caps, impossibly, turned paler than he already was.

“Damn it!” Noah had somehow managed to get one pant leg inside the other.

“Son of a bitch! Dogs!” yelled Caps.

“Nice try,” said Noah.

Caps was already running.

Sid swiveled and looked behind him.

Still a distance away, through the panels, the shapes of three dogs trotted closer. The lead dog broke into a run. The access panel to the battery bay, and the safety of below, was between the three men and the animals. There was no chance of reaching it before the dogs did.

Sid ran after Caps. Noah, his legs still tangled in the coveralls, stood, took a step, and fell flat on his face.

“Noah, come on!” Caps yelled as he leapt for a panel mount.

The Boss pulled himself onto the same mount, then the two of them clambered up to a high support beam. Two thoughts struck Sid as he looked back for his chief electrical engineer: the first was that they weren’t dogs, they were wolves; the second was that Noah wasn’t going to make it.

Noah gave up on dressing and ran, his coveralls trailing from one hand, but the wolves were closing the distance too quickly for him to get to a support beam high enough. He could almost feel the teeth sinking into his legs. With less than twenty feet between himself and the lead wolf, he hooked his coveralls on a low-mounted panel and gave his legs everything he had. The wolf was fooled by the garment for only a moment, but that was all Noah needed. He jumped and grabbed the top edge of a large panel, then pulled himself up, throwing his leg over the top so he was lying on the edge of the frame, barely two inches thick. Two of the wolves stopped at Noah’s panel. The third proceeded to the beam Caps and Sid sat on. Both men pulled their legs up as the creature jumped and missed.

“Shoot them,” said Caps.

“With what?” Sid patted his empty hip. “If I’d brought a gun, I’d have already used it on you two.”

There were no ground guards topside. Since the fall of both Fenwick Prison and Gascan D'Abo there was nothing even remotely close by to guard against, and of course the Screaming Mimis kept the teeth away. At least they were supposed to. Sid cast his eyes first at the southwest, then the northeast tower.

The lone wolf darted right and left, looking for a way to get at its prey. Noah's two were also pacing back and forth. Apart from an occasional low growl, none of the animals made much noise.

"HELP!" yelled Caps, waving at the towers. "HELP!"

"Stop that." Sid slapped Caps's arms down. "They can't hear you. Oh, no."

Two more wolves appeared through the panels, then another pair, until there was a total of seven wolves pacing and snarling.

The narrow frame Noah was on cut into his naked chest, and the warmth brought on by adrenaline was ebbing, sucked away by the cold air, but he had a more immediate problem. The panel he was on was a concentrator, one of many large, monochromatic cells designed to track the sun. To this end, it was mounted on a swivel, and Noah's additional weight was causing the panel to tilt down towards the wolves.

"Oh, shit..." breathed Caps.

Noah's scalp crawled and another surge of adrenaline burst through him. As the panel twisted, he let go of his tentative perch and pulled himself along to the opposite end that would soon be the high ground. The panel reached equilibrium parallel to the earth. Two wolves jumped onto it simultaneously, their combined weight enough to spur the panel into finishing its rotation. The wolves slid back to the ground, clawing at the panel's black surface as they went. Noah yanked himself up to the frame's new top edge and once again lay flat, his hands braced on either side. His eyes were huge with fear, and his trembling had nothing to do with the cold.

One of the wolves threw itself into the bottom of the panel. The frame couldn't turn anymore in that direction, but it lurched, nearly dislodging the young man.

"Noah, look at me," said Sid, his voice unnaturally calm. "You'll have to jump."

A ten-foot distance separated the top of the concentrator and the high beam the Boss and Caps were on.

"Don't look down. Just jump."

The wolf hit the concentrator again. Another wolf's ears perked up as it caught on.

Noah gripped the panel tightly with his hands as he brought his legs, then his feet, underneath him. If he'd been wearing boots, it would have been impossible, but bare soles made for better traction and soon he was poised on the frame like a monkey on a

tree branch. Like a drunken monkey on a tree branch. His extremities were numb with the cold and three of the wolves were now doing their damndest to shake him loose. Just as the largest of the three attackers smashed into the panel, Noah launched himself towards the beam. Panic had been kept in abeyance by the suddenness and sheer *unreality* of the situation—attacked by wolves amidst his own array, and so deep within the sound net—but in the fraction of the second in which he was airborne, he knew he was headed for the ground, not the beam. He could see each individual hair on the muzzle of the wolf rearing up at him.

Caps caught one arm, Sid the other, and as Noah slammed into the beam, they hauled him up onto it.

The wolves made a few more useless jumps, then surrounded the trio and growled.

Caps resumed waving his arms at the nearest tower and again the Boss slapped his arms down.

“I told you to stop that.”

“Are you losing it?”

“What’s going to happen? They can’t see the wolves through the panels. Whoever’s up there will think we’ve just locked ourselves out and send someone to open the hatch.” He flicked his eyes at the animals.

“They’ll be torn apart,” said Caps. “So what do we do now?”

“You could give me your jacket,” Noah stammered to the Boss.

“Sorry. Here.”

Noah yanked the jacket on. Caps tried to pull his feet up into his pant legs without losing his perch. He failed. A quick grab from Sid saved him.

“Gershwin’s gone,” said Noah. “Our supercomputer finally fragged itself.”

“Not necessarily,” said Sid. “What if it’s just lost power?”

“No way. No way! Everything else in the Pit would lose juice before Gershwin. I’ve got so many redundancies—”

“Alright, Noah. I believe you.”

While five of the wolves set off down the length of the beam, most likely to look for a way up, two of them stayed guard. One sat down and whined.

“Oh, that creeps me out,” Caps said. “This one’s more disappointed than angry that it can’t eat us yet. What’s that one doing?”

One of the wolves had a cable in its teeth and was wrestling with it.

“It can’t get us so he’s ripping up my array,” Noah said sullenly. “He’ll never chew through that cable.”

The wolf planted its feet, clamped down on the cable and pulled with all its might.

The Boss followed the cable with his eyes. It led up to a medium-sized panel mounted even higher than the beam they were sitting on.

“Noah, move!” Sid reached out, but Noah had already slid out of harm’s way. The panel came loose and smashed into the beam before falling to the ground.

The wolf barked twice and the animals closest to it turned to face it, bodies in postures of attention. The wolf barked twice more then went to work on another cable.

“No way,” said Caps, turning his head to follow the cable to another panel.

The wolves watched their cable-wrestling pack mate with curiosity. The three men slid a few feet down the beam. One wolf got bored and returned its gaze to the dinner hiding in the strange tree.

The panel came loose and cracked into the beam.

Noah cursed.

The instructing wolf looked at Noah and huffed a few times.

One by one, the wolves chose their cables.

“I’m very scared now,” said Caps, eyeballing the canopy of panels above them.

Sid’s head swung from left to right. There was nowhere to go.

Noah watched a cluster of wolves heading for cables in the distance. As a group they pulled up short and backed up a few steps. Noah searched frantically for whatever they’d found. He saw nothing in particular that would attract their attention. One of the creatures trotted forward only to lurch back again.

“Guy’s, c’mon.” Noah stood on the beam and walked along its length as quickly as he could and still keep his balance.

“What do you see?” Sid also rose to his feet.

A panel hit the beam, edge first. A brittle *snap* preceded shards of crystal tinkling to the ground.

“Each of the Mimis has a sphere of influence, right?” said Noah, wincing as another panel came loose. “Only one sphere actually crosses the fence into our topside. Gershwin’s still online.”

Sid and Caps caught on at the same time. The Screaming Mimis were set up so that their areas of effect overlapped and completely surrounded Compton Pit, but that was beyond the fence line. The limitations of geography forced one of the sound projectors to be set up close enough that it protected a small area within the perimeter, and that area included a portion of the array. If they could get to that area, then they could jump to the ground and still be safe. They could stay within the safety zone, and work their way to the southeast tower.

Three guard wolves kept pace with them as they shuffled along the beam. What few parts of his feet Noah could feel, felt like they were burning. He didn't know how much longer he could take it, and the safety zone was still a ways away.

"Just keep going, son."

"Th-that's easy for you to say. You've got boots on."

"I'll be happy to give them to you once we reach the ground."

Arms outstretched at their sides, they approached their goal. The larger group of wolves gave up on the cables and moved to intercept, and the closer they got, the louder they got. Soon all of the creatures were snarling and barking. One of them—the largest—made a last desperate jump, but fell short of the beam. When the wolves were thirty feet behind, and making no attempt to come closer, Sid lowered himself to hang from the beam by his hands, then dropped to the ground. When the animals didn't charge, Noah and Caps did the same. Frustrated beyond belief, the wolves began to howl.

"That'll do it," said Sid. He looked around. "Someone'll hear that. Good job, Noah."

"Thanks. About those boots?"