

Trapped in the R.A.W.

A Journal of My Experiences  
during the Great Invasion

by  
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With an Afterword by Pearl Larken  
and Appendices Compiled by the  
“We Survive” Series Group

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Dedicated to those who love books,  
libraries, and all things rare and wonderful,  
including the indomitable spirit  
that helps us survive.

## *Day Eight*

Rip out pages from books? Never! I never harmed a book before I took this job in the special collections library, and I wouldn't risk losing my job by doing such a thing now. Even during seminars, when professors encourage us—actually, given what's happening outside, I should start using the past tense—encouraged us to make margin notes in our texts and then shamed students who did not, I came to class w/ dozens of tiny slips of paper sticking out from between the pages of my books because I couldn't write in them. I forced myself to make a margin note once—w/ a #3 pencil, and very lightly but I erased the mark & felt physically ill for hours.

I never harmed a book...before the invasion.

Everything changed eight days ago. I was alone in here, closing the library for the day, when I heard screaming outside. I climbed a sliding shelf ladder to look out a high window, & I saw.... I....

I can't write about it now. I can't even think about it. Too soon? Why do people say that when they know it's not funny? Yes, it's too soon. Too disturbing. Too incomprehensible. Plus, the light is fading so I need to wrap things up for the day and go into hiding because the invaders are most active around dusk & dawn.

"If I should die before I wake...."

My grandmother taught me that bedtime song. I've hummed it often during the past week because there have been many times when I thought I might die. Or was sure I would. Best to fall asleep w/ a clean conscience, just in case.

So before I crawl under my bench in the far corner of the Science/Medicine section of the library and try to sleep—

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while listening to annoying scratching sounds coming from someplace inside this building & horrifying howling coming from outside it—I say: I am sorry. Sorry I’ve been ripping out blank pages from rare books in this library for the past seven days. & very, very sorry I ripped out this printed page today.

## *Day Nine*

I tried to calm down enough this morning to write about Day One, but my hands started shaking as soon as I thought about it. I gave up. Besides, I've decided to deal w/ the worst aspects of my situation on even days. Today is definitely an odd day.

The only thing I can say about Day One at this point is that as soon as I realized what was happening, I slid down the sliding shelf ladder (didn't even use the rungs), locked the two library doors, then shoved tables, chairs, & shelves against the doors to form barricades. Still don't know where I came up w/ the strength to do what, in retrospect, seems like a bona fide tiny-woman-lifts-car-w/-one-hand-to-rescue-infant kind of thing.

When I finished securing the doors & took a moment to catch my breath, a physiological reaction to the fear & adrenaline pumping through my body struck me. Yes, that. I ran to the bathroom, turned on the light, closed the door, & ...no toilet paper.

My friend/choir buddy/co-worker Benji, the only person who had been working w/ me that day in the RAW (our nickname for this library), had called the campus custodial office earlier to tell them our bathroom needed to be stocked. No one came. After Benji left for the day, I tried calling them again on my cell phone while I was closing up the library. No signal (hasn't been a signal or Internet connection since then, so cell phone towers must still be down, & now my phone battery is dead). I continued closing up, heard screaming, climbed the ladder, looked out, & that was that.

Amazing how little paper there is in a special collections library. No due date slips because items in here can't be checked

out. No card catalogues, which I've seen only in old movies & photographs, because all info is on computers. No tax booklets & forms because they're available on-line. We used to give patrons scrap paper if they needed to take notes (only w/ a pencil, of course; no pens allowed for patrons), but now we have a digital-only policy for note taking.

Our head librarian is—was?—a recycling fiend, so no paper towels in the staff kitchen, just cloth napkins & rags the kindly old library volunteers take—took—home to wash for us. There was—is?—a little box of tissues in the head librarian's office, one box for the entire staff. We were encouraged to bring a cloth handkerchief, & we were glared at if we forgot and had to slink into her office to take a tissue. But her office was locked on Day One, peons like me weren't given keys to it or the book conservation room, & I was still too afraid of her then—& in too much of a hurry—to break the lock.

Where are the creeps taking stealth videos when you need them? A clip of me running around the library w/ a bad case of the hurry-me-ups while trying to figure out what to use as a substitute for toilet paper would go viral for sure. A cloth napkin or rag? No, I would need to wash it, & I wanted to conserve water because it could be turned off at any moment. My hand? See previous response & eeeew, just...ew. A sleeve from the head librarian's lab coat? Deeply satisfying, but only momentarily, & not practical. My hat? A sock? The smoking-gun letter Professor G sent me, the one I hid in the case w/ my sunglasses? No, no, & absolutely not.

Fun fact about how most books have been made over the past couple of hundred years: pages of text are printed on both sides of a large sheet of paper; the paper is folded several times to create a signature (a booklet thingy); after enough signatures are printed to include all the pages of text, the signatures are bound together into a book. Because of the folding process, the number of pages in a book created this way will be a multiple



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of eight. If the text doesn't come out to a multiple of eight, there will be blank pages, usually at the end of the book.

Yes, it's amazing how little paper is in a modern library—except between the covers of books. I wish I could say I hesitated for a long time before ripping out that 1<sup>st</sup> blank page. I didn't. Once I settled on the solution, I found a book w/ blank pages, ripped one out, & ran for the bathroom. Just like that.

Later, curled up under a bench in the Science & Medicine section—the bench farthest from the doors, the one that can't be seen from any windows—I thought about ripping out that page, & I cried for hours.

Silly to be upset about a small thing like that in the midst of massive death & destruction, right? But here's something I've noticed during my time in the RAW: Many of the really horrible things that happen leave me feeling zoned-out. I don't think that means there's anything wrong w/ me. I think of that reaction in terms of the pain scale from 0 to 10 that doctors use: if a scale existed for emotions, & if the most intense negative emotion it was possible for us to feel in the normal course of human events—aye, there's the rub—was a 10 (as I felt when my mother died), then what happens to our emotions when the basis of the scale changes? When the world ups the horror ante & the old 10 is now a 1? Or a .001? When we've felt as badly as we can feel & then things get worse? It makes sense that our emotions would be off, at least during a period of adjustment, under those circumstances. So it's the small things, the things I can react to based on the pre-invasion emotional pain scale, that upset me the most.

Also, destroying books means one more piece of the old world, the old me, is lost. Maybe forever. How many more pieces of me can I lose before there is no more "me," before the "I" that I was before the invasion disappears completely?

I fell asleep before dawn, then woke from a dream about earthquakes. I was shaking so hard that the book cart next to

my sleeping bench was vibrating. I almost threw up, but I took deep breaths to calm down.

A few blank pages a day to take care of necessities, that's all I needed. I discovered early on that pages are scratchy, especially when applied to delicate areas, so I tried something we did in elementary school: Crumple pages into balls, open them, smooth them out, then repeat until the pages are soft & more absorbent.

& so it went until yesterday. I ripped out a blank page, hurried to the bathroom, & didn't realize until I was in there that I had torn out an additional page by mistake. A printed page. A page of text.

The pages of the book were so thin. Gold gilding on the fore-edge had stuck the pages together. I was in a hurry. Yadda, yadda, yadda. I could make a list of reasons. But I can't provide even one good excuse because there is none.

So that happened. Mea culpa. My bad. I was sorry about using blank pages; I was appalled about altering a book forever by removing a page of text. I spent hours yesterday looking through books to estimate the supply of blank pages available. I considered, for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, the possibility that there might not be anyone left except me to read these books. Ever. I decided I should

Oh, no!



## *Day Ten*

Last night was a nightmare. Again.

The invaders have been trying to break down the front door since Day One. No luck, which explains why I'm still breathing. The doors resemble those of a castle: Oak slabs, iron straps, monstrous bolts. Built to withstand attacks by Huns, Visigoths, or other marauding hordes that might pass by this little town in the middle of nowhere & have a sudden overpowering need to visit a library. I always thought the doors looked pretentious; now I love the way they look & perform.

But when I was writing in this journal yesterday, the invaders hit the door w/ something really big & really heavy. Something like a battering ram.

BAM!

I started humming "Love Shack" to drown out the sound.

BAM!

I hummed a little louder, baby.

BAM!

Even though I was humming as loud as I could, it wasn't loud enough to drown out the sound of wood cracking.

BAM!

The last bash knocked down some chairs from the barricade. That, plus the sound of wood cracking, made me feel sick. I hid under my bench, rolled the cart in front of it so invaders couldn't see me when they broke in, & waited for the door to give & the invaders to swarm the RAW.

Then—Why? Why?!!!—they stopped. Maybe their arms were tired. Maybe they saw other people trying to escape & had to go kill them. Maybe it was supper time. I don't know.

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I stayed hidden until long after the last bash. I needed to check the door for damage, but I didn't want to emerge until the invaders were gone. While I waited, I kept humming "Love Shack" as loudly as possible to drown out the sounds of feet running past the building, people howling as they died, something scratching frantically.

Two things made last night worse than previous nights. 1<sup>st</sup>, the amount & intensity of activity: In addition to the ramped-up assault on the door, I counted nine howling sessions. 2<sup>nd</sup>, & almost as disturbing, my sighting of an invader looking in a window.

The windows of this one-story building, which is almost as tall as the two-story buildings on either side of it, are long, narrow, & located near the top of the high walls. The architect—son of Dowager Gulick, who donated the money to build the library—said he designed the windows that way to protect the books from sunlight. The design didn't work, & the campus maintenance crew had to install Roman shades on the windows to fix the glitch.

From outside, the shape & location of the windows, plus the rough concrete walls (How is Brutalism still a thing?) & oak doors, make this place look like a small castle fortress w/o the charm. From inside, the lack of windows through which to view the campus & town (w/o climbing a shelf ladder) made it feel a bit like a prison even before the invasion. (To be fair, though, the windows do provide a nice view of the sky.)

Anyway, the invader must have accessed the roof using the maintenance ladder next to the wheelchair ramp by the back door, laid on his/her/its belly (or whatever), & hung his/her/its head & upper torso (or whatever) over the edge of the roof—and I mean way, way over the edge—to look in.

Because the enemy should have a short &, if possible, disgusting name (the better to express one's hostility toward them), I have decided to call the invaders "pacz." That's plural:

“pac” is singular. I have no idea what these things are. During long nights when I can’t sleep, the question spins around in my head: What are they? What are they?!!! People? Aliens? Robots? Creatures (i.e., animals) of some sort? Or—in half-awake moments, when dreams & reality merge & turn into the stuff that makes heads explode—zombies? I had no idea on Day One; I have no idea now.

I decided to use the 1<sup>st</sup> letters of “people,” “aliens,” “creatures,” and “zombies” to name the invaders, but I refuse to dignify them by capitalizing the name. I nixed the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of “robots” because the top two names I came up w/ that incorporated an “r” were “crapz” and “parcz.” The former is too common &, given the color of the invaders’ suits, not terribly creative. The latter brings to mind pleasant places: Great Barrier Reef, Grand Canyon, Galapagos, Disney World. Plus, the “r” softens the sound of the names too much. Saying “pac” feels like spitting. Saying “pacz” feels like spitting & then hissing (I like to say “paczzzz” to accentuate the hissing effect).

Anyway, I wouldn’t have noticed the pac that (I refuse to use “who,” too) looked in the window if not for the full moon. I expect that’s why so much was going on, since pacz are most active in half-light. There was no real darkness last night, so there was no respite from the horrible things they do.

The scratching sound has become a huge problem. The sound started on Day Three, I think. It was barely audible at 1<sup>st</sup>. I thought it was the sleeve of my jacket (it’s cold in here) brushing against things. But the sound was still there when I played what Matilda & I call the statue game—make no sound & don’t move.

The scratching was so irritating last night, my need to check the front door for damage was so pressing, & the library was so easy to move around in because of the full moon, that I slid my protective book cart to one side & crawled out from under my bench to investigate.

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I checked for the source of the scratching in every part of the RAW that I could. 1<sup>st</sup>, the main section, which looks like any ordinary library, w/ many rows of book shelves that patrons can access by themselves, plus a section in the middle that used to have lots of long study tables before I used them for door barricades. Then the area around the front desk, where Benji & I worked. Then the three SoDoc rooms (SoDoc = special objects & documents), which have no doors & contain items only people who work here can access. After that, the staff kitchen area, also w/ no door. Finally, the bathroom, which, thank goodness, does have a door.

I found nothing that could be causing the scratching, so it must be coming from either the Head Librarian's office or the book conservation room. As I mentioned before, the doors of those rooms are locked, & I don't have the keys.

Trundling back to my sleeping nest after a fruitless search, I noticed something strange about one of the long, narrow shafts of moonlight on the stone tile floor. There was a roundish dark spot at one end.

I looked up, & there was the pac's head in the window, backlit by the moon. That mesh part of its head covering, the part I'm guessing is over its face, was almost touching the glass. Of course, it was viewing me upside down, since it was hanging over the edge of the roof.

No trouble playing the statue game at that moment. I couldn't move. I don't think I was breathing, either. The pac seemed to be playing the same game. There was a long period of absolute stillness. Did it see me? I had to find out. I took a step to the right: the pac's head turned in that direction. I waited for a minute, then took a step to the left: the pac's head turned that way.

Did it see me? Absolutely.

Any chance I had of sleeping was blown to bits right then & there. I backed up until I was behind a book shelf, then slunk to my bench & hid under it.

But today, as I covered the new hole in the front door w/ a table and then rebuilt the barricade, I couldn't hide from the questions. Did pacz peek in the windows every night? Did the pac realize I was the enemy? One pac knew I was in the RAW on Day Three because it chased me back here after my failed rescue attempt. I was hoping that pac had decided I was long gone: I was hoping the pounding on the front door was something pacz did to every campus building. But now....

Now that the invaders, the pacz, know for sure I'm in here, will they intensify their efforts to get inside?



## *Day Eleven*

Storm clouds moved in yesterday just before sunset, lightning shot through the sky, thunder shook the RAW, & then heavy rain began to fall. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> real storm since the invasion began, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the big storms that hit this area every year in late autumn or early winter. Clouds covered the sun, then the moon. The world became dark in the most comforting way possible.

I watched every step in the progress of the storm; I read every chapter in its story. That's why I've kept the shades open on the windows. It's hard to be locked up in here. If I couldn't see the outside world, if I couldn't look up & see the sky, even if it is only a very thin slice of it, my life would be much harder.

Between lightning cracks & thunder rumbles, everything was quiet. I climbed the ladder often during the evening to peek outside, being even more cautious than I was before, in case the peeping pac was still around. No pacz. Anywhere. Usually I see a few any time of the day or night out in the Quad, on a soccer field, or slinking between buildings. It seems too good to be true, but I have a hunch pacz don't like rain.

Ha! Take that you evil so-&-so(s), you loathsome whatever-you-are(s)! And if you hate rain, trust me, you are really, really going to despise snow....

I love rain. W/ all my heart & all my senses. Even as a small child, I took long walks during storms. My mother never stopped me. She would rub my hair dry w/ a towel when I came back home & say, "That's my Kaylee, soggy but satisfied."

I had an almost overpowering urge to go outside last night, to have that rainy day feeling again. Open the door. Step into the world. Stand on the grass w/ my hands & face turned

toward the sky. Feel something powerful again, something other than fear.

I was full of nervous energy, my body charged by the clash between an intense desire to be outside & an intense desire to stay safe inside. I couldn't read. I couldn't sit still. Exercise was the only way to get rid of my agitation.

Exercise became part of my daily routine after I recovered from the events of Day Three. Being slapped in the face that day w/ the realization that my life, & maybe the lives of others, would almost certainly depend at some point on my ability to run fast enough to escape death gave me a great incentive to keep as fit as possible.

I had created an empty space in the middle of the RAW when I used the tables & chairs to barricade the doors. But running in tight circles in that space made me irritable. It reminded me too much of the similarities between my situation & that of a caged hamster. Spinning, spinning, going nowhere.

I needed longer stretches of cleared space to give my heart & lungs a work-out. By stacking in one corner the small study desks that had been in the perimeter aisles, I was able to create a large loop to pace around. Ninety-two paces from the front door, around the perimeter of the main section of the library, & back to the front door again.

For over an hour I paced around the perimeter aisles of the RAW to the sound of the storm. My speed grew faster as the storm grew more intense, as I recalled more walks in the rain, as I thought about my mother & all the people who are gone now.

& then, suddenly, I was running. I was lapping the aisles in great loping strides, around & around, singing.

"I can hear the thunder  
of that great strange world of wonder,  
Like a voice out in the distance calling me."

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At one point—heart pounding, breaths coming in quick gasps—I grabbed a table from the pile barricading the front door & threw it. Across. The. Room. The table crashed into 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Literature, dislodging several books from a shelf, & sending them skittering along the slick tile floor. Something about the way those books moved, like terrified animals scurrying away to escape my great fury, made me laugh. Doubled over. Gasping for breath. Until I cried.

When I calmed down, I wedged the table back into the barricade. Then I flopped down on the floor & crawled on my belly across the stone tiles until I was as close to the door as I could be w/o causing items in the barricade to cascade down on my head. Through the narrow crack between the bottom of the door & the threshold, a draft of air flowed toward me. Rain-laden. Fresh. Cool.

The smell of freedom.

