

It all ended 22 years ago. It wasn't extravagant, like some thought it would be. It was just a sad, hopeless finale that resulted in the end of western civilization.

I was born in 2026, two years after the crisis. Most of what I can tell you about it is the information I got from my uncle, who I lived with after I lost contact with the rest of my family.

The collapse of civilization wasn't caused by a meteor, nuclear war, or the Rapture. No. We brought this horror upon ourselves. It started with the coming of a new era. An age in which information became as easy to get as food and water. This age gave birth to a technological revolution of the likes that had never been seen before. Many new advancements were made. New world powers emerged, and in turn, some empires began to age and die out. For all of these nations, their need to fuel their economic and military machine grew. Oil, coal, and natural gas became increasingly necessary to ensure that a nation could maintain its international power, and the general well-being of its people. As the demand for these resources grew, the supply dropped. Most countries ran out of these resources within their own borders, so, they had to turn to chaotic, fanatical countries to get their oil and coal. When these "supplier" countries got involved in a war, the countries that needed oil and coal would be forced to defend them, or else be economically deprived.

Eventually the supply of fossil fuels became dangerously low. Unfortunately, nations were so dependent on them that it became impossible to change. The gross domestic product for virtually every country that used fossil fuels dropped. Mass riots occurred all over the world. Revolutions were held, and for citizens of most countries on the planet, it was adapt or die as western civilization collapsed.

Well, at least that was how my uncle told it. Now, only pockets of civilization were left in North America. Most survivors (if you will) formed city states, but most of these had to establish cold, merciless governments and social policies in order to survive in this new world.

My Uncle Stu and I had found a city-state built on the ruins of Anchorage and the land surrounding Cook Inlet. It was called the Alaskan Republic, although it hadn't always been. 16 years ago over half of Anchorage was pillaged by tribes of raiders from the north and from the west. The mayor at the time, in desperation to protect the people of Anchorage, gave Malcolm Hyde, a former CIA agent permission to command an ad hoc militia group. Within a month, the highly disciplined group managed to push the raiders out of the city. Hyde became a hero. Months went by with no conflict erupting between the raiders and the militia. Then, one winter night, an unknown group of people opened the gates let the raiders loose upon the city. Amidst the chaos, the mayor was killed.

Afterwards, Hyde was almost unanimously elected mayor by the city council. Hyde vowed that the raiders would be vanquished. He also established a strict curfew at night that if broken, would entail imprisonment. Furthermore, he was given absolute power over the laws and social policies of the city. Hyde also established a cutthroat military unit called the Watchers. My

Uncle and four others were the only ones to object to Hyde's power. They said that Hyde was America's first dictator. But, the other 20 members of the council didn't care, for Hyde was a war hero. In the next year, Hyde led a campaign against the raiders. He razed their encampments and invaded their territory. The area encompassing Anchorage was then dubbed the Alaskan Republic, led by its First Citizen, Malcolm Hyde. Hyde grew even more powerful, and Uncle Stu and his followers became the only counteract to Hyde's strength.

Years went by, and all was peaceful. But in 2042, a new threat was rising in the North. A town had sprung up in the former Denali National Park. It was named The Haven. It sat atop a hill overlooking the vast wilderness. At first we strived to have good relations with them, but we were cautious. Word spread that they had taken in the raiders and begun to form them into an army. We sent four envoys to talk with them, my Uncle being one of them. Days went by and there was no news of what happened to them. I feared for the worst. Finally, a scouting party discovered their remains by a riverbank on the edge of Denali. The retribution was swift. The Watchers destroyed several Denali outposts and forts. They also performed an operation in which several of them disguised themselves as raiders and infiltrated The Haven. They burnt down most of the industrial buildings there, as well as the majority of the residential district. The two sides skirmished for over a year. Eventually Malcolm Hyde and the August Committee, who ran The Haven, arranged a cease-fire. I was saddened by my Uncle's death, but I hoped there could be peace. In the end I was wrong.

Currently, it is January 10th, 2044. The sky is dark and ominous, and the ground is layered in snow. The day is grim, but that's not why. I would arrive at the outpost today.

You may think the war had opened up many new jobs, but it hadn't. The population was booming, and the Republic was at about 300,000 people. I was poor. I had just graduated from the college, and needed a job immediately, seeing as how my Uncle wasn't around to support me. I was struggling to pay the bills. Luckily, the city allows you to not pay taxes for up to two years for one year of military service. So, I took the opportunity to sign up. I had enlisted in the Ranger Infantry. They mainly stood vigil by the border with The Haven. I would be deployed to an outpost in the Northwest.

I grabbed my bags and my service rifle, and got into a bus. There were about 20 other Rangers in there. I took a seat next to a strange looking guy. He looked at me, studying me. He looked like a hawk eyeing its prey.

"Name's Silas," he said as he extended his hand. I shook it.

"I'm Isaiah, Hightower." I was nervous and I showed it.

"You're new to the infantry, aren't you?" Silas said.

"Yes," I admitted. "Have you served in the military before?" He nodded his head.

“Its not to bad as long as you don’t get shot or stabbed. And as long as you watch out for Captain Mercier.” Silas pointed to a tall guy sitting in the back. He glared at Silas. “He doesn’t scare me though. Nothing really does.”

The bus ride was about two hours. We made a pit stop at Fort Hyde, the military juggernaut of the Republic. We dropped off about 15 people. When we left, there was only Silas, Captain Mercier, six other people and I.

When we arrived at the outpost, we found most of the people sitting around a fire. I got off the bus and sat down on a log, by the fire. Captain Mercier walked up casually to the group and began to talk.

“Good afternoon soldiers. We have some fresh meat here. This is Francis Dubois.” He pointed to a skinny, but tall guy. He looked like a stick of bamboo. “Teresa McCullen,” he gestured toward a blond girl. “Michael Holliday,” he pointed to a guy who was fiddling with his rifle. “Isaiah Hightower,” he gestured toward me. “And Silas. You all know him. Now listen everyone, we have heard reports of raiders in the valley. We will meet up with two other squadrons of Rangers and bag ‘em. We will leave the camp in 20 minutes. Dubois, Martin, Chen, and Perry will stay behind and guard the camp.” He then walked into a tent, followed by two other official looking people.

Twenty minutes later I was on the road again. Only this time, I was alert, scanning the trees for any sign of the enemy. I loaded my rifle as the convoy stopped by a ridge. There were 2 other convoys parked already, with about 40 people in formation.

“Lets move out right now. Garcia, take your unit and swoop in through the trees. Sanders sneak in around the ridge and provide covering fire. We’ll flank them from the right,” said Mercier to the leaders of the other units. They instinctively called their forces to perform their jobs. “Lets go squad,” said Mercier. We started moving through the trees, like a viper slithering through the grass. As we approached the bottom of the depression, we heard gunfire. Mercier’s radio rang with static. I heard Garcia’s voice.

“THERE ARE TONS OF THEM. WE CAN’T HOLD ON MUCH LON-“ The feed cut off.

“Garcia! Garcia! Can you hear me!” said Mercier. Suddenly I saw a flash, and the forest was afire.

I barely had time to react. I found myself trapped under some branches after the initial explosion. I pushed them off and ran. Suddenly I heard gunfire. The raiders had ambushed us. I knew they were close, but I dropped my gun and ran. I ran and ran and ran. Once I got to a small stream, I collapsed. I crawled over and drank the cold water. I knew it wasn’t safe, but after that searing heat, I needed something. I heard footsteps and whirled around. It was Mercier. He was

severely burned. I only gaped in shock. Suddenly Silas burst out of the brush with a machete. He knocked Mercier down and stabbed him in the back.

“No!” I screamed. I fumbled for my knife, but I couldn’t find it. Silas walked over, with a sinister smile on his face.

“You have a lot to learn,” he said. Then he pulled out his pistol, and hit my in the head with the butt of it. I lost consciousness.

When I woke up I was in the barracks at Fort Hyde. Silas was sitting in a chair by the bed I was in. I rubbed my eyes, not believing what I was seeing. Then I lunged at him. He punched me hard in the face.

“I understand that you want to kill me right now, but you most likely won’t in a second.”

“You killed Captain Mercier.” I snarled.

“Listen, I will give you a choice, you can kill me, or you can hear some information that will change your life.” He handed me his pistol.

I thought about this. I wanted to kill him, but I also wanted to hear the information. I also thought about the fact that he probably had guards outside.

“Alright, tell me the information.” I replied.

“What if I told you that your uncle’s death was not caused by The Haven, or that Captain Mercier isn’t the person you think he is, as well as Malcolm Hyde?” Silas said.

“I’d say; you’re full of crap.” I said. Although he seemed confident about what he was saying.

“Well take I look at these classified files here. We had them taken from the master safe in the command room. This one is dated November 1st, 2042.” He handed it to me, and I began to read.

11/1/42 Operation Narragansett

Private James West, Private Aaron Townsend, Commander Hideki Usagi, and Captain Caine Mercier successfully dispatched council Members Stuart Hightower, Jason Vale, Irene Willis, Darius Henderson, and Vincent Colombo at 17:00.

Authorized by First Citizen Malcolm Q. Hyde.

I was shocked to see this. I knew it was real because it made sense. Stu and the others were the only ones who tried to limit Hyde's power. There was no way The Haven's intelligence could have known that.

"Why did you show me this?" I asked Silas.

"Because I need you for my master plan. You are a necessity in this grand scheme. Isaiah, I'd like to make you my right-hand man." Silas said clearly. I didn't know what to think. I was confused. But, my thoughts began to clear up, and suddenly a burning hatred swelled up inside of me. It was directed towards the First Citizen, Malcolm Hyde. I wanted revenge.

"What do you need me to do?" I said.

He grinned. "I need you to open the gates to the city when we make our strike. My forces are currently on their way to Fire Island Prison. They will free over 200 political prisoners. We will then arm them. You will let them loose upon the city. Amidst the chaos, the First Citizen will be vulnerable. I will personally escort you to the Capitol, where you can take vengeance onto Hyde."

"Are you some sort of Haven general or something?" I said.

"Yes, I am. Would you like to know why I hate the First Citizen so much?" Asked Silas.

"Sure" I said.

"Well, as you know, after the envoys were murdered, war erupted between The Haven and the Republic. I lived on a farm just outside Denali. One morning, I awoke to the sound of shouting. My mother told me to hide in the cellar, so I did. When I got out, I found my parents lying by the riverbank. They had been drowned, humiliated by the Republic's Watchers, so-called defenders of justice. Malcolm Hyde and his Watchers destroyed my family. I have sought revenge every day since then." Silas turned away. "Be ready to go by dawn."

The next day I jumped when I saw a raider walk into the barracks with a rifle. Then I remembered whose side I was on now. I realized I would have to fight my friends. I decided I didn't necessarily have to fight them. I could just sneak past.

"Rise and shine, you know what time it is." Said the raider in a hoarse voice.

I got up and walked over to the raider. He handed me a handgun. He led me out the door and directed me to a Range Rover. Silas was in the passenger seat. I got into the driver's seat. Two other people got into the back. They were wearing prison clothes.

"They were successfully freed yesterday. We gave the guards a choice, join us or...well, you know what happens." Silas said.

“Where is the rest of your army?” I asked.

“They will hide out in the woods until you open the gates. Listen, the gatekeepers will most likely be asleep, but if they aren’t, you can either sneak past them, or take them out, it’s your call.” Silas said. I nodded quickly.

The car ride was only half an hour, but it seemed like eternity. I had butterflies in my stomach. My hands were shaking furiously. I could die. But, Malcolm Hyde needed to go. If not for my personal view of him, he was a tyrant. Fear and oppression the tools used to build his kingdom.

When we arrived at the gates, I was relieved to find that the gatekeepers were asleep. I climbed over the top of the wall and hopped down. I saw a Watcher strolling nearby the gate control room. I quietly sneaked over to him. I scanned the ground and picked up a brick. I hit him on the head with it. He crumpled to the ground, unconscious. I then walked into the control room. I took a deep breath, and opened the gate using the controls. Immediately the guards woke up and ran towards the control room. I saw Silas outside on his radio, calling for his army. One of the freed prisoners fired his weapon. The guards then, turned toward the sound and fired back.

I sat patiently for about a minute, then I heard what sounded like a herd of buffalo stampeding. About sixty vehicles of all sorts came through the gate. It was Silas’ army. About a third of them parked as soldiers got out. The rest drove down the street. Most headed toward main street, but some headed towards the docks, and some headed towards city hall and the Capitol.

I met up with Silas and we ran towards the Capitol. There were raiders and Watchers fighting on the steps. We sneaked around them and went inside. The main hall was in a panic. We ran up the spiral stairs until we approached the First Citizen’s quarters. Silas and I burst through the door. We saw Malcolm Hyde on the balcony.

“It’s time you paid for your sins, Hyde.” Silas howled. He was going into hysterics.

Hyde sighed. “I knew it would come to this. Eventually someone would figure out my scheme. Did you also know that I was the one who killed the mayor?” He said.

“No, but we do now. We also know you killed Stuart Hightower and the other Haven envoys. We also know that you caused a war.” I said.

“Who might you be?” Said Hyde.

“Isaiah Hightower.” I said. Then I pulled out my pistol, but Silas had run up to him.

“You will feel pain. Like I did when you killed my family.” Said Silas. Then he pulled out his machete. Suddenly a woman walked into the room. I knew it was Hyde’s wife.

“Oh, no, you will feel the exact same pain.” Said Silas. He walked towards Hyde’s wife.

I stepped in front of him. “I’m afraid you can’t do that.” I said.

“Get out of my way, Isaiah. He needs to feel agony.” I realized he was insane.

“No Si-“ Then he swung his machete at me. I ducked just in time as I felt the blade whizz over my head. I pulled out my pistol, and fired blindly with my eyes closed.

When I opened them, Silas had dropped his machete. He was feeling a hole in his chest he stumbled back.

“Traitor.” He spat. “I thought you wanted this.”

“Not this...torment.” I said.

Silas stumbled back towards the balcony. He turned and grabbed Hyde. Hyde tried to escape but Silas had him in a death grip. Silas closed his eyes and dragged Hyde off the balcony, along with himself. I turned away. When I looked back, I saw that we had captured the city. Silas’ army looked up at me on the balcony. I realized it was up to me to lead, now that Silas was gone. But I couldn’t succumb to greed or madness like Hyde or Silas. I needed to do this right. A real leader needs to know how to handle their power.

“There will be an election to determine the next First Citizen. And furthermore, there shall be peace between the Haven and the Republic. This is the dawn of a new era.” I shouted. I had hope that goodness would prevail in this dark new world.