

The Scorched Earth (Prologue)

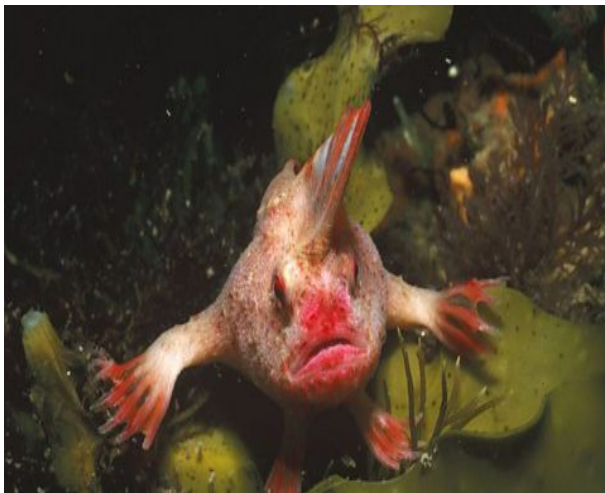
Movies these days mostly have the same three plots. #1 Someone kills or kidnaps a loved one and the main character seeks revenge. #2 Monsters of some kind. #3 Apocalypse, zombies, and survival.

So today I choose #3.

It doesn't really matter what caused the earth to reach this condition. Radiation from outer space, volcanic eruption overload, alien invasion, or extreme global warming. The scene has been set. Massive human extinction, remnants of survivors left to roam the globe.

Here we go.

Charley was one of the lucky ones. His career took off when he studied oceanic research in college. This led him to become one of the premier explorers of the deep oceans. Forget outer space. Our own planet has mysteries that no one had every seen. At the time of the apocalypse, he was deep in the Mariana trench photographing some of the strangest creatures that ever existed.



Chilean sea bass?



I knew it. I was sure the aliens were living down there.



The diving bell was one of the latest and equipped with the most sophisticated instrumentation. When he finally surfaced, the research vessel that had contained his support crew was void of any human life. A mystery that he would soon unravel. The sky had become a strange violet hew. Whatever had happened when he was down in the depths didn't look like it was reversible. Later he would find out what had happened. A giant asteroid moving so fast that astronomers didn't have time to warn anyone hit the earth. It was larger than the one that wiped out the dinosaurs and hit a landmass instead of the ocean. That would have been bad enough, but it was also radioactive. The impact created a cloud that rapidly moved through the atmosphere. Kind of like that pyroclastic flow that destroyed Pompeii. Any person or animal that was not sheltered was immediately cremated and blew away like dust. So now the earth's surface was mostly void of carbon life. 99% of humanity gone. The oceans were OK. The cities and forests remained untouched. The radiation quickly dispersed.

Charley remained on the boat for a month before he ventured onshore. The earth was as pristine as when Adam and Eve supposedly woke up in the Garden of Eden.

The Scorched Earth (Chapter 1)

There were plenty of provisions aboard Charley's support vessel, especially since no one else was left alive. He wanted to return to the US coastline which was 5000 miles away. It took him three weeks to make the journey. The first land he saw was Baja, California. He wanted to make his way up the Sea of Cortez and land where the Colorado river empties into the Gulf of California. That is where he anchored and took the skiff loaded up with as many supplies as it would hold. He figured that water was the most important commodity and the flowing water would have the least chance of being contaminated. Also, well water should be safe.

He started traveling north following the river. He tested the water and he didn't die yet right away so he thought it must be OK. There were still fish in

the river so food and water would not be an issue. As he traveled north, he didn't see any animals. They had perished along with humans. His contingent of supplies included a knife, handgun, rifle, and a reasonable supply of ammo and some rope. He also had a medical kit with aspirin, penicillin derivative, and bandages. The rifle had been used on the boat to ward off sharks that might endanger divers.

He walked for three days before he saw another living creature. He came upon three donkeys. He had read that somewhere near Oatman, AZ there were wild donkeys.



They roamed free during the day, but huddled together in caves that were prevalent in some parts of the Colorado river basin in the afternoon. They must have been sheltered when the event occurred. Charley thought this was a good omen. Using his rope, he managed to lasso one. Maybe one of his ancestors was a real life cowboy. At first, the donkey was not too cooperative. Charley won him over feeding him wild apples that grew nearby. Were the apples contaminated? Not sure, but he wasn't going to be the guinea pig that checked it out. He named the donkey/burro Sam. After awhile, Sam gave in and started hauling Charley's backpack load. Charley, for the first time since he surfaced, felt like there was some hope. If Sam survived, then maybe others animals and even humans did too.

Both of these can be found along the Colorado river.

Redwall Cavern and Emerald Cave



As he ventured north, he would look for any caves that might have sheltered animals or humans. That is where he found April. This green colored water named Emerald Cave on the Colorado was not too far from Las Vegas. The circumstances were typical. When mankind has been reduced to the lowest form of survival his primal instincts come alive. He came upon two men who were trying to corral a young women. It was not hard to figure out their intent. She was perched on a ledge inside Emerald cave. The two guys were trying to climb up and grab her. Charley yelled to them. Hey, what are you doing? This in none of your business stranger. We saw her first. If you don't cease and desist your climb she will be the last thing you see. Get lost dude! Charley pulled out his rifle and fired a shot just below their feet. That got their attention. They backed out and left the cave waterway. Charley moved closer. You can get down now. Why should I trust you anymore than those two? I see your point. You can stay here, or take a chance and follow me. I am heading north, not sure what my goal is other than to find other survivors. If I leave, I am sure those two will return to continue their pursuit. It's your choice, as he began to depart the cave entrance. OK, OK, wait. I am going with you, but keep your distance. No problem.

So he returned to his trail north. April was surprised to see Sam. My name is Charley, what is yours? I am April. How is it that you survived? I was kayaking with a group of my friends when the event hit. I was far enough inside as to not have been fried. Not so lucky for my friends. I have been staying here not sure what the conditions were outside. Those two showed

up recently and you saw what they were trying to do. How about you? How did you survive? I was miles below the ocean in a diving bell. When I surfaced, my whole crew was gone. I picked up Sam here awhile back. He must have been sleeping in a cave too. Are you hungry? I have some rations I took from my dive boat. I have also been catching fish as I go along. A rabbit or two I shot with my pistol. I could see my mention of food had an big effect. I pulled out some stale bread and left it on a rock as I kept walking. She quickly grabbed it up and devoured it. Later this evening, I will try to catch another rabbit. I don't want to keep using my bullets on game. I need to build a trap. I need to keep my bullets for higher up predators like those two who were after you. We found an enclave just off of the river with some boulders for wind protection. I went about gathering some wood to make a fire. The nights still got chilly this far north. The terrain is all desert, and even though it is warm during the day, nighttime temps fall drastically. I am heading off to try and snare a rabbit. You are welcome to stay by the fire. I laid down my extra parka and starting walking away from our camp. It took me an hour to make a snare trap, but I was successful. When I got back to camp, April was sound asleep wrapped in my parka. She came awake smelling the cooking rabbit. She realized that if I had wanted to take advantage of her, it would have been easy. She started to relax.

Sitting around the fire eating cooked game meat almost felt like the days when Charley went camping with his family. It felt good. He told April that to continue going north was not the best plan. It would get colder and colder. Now that he saw there were some survivors, his plan changed. I left my research vessel anchored in the Gulf of California. I would like to return to San Diego. The ship still has enough fuel to make it there. My new plan is to find an adequate sail boat and try sailing to a place that might have more people and have a warmer climate. I will have to ditch the research vessel. Not sure if there are any places to refuel. A sail boat doesn't need that. You are welcome to come with me. It would help me if I had another person on the boat to help navigate. I need to sleep sometime and just floating around without a watch is dangerous, even on the open ocean. You seem to have more resources than I can get by myself. I guess going with you is my safest bet.

What would the earth look like in 1000 years if man was reduced to a few thousand persons scattered around the globe?



You see, global warming continued to occur even with man's carbon footprint gone.

One year ago in his speech at the Oxford University Union, the legendary Stephen Hawking proclaimed that humanity can only survive for another 1,000 years.

In his speculative thought experiment, Dr. Kwan hypothesized that in the distant future (more than 100,000 years from now) humans will develop a larger forehead, larger nostrils, larger eyes, and more pigmented skin. Scientists are already working on ways to edit genomes so that parents can choose the way their children will look.



I don't think I would want to make her angry. Those eyes can penetrate right through you.

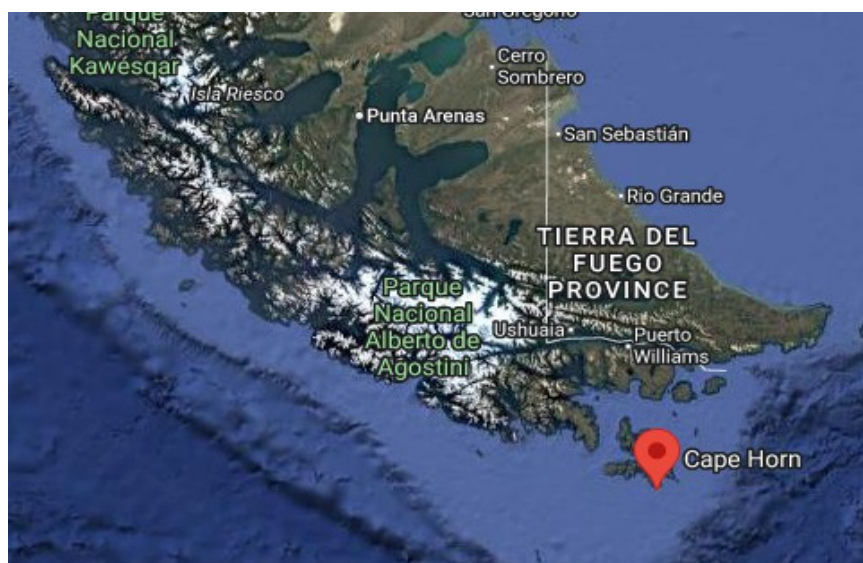
Charley went through with his plan and he is now in San Diego looking for

the right sailboat. April is still with him and now trusts him completely.



The Scorched Earth (Chapter 2)

Charley's plan was to find the most survivors and form a community for camaraderie and protection. From what he had seen so far, countries with lots of caves had the most potential. He didn't know much about cave systems in the world. At first he thought Brazil might be a good destination. Then he realized that he couldn't get there easily. He would have to go through the Panama canal, and without operators, the locks wouldn't work. Going around the tip of South America was out of the question. That was the most treacherous ocean in the world to traverse.



The Drake passage where the Atlantic and Pacific meet creates enormous

waves and rough waters.



It looks like the Atlantic and Pacific don't mix at their meeting spot at Cape Horn.



The Pacific and Atlantic oceans do mix, but not instantly, due to differences in their water properties, such as salinity, temperature, and density, which prevent them from immediately blending. These differences create visible boundaries, sometimes called "invisible walls," where the water layers meet.

He decided to sail to Australia. He could stop in Hawaii. Not realizing he had made a lucky choice, Hawaii has lots of volcanic tubes carved out by past lava flows. Also, Australia has the third largest number of caves with the US being #1.

Hawaiian lava tube caves



Upon reaching San Diego, he was like a kid in a candy store. He had his pick of sailboats. He chose this one.

The Catamaran Vicarious. I like the simulated ocean Jacuzzi and floating rafts.



Just one of the four bedrooms.



This looks better than a five star hotel.

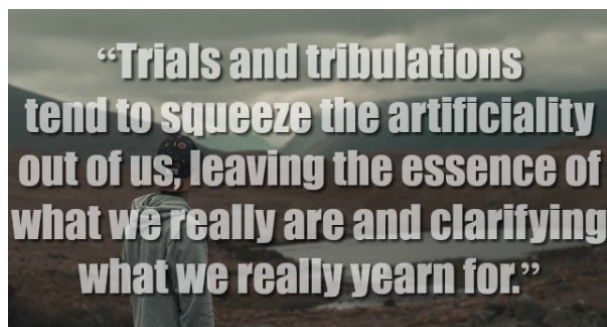


I guess being one of the last men on earth had its advantages. He could even have brought Sam aboard. The boat was still connected to the dock's electrical circuits. The fridge and freezer were still operating.

He found the wine cooler fully stocked. He pulled out a bottle of Dom Perignon champagne. Of course, anyone who could afford this boat would be use to the finest of things. A bottle goes for around \$250. Using some fishing poles he found aboard, he caught some bass off of the bottom of the harbor sands.

He treated April to a gourmet meal of braised bass and vegetable stew. Even though this was probably the best meal she had eaten since the catastrophe, it didn't top the roasted rabbit Charley had prepared for her first meal in days.

What is the occasion? We are celebrating still being alive. I will drink to that. Such began a bond that would carry them through all the trials and tribulations to come.



The Scorched Earth (Chapter 3)

Normally taking off on a boat this size would be a low risk adventure. First check the long term weather report across the Pacific. Not possible, no Internet. The servers had probably shut down for some reason. However, this boat was equipped with a marine radio, GPS, radar, nautical maps, and a sextant. The GPS gets its position from satellites, not the Internet. Charley had extensive navigational training to reach a position as a top marine explorer. With all those sophisticated instrumentation he should have no trouble. The one thing he lacked though was a weather report. Just like the Internet, the marine radio was useless. No one on the transmitting end. One thing he learned though was don't rely on electrical instrumentation. A lightning strike could knock out all his electronic aids. So the only truly reliable instrument is the sextant. The sextant had been used since the early 1700s.

To use a sextant, sight a celestial body like the sun and bring its reflection down to the horizon using the index arm. Then fine-tune the angle with the micrometer drum. Next, “rock” the sextant side-to-side to ensure the celestial body is just touching the horizon at its lowest point. Record the measured angle. Finally, correct the angle for factors like dip and refraction. Use this corrected altitude, along with the exact time using a chronometer. Check the nautical almanac to calculate your latitude and longitude.

Before taking off, Charley visited some local gun shops and replenished his ammo supply and picked up some small arms for April. He also got 4 of those 5 gallon Sparkllets water bottles and filled them to the brim. Tying them down with cargo straps in case they hit something and damaged their water tank.

Are you sure it is safe to sail to Hawaii? This boat almost sails itself. It is almost impossible to capsize unless we sail into a Hurricane or we experience a rouge wave. The first two weeks were ideal. They made good time and April proved to be a quick learner. With only a week left before Hawaii, she decided sleeping alone was boring. Charley didn't complain in the least. The

last week was not so pleasant. It was not a hurricane, but close. If the news media had been tracking it, they would have called it a tropical storm. Wind speeds of up to 70 mph. The catamaran handled it OK, but April was sick most of the time. Charley piloted the boat mostly by himself using the radar to avoid collisions. There were a couple of close calls with abandoned freighters. April was especially happy to step onto dry land. They pulled into port on the Big Island of Hawaii. To their surprise, they were greeted by a dozen people. Welcome. We have set up a pseudo government here to benefit all. Charlie was carrying his rifle and had a pistol strapped to his side. April also had her gun handy. Before you go any further, we would ask you to disarm. Why is that? We believe that guns are a source of violence and our community has ruled that no guns are allowed here. Guns don't promote violence, people do. We mean you no harm. If it hadn't been for my gun, this young lady would be in a bad state now. After this exchange, Charley noticed the group starting to advance forward. He was definitely outnumbered. He ordered them to keep their distance. They didn't comply. He pulled out his side arm and fired a shot at their feet. They backed away. You have proven our point. Guns promote violence. You are not welcome here. You have also proven my point. Without guns, you have no defense. I really don't want to join your society, stupid people really annoy me. If I was a pirate, you all would be dead. Someday pirates will land on your shore and kill you all. I think I will just get back on my boat and go somewhere else. April, if you think these folks have the right idea, you can stay with them if you choose. I never force anyone to bend to my will. April said nothing. She just backtracked, also pointing her gun at the crowd. We both boarded the boat and left promptly. Lets try another island. I can't believe anyone would be that stupid.

They next sailed to Oahu and Maui. Those two islands had no inhabitants. At least none that came out to greet us. We went ashore and found some supermarkets. We stocked up on canned goods. All the produce and meats were spoiled. While returning to the boat, a small dog came out of a drainage pipe. We could see it was famished. April opened one of the cans of stew and dumped it on the ground. The dog lapped it all up then followed us back to the boat. I knew what was going to happen. April adopted the dog and named her Snuggles. I would have chosen something different, but Snuggles

it is.

At least she would not be a problem like Sam would have been.

Snuggles



I had found out that April was a former art student. We found a Walmart and she loaded up on art supplies. I was interested in seeing what she could paint during our long trips on the open ocean.

April, have you ever been to Hawaii? No I haven't. While we are here, let me take you to the Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor.



Interesting side note:

Elvis Presley's fund raising efforts help finance the building of the memorial.

The battleship USS Iowa is docked in Long Beach. The same class as the USS Arizona. A really interesting historical tour.



Restocked, we took off from Hawaii headed for Australia with a stop over in Fiji. About another three weeks journey, weather permitting.

Our three week ocean voyage was uneventful. That is a good thing. Another good thing was that April created some interesting artwork.

Here is one she painted of a real sight we both viewed. She titled it:
Rough water at sunset



She created these just from her talented mind:



I especially like this Chinese themed painting. She used both watercolor and acrylic.



Author's note: So what if I promote my own painting. This is one of my favorites.

As we approached Fiji, we anchored offshore and did some snorkeling before we went ashore. April snagged 5 lobsters from their hiding places. It seems like there is nothing that this girl can't do. Finding her in Emerald Cave was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me.

Here is April on the day we arrived in Fiji.



Here is what Charley looks like. Don't you think they are a good couple?
She is 25 and he is 35.



When we finally went ashore we were bearing gifts of the lobsters. We were greeted by a dozen friendly survivors. Of course they could get their own fish, but our gesture was well received. As it turned out, most of the survivors were elderly folks with the exception of a local tour guide. They had been touring the caves in Fiji. This is all new information for me. A real education. I wasn't aware that most lands had extensive cave systems. Even so, the local guy never thought of going to a hardware store to find guns for defense. I told them about April's ordeal. They realized how naive they had been. At least Fiji has lots of natural fresh water sources due to lots of rain showers that come down from the hills and feed the streams.



Sawa-i-lau caves in Fiji

I told the people here about my plan to find survivors and form groups for protection and social interaction. It seemed like they had already done OK. After arming themselves, we thought they were much better off. We stayed around for a week or so just enjoying the landscape, the coral reefs, and talking with them,. Soon it was time to say goodbye. Australia here we come!

The Scorched Earth

(Chapter 4)

So once again they take off headed for Australia. Charley sees that New Caledonia is about half way. Why not stop there and check it out? He doesn't know if the islands has any caves, but from what he has learned so far, caves are just about everywhere.

Even though the distance is less than 1000 miles, it takes them three weeks to make the trip. They were bucking trade winds the entire time. They can be fairly strong.

They had stocked up on more canned goods from the Fiji supermarkets. April surprised Charley by making a gourmet meal herself. She caught a nice halibut while trolling off of the stern. She had spent a long time perusing the shelves at the supermarket looking for some specific items. Namely, capers and sardines in olive oil.

There were still some cream cheese in the boat freezer. She seared the fish fillets in olive oil. Made a paste out of the sardines and cream cheese. Salt and pepper to taste, and a drizzle of lemon juice. She spread the paste on the fish, topped it with capers, and served with saltine crackers. Charley was blown away. He had to open another high end wine selection to accommodate the meal.

When they reached New Caledonia, another tropical paradise appeared before them.





On the way in, they spotted those over-water bungalows that Charley never could afford to stay in. Now everything was free. Lets stay there. April was all in. First, lets get some supplies. They moored the boat in the marina and were walking toward town center when Snuggles started barking. Before they knew it, they were surrounded by a dozen or so armed villagers. Mostly men with a few women present. One in particular looked like the leader. He was robust and had a blade stuck in his waistline. Lay down your arms, he commanded. Charley had no choice but to comply. He proceeded to tell Charley that they had formed a commune. They shared everything, as he started to grab April's arm. My wife is not for sharing. In other circumstances, April would have been pleased to here these words. To Charley's surprise April said, he is not my husband. He kidnapped me from the cave I was living in. I have been looking for a way to get free. I see that there is a man here who looks strong enough to rescue me. The guy said, I should just shoot him now. Don't do that. He has some secret stash on his boat. Until we find out his hiding place, he is still of some use to us. They took Charley to one of the bungalows and tied him up and stationed a guard. April willingly went with the leader to his own bungalow. Charley couldn't see how he was going to get out of this mess. As evening concluded, April slipped in to his room and used the knife that the leader had previously had to kill the man guarding Charley. Do you know where my guns are? Yes, there is another room where I saw them store our guns. No one appears to be guarding that. How did you get loose? I will tell you that story after we are safe. They both retrieved the guns that has been taken from them. As they approached the center pavilion, it looked like the group was engaged in a drunken party. Charley got the drop on them and ordered all to lay face down. He quietly asked April, where is the leader? He is no longer with us was all she said.

He addressed the rest of the band. We find this society not to our liking. We are going to leave. Two of the woman protested. We were forced to participate in this so called commune. We really don't want to stay here. A couple of the men voiced the same opinion. Charley told them about his quest to find other survivors. If you want to join us, there are plenty of boats in the harbor. You are welcome to follow. We are heading for Australia. He learned that their so called leader was nothing more than a tyrant. He had forced his will on all those too weak to resist. I guess throughout history there are always kings, dictators, and tyrant using force to bend people to their own will. That is why it is necessary to have a free society and allow citizens to arm themselves. Not to protect themselves from thieves, but to protect them from out of control governments. America's forefathers knew what they were doing. The 2nd amendment has faced multiple attempts to repeal it, but it still stands more firm than ever.



That is how Charley got to be the leader of a flotilla of survivors. Most of them joined along.

This group was much like the last, except for the forceful leader. Mostly tourists that had survived inside the cave system. So New Caledonia did indeed have some caves.



Later in route to Australia, April related this account of how she escaped to free Charley.

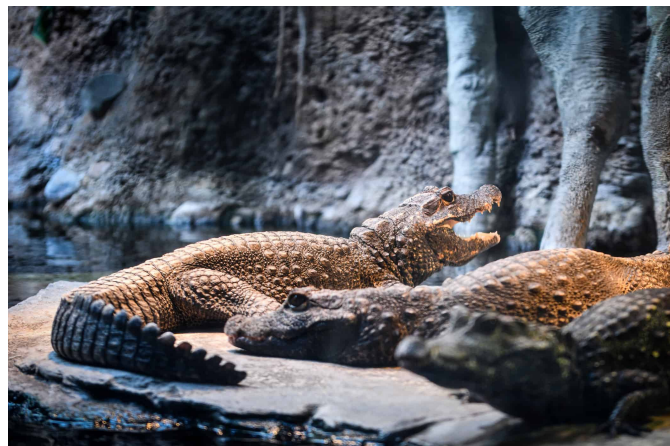
After my academy award acting performance, the leader believed my story hook, line, and sinker. Of course he claimed me for his own. We had some BBQ fish, island fruits, and consumed much wine. I held back on the wine, but continued my performance appearing quite drunk. As he lead me to his room, I played along. Once alone, I started to undress him. That was when I took the knife from his waste band and slit his throat. By then, most of the others were too drunk to see my exit. You know the rest.

Will this woman ever cease to amaze me?

Charley and his armada, I chose to call it that, arrived in Sydney harbor three weeks later. He expected to see a large contingent of survivors, but was surprised when no one showed. He wasn't aware that the nearest cave system was three hours away. That meant the entire population of Australia's largest city had been scorched. Disappointed for sure, but he learned to take everything in stride. He suggested everyone tie up at the dock and see what might be available in city center. He could not possibly know what danger was in store of all of them.



The Jenolan cave system wasn't too far from Sydney. Although there were no direct surface waterways connecting the caves to the city, there were underground rivers that flowed there. This allowed the most dangerous survivors to head there. The caves were home to fresh water crocodiles, rats, and snakes. Since the celestial event wiped out their abundant food source, they had no other alternative than to turn toward the city in search of food. They had devoured the few tourists that were unfortunate to have been caught there. They got a taste of humans and they liked it.



When one predator's enemies disappear, they multiply ten fold. That is what happened in Wyoming when the government killed off all the wolves. The deer population grew exponentially, ate all the leaves and bark off of the trees and died by the thousands due to lack of adequate food supply.

So what is next in this adventurous drama? Only the shadow knows.

Where did this phrase come from?

"Only the shadow knows" is a famous phrase derived from the old-time radio drama, *The Shadow*, and implies that a secret or mystery is hidden from everyone except a hidden or unseen witness. The phrase is an extension of the show's iconic opening line, **"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? Only the Shadow knows!"**

Author's note:

This just goes to show you what an ageid writer I am. I actually listened to this show when I was young.

The Scorched Earth (Chapter 5)

Half the group remained on their boats and half went with Charley and April. They were 30 yards from the Walmart entrance when all hell broke loose. I guess it was just a case of bad timing. Their arrival in Sydney coincided with the crocks journey through the underground streams. One such stream flowed into the ocean creating a popular tourist area called Fresh Water Beach. This stream was connected to the underground one. This is where the crocks emerged and began their hunt for human flesh.



Snuggles was the first to alert the group to the impending danger. She started barking relentlessly. April knew something was amiss. She spotted the crocodile swarm advancing toward them. The Walmart parking lot was still full of cars. Everyone jumped up on top of the nearest car. Snuggles slipped out of April's grasp to defend her against what she viewed as just big lizards.

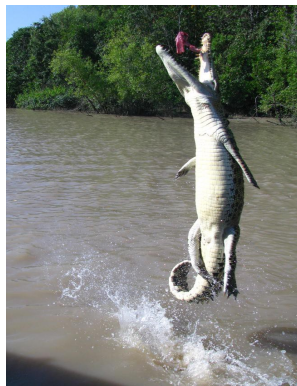
She was about to become their first snack.

Author's note:

I believe it is a dog's instinct to attack lizards. I had a small poodle that use to chase lizards in the bushes in my patio and front porch. They were too fast for her except for one time. She caught one and brought in back into the house through the dogie door and dropped it at my feet. I guess this was an offering to her master.

To continue:

April jumped down and retrieved her just as Charley fired a bullet through its open jaws. He pulled April back up onto the car top. It is fortunate that these crocks weren't big enough to jump up on top of the cars. There are some species that can do that.



The only safety for them was to get inside the Walmart. They jumped from car top to car top and reached to front door. Even though the automatic doors did not open, they were not locked shut. Everyone was able to safely enter and they slammed the doors shut just as the crock group reached there. There were no people inside the Walmart. They must have left after the radiation died down. Charley didn't know where they had gone. That mystery was not on his mind. How are they going to get back to the safety of the boats?

The answer to that presented itself after Charley checked out the merchandise inside the store. They had a section where they sold electric bikes. There were enough of them to supply all of the group as long as they doubled up. There was some assembly required, but the batteries were fully charged. After putting one together, Charley demonstrated how to ride. His plan was

risky, but dying of starvation in a Walmart was not how he envisioned his last days. The group assembled 6 bikes.

Author's note:

I actually bought one of these electric bikes from Temu. I can't believe that they can sell this for only \$275 including free shipping.



Charley told them to practice riding up and down the Walmart aisles until they were confident. One team member asked if he should wear a safety helmet. You can if you want, but if you crash or fall off, the crocks will descend on you faster than the “Walking Dead”.

We have to get back to the boats. It is my guess that these are fresh water crocodiles otherwise we would have seen some in the bay. When we open the doors, I will fire some rounds into the horde. This will cause chaos among them as they tear into the wounded ones. This is our chance to make a break. These bikes can go 20 mph, but the crocodiles can run almost as fast. Head toward the dock but don't ride to the dock side of your boat. All that would do would bring the crocodiles there and they would just follow you into the boat. When you get to the dock, let the bikes go and jump into the water. Swim to the other side of your boat and climb back on. Quickly untie your mooring lines and float out into the bay. If my analysis is correct, they won't follow you into the salt water.

Charley and April would be the last to depart the Walmart. He opened the door and fired the shots just as he had planned. The bike group sped past him into the frenzy. He told April to pull out her gun and hang on tight. There was no straight line through the crocodiles. One of the pairs hit a leg and spun off to the side. The scenario played out just as Charley had described. April fired into some of the crocks trying to save them, but it was too late. Bad for them, but good for Charley as a clear path had opened up. He sped

by looking away from the gruesome sight. Each pair did as Charley had suggested. When they were free from the dock and floating in the bay, the ordeal was over. The only positive thing, besides them reaching safety, was now the ratio of men to women was more even. The two who had perished were men.

Charley and April had a powwow with the rest of the group. It seems like I have a bad batting average when it comes to picking places to explore. I've run into trouble just about everywhere I went. Bad dudes at the Colorado river channel. Hostile people in Hawaii and New Caledonia. Nature turned against us in Sydney. I would like to find a place to settle down. I am giving up searching new countries. Many places in the world are susceptible to natural disasters. East and south coast of the US get frequent hurricanes as do the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and even New Caledonia. Earthquakes in California. Tornadoes in Kansas, Texas, and Missouri. There is one place that I can think of that doesn't have any of those. "The Maldives". I am not sure if there are any cave systems there, but that is where I would like to travel next. You are welcome to come with us or you can return to New Caledonia of which some of you are native. They all decided to follow Charley. So his flotilla took off. The nautical distance was approximately 4000 miles. Three weeks sailing should be about right. Charley's estimate was pretty accurate. They reached the Maldives in three weeks plus or minus a day or two.

To everyone's surprise, they were greeted by a dozen friendly folks. An evenly spread man to woman ratio. Several of them had been scuba diving in underwater caves. Other had been on an exploratory tour of land based ones.



So this is where Charley and April decided to set up housekeeping. Charley told the group that since he was a captain of his own sailing vessel, he was authorized to conduct weddings. Several couples in the group, who had paired off, took him up on his offer. He even officiated at his own wedding to April. She teased him by asking, what would you have done if I had declined your proposal? He said, I would have returned to Sydney and taken my chances with the crocks.

One issue with the Maldives was fresh water. The ground water was too contaminated to drink. Historically, it used to be OK, but a past tsunami had hit and inundated it with salt water. Sewage creeping into the water table did the rest. The island water came from two sources. Government run desalination plants and rainwater harvesting. The survivors that were left knew nothing about running the plants. Charley knew a lot about this as part of his oceanic studies. He took a couple guys through the closest plant and showed them how to start it up. Many of the empty homes still had stored rainwater.

That taken care of, he and April looked for a place to reside. He chose this place as their private residence.



He chose this group as a meeting place for communal gatherings.

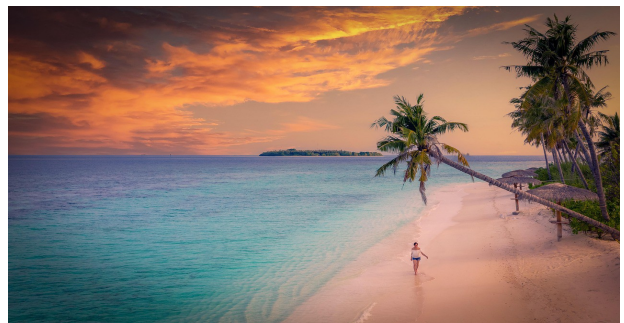


Once a thriving city and residential district, now abandoned.





Once fish and produce markets busy with shoppers and vendors, now only filled with rotten fruits, vegetables, and fish. The orchards still had ripe fruit though and the sea had plenty of fish. This could still work was Charley's thoughts. So began another period in mankind's existence. There may be other places with thriving communities, but for Charley and April this is as good as it gets.



The End