

T-Minus 10 Seconds

Chapter 1: The Final Reckoning

Clunk! The blast shield doors closed as total silence fell upon the fallout shelter. Not even the slightest whisper can be heard, as everybody is simply waiting for impact. Then, after what felt like an eternity, I heard a voice say, "T minus 60 seconds!" It's coming from Mr. Drobovich. Immediately, the last slivers of hope escape my mind of it being a test drill, as my brain starts coming up with all the possible ways I will suffer a painful death.

"It's no use!" I say to myself as I count the last seconds of my remaining life. With imminent death in front of me, all I can think of is my father's words: "If death is waiting for me today, I will enjoy every last second I can." For some reason, the words comfort me. Even as I can feel the individual sweat particles that are running down my forehead or how my hands are trembling at the same rate as a person with Parkinson's, I feel tranquil.

Then I hear it: "T minus 10 seconds until impact!" Knowing that my life is coming to a close, I take one more look at the people around me. Around me are ten people: Mr. Drobovich, Emanuel Juan, Simon Cowell, Vinicius Kaufmann, Dimitrius Kovacic, Rick Grimes, Negan Smith, Charlotte Hansen, Belle Delphine, Ryan Reynolds, and Fragile Franklin. I have known most people here for the majority of my life, and it doesn't bother me that these are the people I die with. Then I hear it: "Five, four, three, two, one." However, after one, it feels as if time ceases to exist; my life flashes before my eyes. I feel as if I am Schrödinger's cat in a life-sized experiment, with life and death hanging in the balance of 18-inch-thick steel.

Then I felt it. A shockwave passes through the steel walls of the bunker and knocks me down to the ground, all while the shockwave causes my lungs to vibrate to an extent where I can barely catch a breath. Then, as soon as I felt it, it was over. After standing up off the cold, hard floor of the fallout shelter, I say to myself, "I am alive!" But just as I think the worst is over, the soundwave comes in. As soon as I hear it, I can feel my eardrums rupture as the power of a nuclear weapon comes crashing down on them. The sheer power of the soundwave makes my brain have a migraine, as my senses cannot adapt to the rapid change of having no more auditory information. As I look around, I see Charlotte screaming, without hearing her, of course, as well as Franklin crying, all while on the floor, and everyone else is either knocked out or dead.

I immediately rush over to see if the others lying lifeless on the ground are still alive. First, I check Mr. Drobovich's pulse; it's weak, but he's alive. Then I move on to Simon; he's also still alive. Next, Emmanuel, but as I try to feel a pulse, I get nothing and presume him dead. As I move on to the others, I find that everyone else is still alive; however, as I move on to the last person knocked out, I see a shard of metal lodged in Negan's eye as well as lots of blood on the ground. As I inspect him, I presume he is dead, but as a safety measure, I still check his pulse. As I check it, I realize that he's somehow still alive. However, due to the amount of blood on the floor, he won't be alive much longer unless I try to do something about it. Knowing that he's knocked out cold, I say to myself, "I must act now when he cannot feel pain."

I rush over to the medicine cabinet in the main chamber. There I found some bandages and a very basic first-aid kit. I take them to Negan while taking a moment to gather my thoughts. In the first-aid kit, I find a small pair of tweezers.

"I can use these," I think to myself. "Even though they are not ideal for such a delicate

procedure, they are the only tool available." With steady hands, I cautiously approached Negan's eye, trying my best to keep calm and focused.

Using the tweezers, I gently gripped the protruding end of the metal shard, taking extreme care not to apply any pressure or cause further injury. I knew that one wrong move could only make the situation worse; however, the thought of Negan dying kept me determined to save him. Slowly and methodically, I carefully pulled the shard out, hoping it hadn't caused irreparable damage to his nerves or brain.

As I finally removed the shard, the bleeding stopped. However, then I remembered that I would still have to disinfect the area. So I grabbed a bottle of vodka, which I heard could be used as a disinfectant somewhere, and slowly started disinfecting Negan's eye. Lastly, I covered his eye with the bandages I found earlier and carried his limp body to the bunks of the shelter. There I laid him on an extremely small bed, where one of his legs hung off because he was too tall for it. After doing so, I felt an overwhelming sense of relief and accomplishment, all while my body was giving out. So I went to one of the bunks, lay down, and realized how hard the beds were, but because of the strain on my body, it felt like sleeping on a cloud. As I started falling asleep, I had only one more thought: "Why am I alive?" I said this as I fell asleep.

Chapter 2: Why Have I Been Saved?

Whack! I wake up to a slap on the face. I open my eyes, but the industrial and artificial lights blind me. In front of me, I see Charlotte. I cannot hear anything as she tries to communicate with me, with only a distant ringing sound in the background. From her facial

expressions alone, I can tell she is shocked just as much as I am.

"However, the danger is not over." I think to myself while pointing to the gas masks on the wall, trying to signal that there is still radiation outside; however, she does not understand and hurriedly rushes out of the bunks.

I step outside the so-called bed that I slept in and realize that I slept close to 14 hours if the clock on the wall is correct. As I stand up, I go see if Negan is still asleep; however, as I check on him, I see that he is no longer in his bed. I think to myself, "That's surprising, he should still be getting rest in bed. However, now that he's gone, I'd better go find him and everyone else." As I leave the bunks, I make my way into the main chamber of the shelter, luckily, I see no one knocked out on the floor anymore; presumably, Emmanuel's body has been taken to the morgue. Also in the main compartment, I see a shelter layout map, with the Majority of the chambers heading south of the main area; however, also on the map I can see a warning of a potential collapse of the south-side area. "At this point, it would be more of a blessing to die from collapsing debris than to die a slow and agonizing death from radiation sickness," I say, as I start heading south.

As I descend further through the corridors of the bunker, I finally reach the cafeteria, where, to my surprise, I find Franklin. Presumably, he is trying to find food; however, he appears to be without luck, so I try to help him find food. However, at the back of my mind, I know that the Soviets would have never hidden food in a bunker when everyone else in the country was starving. Knowing that his efforts are without hope, I signal to him, "Where is everyone?" which he understands and points to his left. I take his advice and start going left until I reach the medical bay.

In front of me, I see a massive metal door, just like the front entrance of the bunker. On it, it says, "Only for medical professionals!" However, all my instincts tell me that everyone must be behind the door. "If everyone is not here, where else could they be?" I ask myself. So I decide to lean in, grab the metal handle of the door, and yank it open. However, once I tried to yank the door open, it would not budge, and it only stood idly frozen. This angered me and made me try even harder to pull the door open, but it just would not budge. So I tell myself, "Goddamit Ivanov, you survived the blast of a nuke, but you cannot open a metal door, you're pathetic." These words, along with some adrenaline, allowed me to finally have the strength to open the door, however, what was behind it, was something far worse than I could have ever imagined.

Chapter 3: Why am I here to suffer?

As I open my door, I immediately see blood stains on the walls as well as a figure running past me; however, as I look downward, I see the most gut-wrenchingly horrifying sight I have ever had my eyes behold. In front of me, I see Mr. Drobovich, as well as everyone who was knocked out yesterday, except for Negan, all lying on hospital beds. Their skin was peeling off, their faces were bright red, their bodies were pale white, and the roots of their teeth were showing. As I look to my side, I see Negan with his bandage still on. However, also in his hands, I see a book, and as I take a better look, I realize it says, "How to treat radiation poisoning."

Instantly, I figured out what had happened to everyone lying in the beds. I think to myself, "The main chamber was not sealed properly. The radiation must have seeped into the bunker through the metal frame because it was not airtight." Then another thought came into my mind: "It's all my fault!" I left the survivors to lie in the main chamber, all while I could have

carried everyone to the bunks to rest, but my ignorance has now left them for dead." As I realize my grave error, Charlotte runs up to me, who was also in the room, and points to what remains of Ryan. As I turn around to look at him, I can see his heart rate monitor deadlining and him going into cardiac arrest. As Charlotte runs over and starts CPR, I look at her, and solely with my facial expressions, I say, "There's nothing we can do to save him." Charlotte understands and stops CPR. As she stops, everyone understands what is going to happen next.

As everyone has a solemn look, Mr.Drobovich accepts his fate and, with the remaining strength that he has, points to a notebook and a pen. Immediately, I rush over, grab it, and give it to him. On it, he writes, "End our suffering; let us be free." After writing it, he focuses his eyes on something at the back of the room. As I turn around, I understand what he wants. At the back of the room is a rifle with ammo beside it. "NO!" I screamed as I burst into tears. Even though I know no one can hear me, I yell, "I will not do this to you all!" In return, everyone simply stares at me with no emotion, no remorse, and just pain and suffering behind their eyes. As I look at everyone, the remaining compassion inside of me cannot bear to look at the pain that everyone is in. So I start heading towards the gun.

With each step I take, my legs become heavier until I finally reach the gun. As I pick it up, so many different emotions start running through my head. "You will be responsible for all six of these deaths!" A voice in my head says, "Think about their suffering; you would want this too if you were in their place," another voice says. With the voices within me battling, I say to myself,

"That is enough!" I take the gun and put the bullets inside it. However, after putting in the bullets, all my confidence and courage disappeared. A wall of guilt slams me as I think about what is about to happen if I pull the trigger. However, in my heart, I know that this is the only

way to end their pain and suffering. The weight of the gun in my hand feels both empowering and terrifying at the same time. I realize that I have the power to decide their fate, but with it comes the heavy burden of responsibility.

As I stand there, contemplating the magnitude of my decision, a sudden wave of empathy washes over me. I remember the moments of joy, love, and laughter I shared with each of them. They were once vibrant and full of life, but now they are trapped in a world of agony. The conflicting voices in my head continue their relentless battle, tugging at my conscience. "Do you really have the right to end their lives?" one voice whispers, its tone filled with doubt and concern. "Think of the consequences—the pain you'll inflict on those left behind," it persists, attempting to sway me from my course of action. But another voice, more resolute and compassionate, counters with conviction. "You cannot let them suffer any longer. This is an act of mercy, a release from their torment." The voice insists, reminding me of the mercy and kindness I would seek to offer.

With my mind swirling in a tempest of emotions, I take a deep breath, finding strength in the midst of uncertainty. I close my eyes, willing myself to confront the immense weight of my decision. Slowly, my trembling fingers wrap around the gun's grip, and I feel the cold, hard steel against my palm. The realization that I am about to end their suffering sinks deep into my soul, causing me to question my own humanity. Doubt threatens to paralyze me, but deep down, I know that I cannot turn back now. As I prepare to pull the trigger, my hand quivers with a mix of trepidation and determination. Tears stream down my face, a testament to the emotional turmoil raging within me. In that moment, I was acutely aware of the gravity of my actions. I whisper a silent prayer, seeking solace and forgiveness, not just for myself but for them as well. With a shaky breath, I summon the last ounce of my strength and slowly squeeze the trigger.

Chapter 4: The Searing Void

Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang! In the deafening silence that follows, the world seems to hold its breath. Time stands still as the gunshot echoes through the room, permeating the space with its finality. I stare at what I have done. I don't even regard looking at Negan or Charlotte; I already know what I have done is unforgivable. As I look upward, all I can see are the bleeding brains of Mr. Drobovich, Ryan Reynolds, Belle Delphine, Vinicius Kauffmann, Dimitrius Kovacic, and Simon Cowell. As I continue staring at what remains of my closest friends, my mind is blank, I feel nothing, and I am truly empty.

Then a thought comes into my mind: "You let your closest friends die, not to a nuclear bomb, but to yourself." I begin maniacally laughing as I can see Negan and Charlotte truly terrified of what I have become in the last 3 minutes of my 19-year-old existence on this now-destroyed planet. As I see Charlotte and Negan trying to escape the threat I have now made of myself, I simply sit on the blood-stained floor and start psychopathically smiling. I start resembling the behavior of a shell-shocked soldier as everything around me begins to lose meaning. As I continue laughing, I put the recently used gun in my mouth with no intention of stopping what is to come next. I tell myself, "You'll be with them soon, Ivanov; you'll be with them soon..." Just as I am about to pull the trigger, I feel a strong vibration coming from the entrance of the bunker. This slight vibration brings me back to my senses and intrigues me enough to stop my suicide.

I leave the medical bay and go towards the front entrance. As I continue walking through the bunker, I slowly start regaining my sanity until I reach the cafeteria. Then my mind registers

one thing: "Franklin. He's been in the cafeteria the entire time." I walk in and quickly smile and wave to Franklin, and he does the same to me. Yet at the back of my mind, I know that it is only a matter of time until Charlotte and Negan tell him what happened, so I tell myself, "Just uncover what caused the vibration, and then go forward with suicide."

As I finally reach the entrance, I try to see what is causing the vibration; however, nothing seems abnormal. So I take the pen that I used for Mr. Droboviches's final message and use it for my own final message. On my hand, I write, "Dear Charlotte, Negan, and Franklin, you have survived so much and seen the most..." *Boom!* The multi-ton door of the entrance falls to the ground, and as smoke rises, tens of soldiers rush into the bunker. They see my bloody face and rush over, presumably believing it is my own blood. As two army doctors come next to me and begin examining me, I have only one thought in my mind: "What will happen once they find the bodies?"