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# The Survivors: A Young Adult Novel

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THE SURVIVORS: A YOUNG ADULT NOVEL

By

Ian Matthews

Honors Capstone Project

Submitted to the Faculty of

Olivet Nazarene University

for partial fulfillment of the requirements for

GRADUATION WITH UNIVERSITY HONORS

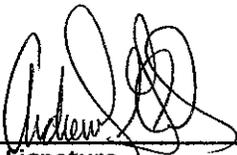
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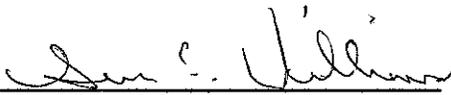
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## ABSTRACT

This project is an exploration of the writing and editing process for a young adult novel. It contains the original rough draft and the final draft (the fourth of four) of the first section of a young adult novel entitled *The Survivors*. It also includes the author's research into what makes Young Adult literature Young Adult, and his reflections on the writing and editing process in terms both general and specific to *The Survivors*. Since the main thrust of the capstone project is the manuscript itself, the manuscript drafts form the bulk of this document.

Keywords: writing process, editing, Young Adult literature, post-apocalyptic, zombies, *The Survivors*

## INTRODUCTION

I started this project with the end goal of having a finished young adult novel. I was told (and soon realized for myself) that such a task would be unenviable, miserable, and nigh impossible. The beginning portion would have to do. My reason for doing this project is that I feel that too often writers of young adult literature write down to their audience. Obviously there are exceptions (The Hunger Games stands out) but for the most part writing for kids is terrible. Obviously you can't write like Jonathan Franzen and expect high school or middle school kids to enjoy it but it's not necessary to dumb things down to the level that a lot of YA writers do. This project is my attempt at seeing whether I can craft something that is a solid piece of writing and still enjoyable for a younger audience.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Good writing in the YA genre essentially means age appropriateness. The main characters should be around high school age, and the language of the novel should reflect that. The characters should be voiced like they are high school students, not like an adult talking like a high school student (Baskin). My novel will focus on a group of high school boys trying to survive the outbreak of a virus which has basically caused the zombie apocalypse. I'm hoping to be less George Romero than that would sound. I'm not going to focus on the idea of the "zombies" but rather on the boys' survival (the title I have in mind right now is The Survivors), how they deal with their circumstances, things like that. Baskin also recommends not shying away from what she calls "touchy subjects," issues that might seem too mature. She says, "Pretty much any issue goes these days in terms of what is appropriate for young-adult fiction. ... But it is not about finding an issue and then creating a story around it. It is about finding the

right voice, finding the right character, and telling his story" (Baskin). That's what I want to do:  
tell a story about characters, not a story about zombies.

## THE ROUGH DRAFT

### The Survivors – Rough Draft Chapter 1

“...well I just don’t know if I’m comfortable with you going on this camping trip,” Jack’s mother was saying.

“What’s the problem, Mom, school’s over and I don’t have a job yet,” Jack said. He was just home from the last day of his junior year of high school and he and his best friends Sam and Peter had planned a camping trip for the weekend. “You know Sam and Peter and we’re just going to the state park.”

“I’m just worried about it is all. I won’t have any way to get a hold of you if something happens.”

“What’s gonna happen? We’ll be gone for two days, Mom.”

“You never know, Jack. You just never know. Did you ask your father?”

Jack hadn’t asked his father. His father had been at his office since before Jack left for school that morning, and most days he was gone until dinner time or later. Jack was tempted to remind his mother of these facts, but thought the ensuing argument would kill the trip entirely. Instead he grumbled, “No. I’ll ask him when he gets home.”

“You do that. If he’s okay with you going,” Jack’s mother paused to think, “I guess I’m okay. But you have to ask him.”

Jack waited near the door until his father got home. It was almost eight by the time the door finally opened. Jack stood up and shouted in excitement. “Dad!” His father jumped.

“What! Jack? What do you want?”

“Can I go camping with Sam and Peter?”

"What will you be doing?"

"I don't know. Camping stuff. Peter has a tent and Sam has some firewood left over from the last time his family went. We're going to the state park."

"Did you ask your mother?"

"Yes. She said I should ask you," Jack said.

"Let me think about it," Jack's father said.

"What's there to think about? We'll be fine. We're just going to the state park."

"I said let me think about it," his father repeated.

Jack sighed. "Fine." His father walked into the kitchen and set his briefcase on the table. Jack sat back down to wait for dinner.

Jack and his parents were still sitting at the table after they ate when Jack's father said, "Jack, your mother and I talked and we decided," he paused the same way Jack's mother had earlier. Jack held his breath. "We decided that you can go on this camping trip as long as you're back by Sunday afternoon. You can leave tomorrow morning; it'll be too dark by the time you make it out to the state park if you leave tonight." He'd hoped to leave right after school but this was better than nothing, Jack decided. He thanked his parents and went to his room to call Sam and Peter. He got in touch with Sam first.

"Hey, Sam? You good to go on the trip?" Jack said.

"Jack? Finally. Yeah, my parents couldn't wait to get rid of me," Sam said.

"Cool. I can't leave until tomorrow morning, though, is that a problem?"

"Not really. It'd be too dark by the time we got out there anyway."

"Okay good. I can drive my SUV out there if you want."

"Good, because I can't. My parents need both cars tomorrow. Pick me up around 10?"

"Works for me. I'll call Peter now," Jack said. He hung up with Sam and dialed Peter's number.

"Hello?" Peter answered.

"Peter? It's Jack. Did your parents say yes?" Jack asked.

"Totally, no problems here. We can use the tent and everything."

"Great. I'm picking up Sam at 10, should I get you before or after that?"

"Whenever works for you guys. After, I guess," Peter said.

"Okay. We'll be over sometime after 10, then. See you tomorrow."

"Yeah, see you," Peter said. Jack hung up. It was getting late so he threw some clothes for the weekend in his book bag and went to bed.

It was cloudy when Jack, Sam and Peter drove back into town on Sunday afternoon.

Sam's house was closest to the edge of town, so Jack drove there first. The driveway was empty and the garage door was open. Jack parked the SUV in the driveway and Sam opened the car door.

"You need any help carrying stuff in?" Jack asked.

"Yeah, grab my sleeping bag and I'll get my backpack," Sam said.

They carried the gear into the garage. Sam stopped inside the doorway and pointed.

"That's weird," he said. The door into the house was left open. Sam ran to the doorway and

Jack followed. "Hello? Hello!" Sam shouted into the house. There was no answer. Sam dropped his backpack in the entrance hallway and walked into the kitchen. "Hello?"

"Did anybody tell you they'd be gone when we got back?" Jack asked.

"No. They said they'd have dinner ready," Sam said.

"Maybe they're out back," Jack said.

"With the door open?"

"Can't hurt to check."

Sam walked through the kitchen into the living room, then downstairs into the basement. Jack turned down a hallway towards Sam's family's bedrooms. He checked each bedroom – Sam's, his little brother's, and finally his parents'. He found no one, but most of the drawers and closets were open and the clothes inside thrown out onto the floor. Jack turned back towards the living room. Sam was still in the basement but Peter was standing in the kitchen.

"What's up? You guys have been gone for a long time," he said.

"We're not sure," Jack said. "Sam's in the basement I think but there's nobody else here."

Sam walked into the kitchen. "Nobody's here," he said. "What is going on?"

"You'd know as much as we would," Jack said. "The bedrooms are pretty messed up, though. A bunch of clothes all over the place and stuff. Anything in the basement?"

"Nothing. All our suitcases are gone. This is so messed up," Sam said.

"What do you want to do?" Jack asked. "Peter's parents are probably wondering where he is and I told my parents I'd be back before dinner."

"I'll stay here in case they come back, I guess," said Sam. "Give me a call when you guys get home."

"Can do. Let's go, Peter," Jack said. They left Sam and walked back to the SUV. Jack started the vehicle and pulled into the street.

"Pretty crazy, huh?" he said.

"What? Oh, yeah, really weird," said Peter.

"You all right?"

"Yeah, man, fine. Just thinking."

Peter's house was only a few blocks from Sam's. Here too the driveway was empty and the front door was open. There were marks of some kind around the doorway. Jack couldn't make them out from the street. Peter jumped out of the SUV and jogged to the open door. Jack was just getting out of the SUV when Peter ran inside.

"Peter!" Jack shouted after him and sprinted to the door.

## The Survivors – Rough Draft Chapter 2

The sun was rising. The storm had finally broken. Jack was almost disappointed – it had at least kept him from dozing off as he kept watch from midnight until morning. His friends were all still asleep; Sam had fallen asleep immediately after Jack offered to take over. Jack couldn't blame them. He was even a little jealous, but it was his own fault. He was the one who'd volunteered for the graveyard shift. The sunrise was a welcome change from the violent, stormy night full of flesh-hungry ghouls. Jack decided a walk might be nice – he could stretch his

legs and maybe wake himself up some before the others were ready to leave. He opened the car door as quietly as he could and stepped out.

The dying storm and the sunrise made a good team. A few beams peeked through the trees around the rest area and rainwater trickled from many of their branches. Jack paused at the bottom of a hill.

"Kinda pretty, isn't it?" A voice from behind him. Jack started and snapped his head around to see Rachel coming down the hill.

"Holy ... Rachel. You almost gave me a heart attack." Jack turned back around to face the trees and the sunrise. Rachel moved down the hill and joined Jack at the bottom.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. I just woke up and wondered where you were. Everybody else is still sleeping."

"Yeah, sorry. I figured it'd be okay to take a little walk. Storm's over and I think we're safe for now."

"Okay. Just making sure you didn't get eaten," she said. Jack turned, puzzled. "All right, bad joke." She turned to walk back up the hill. "Oh – I almost forgot. I think we should find a store or something and pick up some supplies – water, food, first aid stuff maybe."

"That sounds good. Once everybody's up we'll get going."

"Okay." Rachel walked up the hill.

"Hey Rachel?"

"Yeah?"

"It is pretty. Peaceful, almost."

"I know. Kinda sucks that it's the end of the world, doesn't it?" Jack looked puzzled again. "Another bad joke. See you back at the car?"

"Yeah. I'll be there soon." Jack turned one more time to face the sun. It was higher in the sky now, just shining over the tops of the trees. Pretty. Jack turned and followed Rachel back to the car.

The rest of the group woke up over the next hour. Jack explained the plan.

"Rachel and I were talking and we thought we should get some supplies. We left town in a hurry and we don't have food or anything. We're gonna stop in the next town and pick up some things – food, water, first aid kits."

"How are we gonna get this stuff, steal it?" Sam didn't look happy at the thought.

"You have a better idea?" Jack asked.

"Not really, I'm just not sure we can just walk into a store and take whatever we want."

"Who's gonna stop us?" Peter chimed in.

"He's got a point," Rachel agreed.

"Just because nobody can stop us doesn't make it okay," Sam said.

"Well it's either that or we die of starvation," Jack said. "Or infection or something. Look, we need food. None of us know how to hunt. Either we grab what we need from a store or we grab what we need from somebody's house."

"Fine, fine. But only what we need, and we do it fast," Sam said.

"So we're agreed," Jack said. "Next town we come to we'll stop and find a store."

The group got in the car and set off down the interstate. Abandoned cars still littered the highway, pulled over to the shoulder or just left as they came to a stop, out of fuel. A few Infected roamed alone or in pairs but paid no attention to the moving car. The group reached the next town in the early afternoon. There was a shopping center just off the interstate. The parking lot was still half full – people at the shopping center who were caught in the initial outbreak or people who had tried to find supplies and had abandoned their cars as the Infected took over the area. The Infected had mostly moved on from this area of town, or so it seemed. Jack couldn't see any of them from the back of the parking lot, anyway. He parked the car safely away from any others and turned off the engine. The group left the car and made their way to the entrance of the shopping center.

“We have a problem,” said Jack as the inside of the shopping center came into view. The power was out – the only light inside the building came from the doors and a few rows of windows. “We’ll need to grab flashlights before anything else. Sporting goods?”

The group made their way inside. They found sporting goods section to the right of the entrance. It was mostly picked clean; any weapons that had been there were gone along with anything that could have been used to improvise a weapon. In the middle of one of the nearly-bare aisles the group found the flashlights. There were only two left, but they looked sturdy. Jack grabbed them and handed one to Sam. They ripped open the packaging and tested the lights. Both were weak but still functional. Peter found some batteries nearby and the flashlight beams were back up to full strength.

“All right, we’ll split up from here,” Jack said. “Rachel, Hayley, grab some first aid supplies and head back to the entrance to keep lookout. Sam, Peter, find some bottled water.

I'll head to the grocery section and find some food. Sam, hold onto that flashlight and I'll keep this one. Can you find the entrance without a flashlight, Rachel?"

"We made it here fine. We'll just walk towards the light," said Rachel.

"Okay. Then let's get to it," said Jack.

The group went their separate ways. The grocery section was on the far side of the store, opposite the sporting goods section. Like sporting goods, most of the shelves in the grocery area were empty. Jack walked down the aisles, grabbing what he could – a couple loaves of bread, a jar of peanut butter, some crackers, beef jerky. He filled his arms and turned towards the exit.

"What are you doin' here?" The voice came from his right. Jack jumped and dropped the food he was carrying. He shined the flashlight in the direction of the voice. "I said what are you doin' here?" The flashlight's beam showed a man. His hair was shiny with grease, tangled into a messy pile. Several days' worth of beard had grown on his face. His right arm was raised, pointing toward Jack.

"I'm getting –" Jack started.

"Shut up!" The man growled through his teeth which glowed eerily white. He squinted into the flashlight beam, but what Jack could see of his eyes looked bloodshot, sleep-deprived. "Are you one of them?" He moved forward and the flashlight beam found his right hand. Jack froze. The man held a large pistol in his hand, leveled directly at Jack's head.

"Hey, take it easy. No, I'm not one of them," Jack spoke in a low voice he hoped would be soothing. He kept the flashlight trained on the man but raised his other hand to show it was empty.

"Yeah, sure, kid. The rest of 'em said that, too."

"The rest?"

The man gestured behind him with the gun. Jack moved the flashlight to slowly take in the area. Four or five bodies lay behind the man. They did not look infected to Jack. They looked very human. Jack's stomach turned and he swallowed hard.

"Did you kill them?" Jack asked.

"Had to," said the man. "It's kill or be killed out here, kid. They'd have done the same to me." He was waving the gun more wildly now.

"No they wouldn't have! They were just trying to survive," said Jack.

"Maybe. Or maybe they got bit and hadn't turned yet. Maybe they were gonna infect me. Had to be sure," said the man. "Maybe you're gonna infect me."

"I'm not – Look. I'm not Infected. I'll even leave- "

"Stop! You stop right there, kid," the man's voice rose and the gun was again pointed at Jack. "I can't. I can't," His gun hand was shaking.

"Can't what?"

"I can't be alone anymore. They're all dead, kid, everybody you or I ever knew or loved. They got eaten, or maybe they did the eating, but they're all dead." Tears streamed down the man's cheeks.

"What are you talking about, man?" Jack asked. The gun moved up as the man pointed it at himself. "Hey. Hey, what are you doing?" The man's finger tightened.

"Good luck, kid." He pulled the trigger.

Jack doubled over and threw up. He toppled onto the floor and passed out.

REST OF THIS CHAPTER: LEAVING STORE, DRIVING, NEXT NIGHT, GO TO PRISON

### The Survivors – Rough Draft Chapter 3

Jack was being led down a long hallway lit by harsh fluorescents. The walls and floor were painted an unsettling shade of green. Some of the bulbs buzzed and flickered on and off but otherwise the hall was quiet. His guide didn't seem interested in conversation so Jack left him alone. They walked in silence for a few minutes until the man stopped and gestured to an open cell.

"You'll be bunking here for the night," he said.

Jack paused in the doorway to the cell. "Where are my friends?" He asked.

"Not sure," the guide said. "I can ask somebody if you want but I'm sure they're around somewhere. Not like they had anywhere else to go, right, kid?"

"Yeah, I guess. So is that it?"

"Sure. Breakfast starts at 8 tomorrow morning in the cafeteria."

"Thanks."

Jack entered the cell. The prison's new occupants hadn't done much to dress the place up; the only furniture was a bunk bed along the back wall. Jack sat down on the bed and heard the door close behind him.

When Jack and his friends had arrived at the prison they were met at the gate by two men carrying rifles. One, tall and bearded, came to the driver's window and tapped on it. The

other, shorter and skinny, tensed his hands on his rifle but stayed back near the gate. Jack lowered the window.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Jack. These are my friends Sam, Peter, Rachel, and Rachel's little sister Hayley. We're trying to get to the military base in the city. I think my family is there," Jack said.

"Any of you Infected?"

"No."

"You sure?"

"Sure as we can be. None of us have been bit or anything."

"All right. Can't be too careful. Come in, the Warden will want to see you."

The gate opened and the man waved the car through. Past the gate was a lot with a few other cars. Near the main prison building there was a bus. Probably a former prisoner transport, Jack guessed. Jack parked the car with a group of other cars near the gate. He and his friends stepped out of the car and walked toward the main prison building. The guards caught up with them.

"We'll take you to the Warden now," the bearded one said.

The guards led Jack and his friends through another gate. They were in a courtyard with a high wall on their left, the gatehouse behind them and buildings ahead and to their right. The courtyard seemed to be a common area; there was exercise equipment near one of the buildings and a basketball court in the far corner. The guards started towards a dark brick building looming directly across the yard. They crossed the yard in silence, the guards checking back occasionally to see that their guests were still with them. The group reached the building;

according to a sign above the door it was the prison's former administrative center. The bearded guard opened the door and indicated that they enter. The other guard led the way and Jack and his friends filed into the room. The bearded guard was last to enter and shut the door behind him.

The door opened into a room that was little more than a hallway. Opposite the door were two elevators. Other than that the room was empty. The bearded guard crossed the room and pressed the elevator button. The left door opened and the elevator dinged its arrival. The shorter guard motioned them in. The elevator had no buttons; only a panel with a keyhole in it. The bearded guard inserted a key and turned it. The elevator doors closed, the gears hummed into life, and the elevator moved upward. The ride seemed to take longer than it should, Jack thought. The elevator did eventually slow and come to a stop. The doors opened to a long hallway. At the end was a door with a plaque that read "WARDEN." The bearded guard led them down to the door and paused.

"Wait here. I'll inform the Warden of the situation," he said. The shorter guard nodded and stood in front of the door after the bearded one entered. A few minutes passed and the door opened again. The bearded guard stepped into the hallway and pointed at Jack.

"You," he said. "Come in. The warden wants to talk to you alone."

"Why me?" Jack asked.

"You can ask him yourself. Alone. Now."

Jack stepped into the room and heard the door close behind him. The room, as it turned out, was an office with plush carpeting, bookshelves stacked high with texts whose titles Jack couldn't read from his spot near the door, a few potted plants, and a large picture window in

the wall opposite the door. In front of the window sat a massive desk. Behind the desk sat the Warden. He was a gigantic man; even sitting down he was nearly as tall as Jack. He stood up slowly and crossed the room. He towered over Jack; he must have been seven feet tall at least, Jack decided. The Warden extended his hand.

“Welcome,” he said in a deep, vaguely Southern drawl. “I’m Warden Chambers. This is my facility.”

“Why did you want to see me alone?” Jack asked.

The Warden laughed. “You get right down to it, I see. I respect that, son, I really do. The reason I wanted to see you alone is I wanted to talk about what’s happened to you since all this started. My man out there said you were the leader of your little group and I wanted to meet you. Talk man-to-man, you see. Now, I am a firm believer that all meetings between men should begin with a handshake. So?” He extended his hand again. This time Jack shook it, or had his hand shaken by it. The Warden’s hand covered Jack’s completely. The Warden laughed again. “Good! Good, now have a seat.” He motioned to an empty chair near the desk and moved back to his own chair. As he sat down Jack noticed a very hefty revolver in a holster on the Warden’s hip. The Warden followed Jack’s eyes to the weapon.

“I see you’ve noticed Clementine. We’ve been through a lot together, me and her. Like to get a closer look?” He asked.

“I guess,” Jack said as he sat down.

“You guess.” The Warden drew the gun from the holster and tossed it to Jack. Jack froze for a second but put his hand out and caught it by the barrel. He nearly dropped it but put his other hand on the butt to steady it. Sure enough, engraved along the side of the gun under the

cylinder was the name "Clementine" in flowing script. "Beautiful, isn't she?" the Warden said, mostly to himself. ".44 caliber, pearl grip, chrome plate. Yep, me and Clementine have sent a lot of those filthy creatures out there back to the grave, and that's the gospel truth." Jack stood up from his chair and handed the revolver back to the Warden, who thanked him and reholstered the weapon. "Now, to business," he said. "Tell me. Jack, right?" Jack nodded. "Tell me, Jack, where did you come from?"

Jack shared the events of the journey with the Warden. The Warden leaned forward as the story went on, clapping his hands and saying "Wonderful!" when Jack told him about eluding the Infected in Rachel's house.

"The second or third day, we were low on supplies because we got out of town in such a hurry. We raided a grocery store, but some guy had set up shop. He went crazy I guess, he killed himself right in front of me. Just blew his brains out," Jack said. He was surprised at his casual mention of the man's suicide.

"Shame, shame," said the Warden. "Can't really blame him, though. Livin' after the end of the world, Jack, that'll do some funny things to a man."

Jack continued the story and ended with the team's arrival at the prison. "So here we are. Is there anything else you want to know?" he asked.

"No, no, you've said plenty for now," said the Warden. "I imagine you're very tired. We've got rooms ready for you and your friends for at least the night. You can stay as long as you like."

"Thanks," Jack said. He left the office. His friends and the two guards were gone. A different man stood next to the elevator. He led Jack out of the administrative building and

across the courtyard to a squat building labeled "Cell Block." He led Jack into the building and down the hallway to his cell.

So now Jack was alone. The door had shut and he might have been hearing things but Jack thought he heard the click of a lock engaging. He thought about getting up to check the door, but the bed was more comfortable than he had expected and he was more tired than he had realized. He took off his shoes and stretched out on the bed. Locked door or not, it could wait for the morning.

Jack woke up to the sound of footsteps in the hallway outside his cell. He rose and walked to the door. He opened it – if it had been locked overnight it wasn't anymore – and looked into the hallway. A man and a woman were walking down the hallway towards the door into the courtyard.

"Hey!" Jack shouted after them.

"Yeah?" The man turned around to face Jack.

"Where's breakfast?"

"Oh, it's back that way." The man pointed back in the direction he and the woman had come from. "Just follow this hallway around and you should see the door to the cafeteria on the left."

"Thanks," Jack said. He left the cell and turned in the direction the man had indicated. He walked down the hallway past several cells identical to the one he had slept in, vaguely wondering about the people that had been in them before the outbreak. The hallway took a

turn to the left after fifteen cells or so; here there were no cells on the left-hand side of the hall. In what seemed like the middle of the hallway Jack found the double door into the cafeteria. He opened it and entered to see a room much like the school cafeteria. He wasn't sure what he had expected from a prison cafeteria, but the similarities were uncanny. They had the same low tables, same serving line along the back wall with the kitchen behind, even the same medicinal green tile on the floor. Jack saw Rachel and Hayley at a table near the door and made his way over.

"Hey, is it just me, or is this exactly like –" he started.

"The cafeteria at school? Yeah, I was just thinking that, actually," Rachel said. "It's so weird, all that stuff seems like it happened forever ago."

"It really does," Jack said. "I wonder if we'll ever go back."

"Go back where? To school?" Rachel giggled. "It hadn't even crossed my mind."

"Seriously though. How many of our teachers made it out ahead of all this stuff? Or our classmates? You really haven't thought about any of that?"

"Jack, this is a little heavy for breakfast conversation. Plus," Rachel said, lowering her voice, "I think you're scaring Hayley." She glanced at her little sister, who was watching Jack and Rachel. Her eyes were wide and her mouth was closed into a thin, flat line.

"Oh. So," Jack stammered, searching for a change of subject. "What's for breakfast? I'm hungry."

"I don't know," Rachel said. "We just got here ourselves. Let's get in line."

Breakfast was some kind of egg casserole, fruit, assorted pastries, and some juice. Jack, Rachel, and Hayley went through the line and sat down to eat. Jack was nearly finished when a man approached their table.

"You Jack?" he asked.

"Yeah," Jack said.

"Warden wants to see you."

"About what?"

"He didn't say."

"So you're my escort?"

"That's me," the man said. "And we should really get going."

Jack said goodbye to the girls and went with the man out of the cafeteria and back into the administrative tower. The man turned the key in the elevator and they rode up to the Warden's floor. This time Jack was allowed to walk to the Warden's office by himself; his escort stayed in the elevator. Jack crossed the hall to the office door and knocked.

"Come in!" came the voice from inside. Jack opened the door and stepped into the office. "Jack, my boy, come in. Sit down." The Warden indicated a chair. Jack sat down.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked.

"I did, Jack, I did indeed. You seem to me like a young man of great fortitude, Jack, somebody with guts. I wanted to see you because some of my men are going out to gather some things and I want you to go with them," said the Warden.

"What kind of things?" Jack asked.

"Supplies mostly. Food, water, medicine, ammunition, that kind of thing. They're loading up now," the warden said, pointing out his window at the bus Jack had seen the day before. Several men were standing around it holding assault rifles, knives, and other weaponry. Some had large black duffel bags which looked like they held more gear. Jack thought he saw a few pairs of night-vision goggles but he couldn't be sure from so far away.

"You want me to go with them? They look pretty serious," Jack said.

"I'm sure you can hold your own. You're practically a grown man for crying out loud. Are you in?" the Warden asked.

"I guess so," Jack said. "When do we leave?"

"You leave now," said the Warden.

Five minutes later Jack was standing next to the bus. DESCRIBE THE BUS HEREThe bearded guard from the day before approached him.

"So you're coming with us. I guess I should introduce myself. McMillan," the guard said, extending his hand. Jack shook it. "I usually lead these little trips."

"So what do we do on these things? The Warden said we were gathering supplies," Jack said.

"Something like that," McMillan answered. "We'll probably find some things while we're out."

"What else would we be doing?" Jack asked. McMillan didn't seem eager to answer the question. Instead he reached into a duffel bag at his feet and pulled out a pistol.

"You ever used one of these?" he asked.

"A couple times," Jack bluffed. He had held a handgun maybe twice in his life. McMillan handed the pistol over and Jack tried to keep his hand from shaking too badly.

"It's loaded. Safety's on. Here's a couple extra magazines. If you need more just ask," McMillan said. He tossed Jack the clips as Jack tried to find exactly where the safety was. He found a switch on the left side of the gun and assumed that was the safety. He put the clips in his pants pocket.

"Everybody ready?" McMillan addressed the team around the bus. They nodded grimly. "All right. Load up." Jack boarded the bus with the team. McMillan took the driver's seat and started the engine as Jack found a seat towards the front of the bus. He sat down as the bus lurched into motion.

## REFLECTIONS – ROUGH DRAFT

I'd always heard that the first draft of anything is crap. I'd never believed it until now – it's hard to get any sort of perspective on that kind of thing until you actually do it – but it is so true. Further, it's hard to tell how good or bad your own draft is. I thought this thing was in okay shape until I turned it in to Prof. Gibbs. This is the importance of an editor: they think in a different direction than a writer has to. The editor has to think about cutting down, about streamlining and tightening the story. The writer has to keep generating material, moving the story forward. It's not a fight so much as it is a dance. The editor also, from time to time, has to be the voice of reason when a writer has an idea that they think is just great but would cause the reader to raise an eyebrow or throw the book across the room.

Between this draft and the final draft were three major editing sweeps. The edit between the first and second drafts was by far the most drastic: the whole structure changed into the frame story it is now, Sam, Peter, Rachel, and Hayley were turned from scenery into actual characters, and dialog changed to become more realistic. The second draft to the third was mostly adding events and further developing characters, and the third to the fourth was literally an hour of adding commas (among other things; the total edit time was about three hours). I can't include the second or third drafts for space's sake but the fourth draft is below, with further reflections.

Final Draft

Pages 24 – 61

Excised

## REFLECTIONS – FINAL DRAFT

I want to give an analogy for the editing process. When somebody says a word enough times in a conversation it starts to lose meaning (I've heard *flower* used as an example of this happening). Even outside a conversation, just saying the same word ten, fifteen, twenty times turns it into less of a word and more of a collection of sounds that you make your mouth say. That's what the editing process starts to feel like. The author has to keep poring over the same exact words for weeks – they stop resembling the idea way back at the first draft and just start looking like squiggles on a computer screen, and somehow the author has to wrangle them, delete some squiggles and add some new squiggles without remembering just exactly how they started. The beauty of the process, though, is that on the other side of this confusing no-man's-land is a finished story. The meaning comes back, better than ever before (hopefully).

It's far easier to see how crap the first draft is now, looking back three major edits later. It's hard to pick on that draft too much, though. It's still my own work and it did eventually turn into this last draft. Obviously there is a wealth of content added in, but the editing process really was more like sculpting a final product out of that first draft than writing anything new. The ideas and events were all contained in the first draft—they just hadn't happened yet. I think the heart of that really is at the character of Jack. He is the most consistent (well, he and the Warden, but the Warden even changed over the course of editing) piece of the puzzle. The protagonist (or protagonists) is, I think, the best place to start in writing fiction. Before I ever thought about zombies or a prison warden who hunts them or a guy shooting himself in the back of a department store, I thought about a group of friends trying to survive. How would

they react to losing the world as they know it? That leads into the second order of business: creating a world for them to lose.

When I came up with the concept for *The Survivors* it was going to be much more clinical. It would have explained the whole disease outbreak, all been from a third-person perspective (the potential rest of the novel would be from third person, but limited to Jack's point of view for the most part), and generally followed genre conventions way more closely. The focus on Jack as a character and his relationship with his friends and with the Warden makes *The Survivors* a much more emotional experience than it could have been. Those emotions translate into their discovery of the outbreak and the Infected. The problem that a lot of YA novels have is that their protagonists are written like they know everything. They might be first-person but they're written almost third-person omniscient. I wanted to tone down the protagonist's know-it-all nature because that's not a real character. On the first draft I overshot it – Prof. Gibbs asked in his notes on the draft “Is Jack dumb or an emerging leader?” That was the focus of the rest of my edits – make Jack savvy but not too smart. Believability is the key – could he know this and why? Would this freak him out and why? It's not just a better reading experience but a more challenging, fulfilling writing experience as well. I have to think about how a real live person would think about a situation and put it on paper, not just have something in mind that I want to have happen and make my little puppet do it.

Being a writer is hard work. It's not that writing is hard – almost anyone can sit down in front of a computer or notebook and put letters in the right order, maybe even use the right grammar and punctuation. But what a writer does is excruciating. At least for me, the writing mind is caught in a paradox. I have to simultaneously think I can make it work, that I can write

well enough to make people want to read the finished product, and always look at the draft with a savage critical eye. Too many aspiring writers spend all their time talking about what they're working on because they get proud of their work. By contrast, my own family didn't find out about *The Survivors* until my mom had a copy of the final draft in her hands. That's not to brag – I literally can't bring myself to talk about anything I'm working on. If I'm not satisfied with it, I don't want to talk about it. Part of that is the self-critical eye being wary of friends' praise. It's not that they'd lie about a piece being good or bad, but to some extent I think people who know a writer will always read their opinions of the writer into a work. But that was before this project. Now editing has a purpose – to go from something that isn't worth talking about to something to give to other people. I'm grateful for this project because it's the first time I've ever been able to give an extended piece of writing to somebody who's never seen my face, who'll read it just like a book they picked up at Barnes & Noble. I'm grateful for this project because it's helped me go from asking, jaw dropped in horror, "I wrote that?" to saying with a satisfied smile, "I wrote that."

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