

“Bursting the Bubble”

By Michael Stone

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A Final Plea

Foreward

In houses in every city in each of the states united, parents and children opened their eyes to a new day. They rose from their beds, walked through hallways and thresholds, and sat down to breakfast. They hadn’t yet checked their phones or turned on the television—inactions that left the surrounding world just as it should be, just as it was every other day.

But other parents and children already knew that the tall walls were facing a demolition stronger than any other in the history of warring man. For them, sleep ended far too early. The alarm wasn’t stirred by a nightmare or harsh weather but instead sounded like, “Alex, Alex, wake up! We’ve got to go, now! It’s happening!”

Soon, after TVs were turned on, computers booted up, messages read, and phones dialed, all parents and children were well aware. As smoke billowed along the western

coast, rescuers had begun sifting through the rubble that once housed the revered women and men who held the protective gun. Their charred remains were clustered together with debris heaps and hauled away—a secret move to keep body bags off the news. For even in those first hours, the military and the government had foresight worth years. They knew that it would come down to the brute power of every last man, woman, and child to withstand what was to come.

The first onslaught was a surprise, but not a total one. Shipments of goods from across the Pacific had abruptly stopped a month or so prior. Diplomats raced toward remedying tensions, but they were charged with stipulations too great to be met. The demanders seemed to do so strategically, knowing their offers would create false hope in negotiations while the news reports would treat the blockade as mere political drama, not the precursor of immense disaster.

The games would be figured out, though, especially after intelligence removed the curtain on a military buildup so large that it would have been a worthy foe for the world's combined armies. In turn, the diplomats ceased their work and became drops in a bucket of engineers, military leaders, scientists, politicians, and others, all now tasked with preparing for the truest test of the homeland. Military might had struck against her before, but not like this. This couldn't be compared to the days of the king trying to keep his fledgling colonies intact, or even later when the countrymen turned rifles on one another for an uncivilized Civil War. No, this was shaping up to be something more horrendous, more costly, more deadly.

When the day did come, the enemy had much to overcome. The defenders were, after all, fresh and heavily entrenched on their own ground. Fighters sped through the air

to meet the invading formations of bombers and their escorts. The explosive clashes must have been fantastic to see even for the gods—a scene out of apocalyptic fiction, the likes of which had never played out in modern times.

Missiles were flying through the sky and from the ground, creating fireworks whether they hit their intended target or not. Fighters zipped around and past one another in what would have been poetic aerials had the intentions been peaceful. When a bomber was hit, the fireball would be so expansive that it sometimes took out one its brethren, making the coordinators from the ground worry about the power each one packed. A few pilots were ejecting free only to be chopped down by machine-gun bursts or explosions. And through the chaos, the invaders kept charging through. Even if an initial group was focused down, just as many understudies crossed over the coast and into the fray. The endless ocean was proving to not be the unbroken protector it had always been.

Before the full spread of enemy planes could be brought down, the toll had already rose to an entire war's worth. Almost a dozen bases across three states had realized the capability of the bombers. There were survivors, but nary a good many at any location. If their heart did still beat, it was likely because they ran. Those that clung to their posts could not find life in the raining fire. Structures of once great military strength and pride had been pounded into razed earth. Those that did still stand suffered unrecoverable amputations, rising above the ground as ghosts of their former selves. The land had indeed been turned into a war zone, if not hell itself, in a matter of hours.

And then, just for a few moments, the view was serene. The air fighting had stopped, as had the drops, and there were no sirens or commotion because the hoards of first response didn't yet know how to reach those in need. Finding one of the bases to be

far more accessible, a single bluebird chirped from atop a mangled traffic sign. It stood there, all on its own, as the base laid hauntingly quiet, burning a little but not fully blazing, providing color contrast in the foreground of what was otherwise a beautiful morning in America.

“Everything herein should be considered untrue except that is yet to happen.”

The Transport

Chapter 1

The shaking and explosions drove fear deep into Private Allan Hassen. But fear, he had learned long ago, is an emotion that can be used in the same way as love—a fuel for action, quick decisions, and overpowering angst. Such a fuel was needed in those desperate times, and especially in the desperate moments of that night. The transport room, the most sturdy and guarded facility in the nation, would soon be breached, and the five women and men around Allan knew this was their last. It was the same knowledge that had already graced the minds of millions of their fellow countrywomen and men. But surprisingly, death appeared nowhere near as important as the tasks at hand. Their objective: carry out the final steps in powering the machine and send Allan away to correct the wrongs that led to the war. At least that was the goal, one that many declared as too improbable and a waste of valuable resources. But with little alternative in the present, the past was the only hope. Allan was the only hope for the United States of America, and perhaps it was his 18-year-old naivety that gave him faith in himself and the plan that he had been trained to carry out...