

Project: Children of the Apocalypse

By: Jean P. Aviles-Alvarez

Edited: Austin Haefner, Gabriel Mendez, and Keishla M. Concepcion

Prologue:

I always wanted to see a cloudless sky. The sun had disappeared from us entirely. All that was left was a constant blanket of night projected by clouds. Cities had become like beacons.

The dome, protected the city and the surrounding areas from the extreme conditions the planet had developed. The dome reflected the lights of the cities, and helped illuminate the wasteland around us. Looking towards wastelands always gave me a sense of restriction. Scratching my face the plasticity of my fingers reminded me of the accident.

Chapter 1: An Institution Worth Dying For

As I suddenly feel water splashed on me, I woke up to find my sister standing besides the bed with an empty cup in her hand. I could see her playful smile, which annoyed me.

"What the hell was that for!? Screw off!", I yelled at my sister.

"You're late to school you idiot!", she said as she headed downstairs to probably get me into more trouble for giving her attitude.

As I struggle to get away from the water that was still present on my bed, I started to get ready and headed downstairs to the kitchen where my father was almost ready to leave for work.

"Late again?, even when you're acceptance at your school depends on it? You really surprise me at times and not in the best of ways.", says my father as I got my food from the microwave. It was probably put there by mom a few minutes before I woke up.

I stare back at him while eating my food and end up saying, "It's not my fault the current faulted yesterday at night. If it weren't for that I would have woken up."

"Instead of complaining, maybe you should try fixing it", said father as he got up and left for work.

"Why are you guys so rowdy all the time? I can barely sleep having you three idiots laughing or playing around.", said mom obviously teasing us. "Now go already, your buddies are waiting for you outside Weiss.", she said as she pointed through the kitchen window.

I tried hurrying up as I ate my food and then went to place the dishes in the sink to clean up later.

“Please don't forget to wash all the dishes later,” said mom as she starting heading upstairs.

As I walk outside, Amelia was clearly pissed at me. Long red hair and fixed fists, she could just barely stand still in one spot and to add on that I was gonna make her arrive late. Nevertheless, I took a deep breath and braced for impact as I walked into the sidewalk. And just as I thought, once I closed the gate of my house I received a punch right to my guts. If I had not braced I would have had to stay still for some time to recover.

“Did you really not expect Amelia to be pissed once you left home? I mean you know that your parents are totally in favor of having her correct you”, Emil said with a face that only served the purpose of making me feel more guilty about not having set up any precautions in the case that the power went out.

“It was not my fault the power went out”, I said as Amelia looked back at me ferociously while I was still recovering from her punch. “Fine, but you still knew we needed to be on time and now we are going to have to run after the train in order to get to school”.

As I looked at my watch I noticed that it was 7:48 a.m. The train station was about fifteen minutes away from my house. I tightened my bag preparing for the run we would have to endure; Emil put away his glasses. We took off, laughing, remembering how we would do this for middle school. As we arrived we were thankful the train was sitting there, as if waiting for us. Just as I got in the bullet train I wondered how the train worked.

Sitting in the train I peered out the window and noticed the city and the landscape that surrounded it. I was reminded of the tales of how before the world had lots of plants and its sky was blue. But that was all before the disaster occurred some time ago. Technology progressed to the point where we replaced normal guns with ones where we would utilize self reproducing

energy and cars were replaced with magnetic trains as the main form of transportation. But even with those improvements we weren't quite there yet when it came to being safe. Even with better energy processing and weaponry, we still can't go far outside the dome without getting killed by the mutated animals that roamed the lands.

“Why are you so quiet Weiss? You seem more distracted than usual”, Amelia asked while looking at me.

“Oh, it's nothing I'm just astonished by the dome every time we see it. It's always as beautiful as a sapphire. I wonder if that was what the people who built it wanted to resemble. I would really like to see what the outside looks like but I don't think that will happen anytime soon,” I said as we were nearing the station nearest to our new school.

The school which we were going to attend was one focused on research about how to fix the outside. Excavations for minerals underground were proving to be more difficult due to constant collapsing of cave structures. Thus research facilities were made to try and fix our problems outside the dome. There was only one issue and it was that we needed to follow all the rules without failure. Some rules would vary from our uniform to being respectful to absolutely everyone. If we would arrive late on the first day they would probably just kick us out without any problems.

As the train stopped the center of the city could be seen from the train station. Tall skyscrapers could be seen for the larger part. Then we exited the train where we could almost see the school. If we looked back we could see the outskirts of the city where there would be forests that were near our neighborhood.

We ran through the gates of the school campus and I could not help but to be astonished by the tall school building that was covered in windows. The opening ceremony was going to be held in the gymnasium which was in another building near the one we had just seen. At first we were lost but then we noticed the stream of students that had left the main building where they

had started the school tour. We decided then to follow them as they probably knew where they were headed. Entering the gym there was a stage with what looked like teachers ready to give out their speeches.

“Finally made it, now let's take a seat,” I said as I looked for a spot where we could sit together. I then saw that the gymnasium had what seemed to be seats that could hide under the flooring. Seeing the chairs made me wonder if there was machinery under the boards we were stepping on as to make the space for whatever activity. The gym then had its lights in the walls and the ceiling could open in order to allow fresh air to come in.

“Welcome to Poseidon High School. You can call me Professor Shaw. You probably think you have done well in the past years to grab our attention but remember that we will now require even more effort from you. As you know, the future rests on your shoulders. Now I will allow a teacher to talk to you about what will be happening today,” Professor Shaw said as he stood on stage.

The director was really intimidating with his muscular appearance. He was also bald which made me think of him as one of those bodyguards you would see in movies. Listening to how he spoke, I felt intimidated but at the same time I could understand the meaning behind what he said. After his speech he sat down and the teacher he mentioned approached the microphone.

“Now students, I know you thought you were just going to have a tour around the campus but that will not be the case. Today, we are going to put you through a survival game to take a look at who we will select for a special program. There's a simulation area through those doors and that is where you will dive into the game. These games have to be done in teams of three so those that have friends will have an advantage. Those that survive the longest will have the chance to participate in a special program we have run for some time now. You would all benefit from this program since it offers free food and other commodities but we will offer these things

to those that succeed. It will be up to you if you will have better chances at succeeding in this world so I wish you luck”.

I then looked above me and noticed an enormous holographic screen. My hands start sweating at the thought of what we might have to face in the simulation. From surviving in harsh environments to going into combat with a mutant. I was unsure if I could do well in any of them let alone be of use to my friends. I do not know if we had the luckiest pick ever but our group was also the first one and that only added to my anxiety.

“Group number one please go to the simulation room” was heard through the speakers.

“We will be fine, you have always had good judgement when under pressure. Just tell us what we need to do and we will do our best,” Amelia said as she smiled.

We walked towards the metal doors that led to the simulation room and it wasn't as bad as I expected. The people managing the machines would be in a room surrounded by glass while we would be attached to an arm that would mimic everything we do as to make it feel real. The same teacher that had spoken on stage was waiting for us in front of the machines.

“This test will be focused on your survival skills. Your decision and resource management will be what gets you through this and if you are lucky you might find something that will give you an advantage for the next stage. You cannot retake this test so do your best,” said the teacher.

Right as I stepped in and the simulation began everything went dark. It was a funny sensation to have my eyes be completely open but not see any light. I would assume this is how the outside is. I move my arm up when I feel something touching it. Then i was suddenly able to see normally. I look around and I notice my friends right besides me. The area we were in was actually the school which surprised me as I thought they would have chosen a more challenging type of tests. Even if the test was in the school grounds I had not walked around so it was all new

to me. A timer then appeared in the corner of my right eye suggesting we had to survive for the amount of time designated.

“Hey guys we have to get out of here quick,” Emil said as he had a frightened look on his face.

“Oh shit we are in for a ride here!” Amelia shouted as we noticed the giant mutated heading our way at incredible speed.

This mutated was no small feat to kill as it had a hard shell covering it entirely. It resembled what I assume was called a scorpion before the disaster. We started running towards the main school building and noticed a small bag on our way there. We opened it to see what was inside and found a small cellphone and one explosive. I was surprised but just decided to run with it before judging what to do with these. We then reached a tree and managed to lose the scorpion. I took a deep breath and then looked to my right where I saw the main school building. Thinking it would be easier to survive in the building, I let Amelia and Emil know by pointing in its general direction. We then started running to the building and luckily the mutated had not noticed our movement.

“Hey Emil think you can hack that lock to let us enter the building?” I whispered as to avoid having that thing notice our exact location.

“You would have to hold back that thing for at least two minutes while I use this cellphone. Are you sure you want to do that?” Emil said then put his glasses back on as to see what he was doing.

“Amelia, think we can use that metal pipe over there and stick that explosive into that thing?” My gaze was fixated at the rusty pipe that was lying in the grass.

She then took the pipe and checked its integrity, “It might work if we can make this pipe break into a shape that could penetrate that thick shell”.

Without a second to waste, the rusty pipe was broken by hitting it against the building. This action drew the attention of the giant monstrosity, but this was our best shot at getting rid of it and entering the building. My heart was going so fast I could barely stay quiet enough as to let it get close enough to kill. Right as it passed by the corner we immediately went for its head. Emil was located in the other corner of the building so this action would be fine. The scorpion attempted to sting me and Amelia but thankfully the bomb detonated in time.

“Hey guys the lock is done, let's hurry up!” Emil shouted as he quickly went through the door.

“What is that in the floor Amelia?” I noticed what looked like half a key.

“Let's take it just in case, it might be part of that advantage we could get for the next stage,” Amelia then started walking to the door.

As I walked into the building the lights were all turned off and small green lights could be seen at the end of the hallway. We all decided to go through the hallway and used the cellphone as a light. It was too quiet and I did not feel secure at all. Then all of a sudden, I heard a gunshot. I looked to my left and noticed that the phone was destroyed. We quickly ran to the bathrooms which were luckily near us.

“This is a sick joke!” Emil said angrily. He was terrified and it was apparent.

Even if we could not die in the simulation everything felt too real to ignore. Things from hearing to touch, it was quite easy to forget it was all a simulation. I then remembered we still had the bag and decided to use it in case anyone would enter the bathroom. It was not the best idea but it could give us a shot at stealing the weapon of whoever entered.

And just as I thought I heard someone step into the bathroom. I held my breath as I waited in the dark. The person was fully equipped in army gear. Right as he passed through the first stall I wrapped the bag around his neck and made the him fall temporarily.

“Emil get the gun!” I shouted as the soldier started getting back up.

Emil tried reaching for the gun but the soldier kicked him right in the face. He then picked up his gun and I heard him shoot at me but the bullet suddenly stopped in the air.

“This simulation is over,” was heard and it all went to black again.

I thought I had failed the first stage but then remembered the timer and saw it had counted to zero. The rush I felt made me forget entirely about only having to survive. Then I could see the room I was in again and the machine slowly put me back on the floor. I slowly started walking towards the exit where Emil and Amelia would probably join me shortly. The teacher managing the simulation was waiting for us right at the exit.

“That piece of the key which you have obtained will still be there in the next stage so do your best to find its other half. What others saw in the gym was different as to what you actually did. Remember that this is also a test for other students so do not tell anyone or that key will disappear,” said the teacher as she headed in the glass room to call in the next team.

“That was fun right guys?” I said as I could barely keep myself from laughing.

“Sure, next time why don't you get hit in the face,” Emil said as he looked at his phone.

“Oh don't be sour, you know full well that Weiss tried to hold the soldier down,” Amelia then started heading back to the gym.

I could have left for the day but decided to stay back to see what the other teams did for their test. I was really astonished by the next team where they had decided to stay outside and hide. It was not a wise decision as there were multiple mutants around. We had not encountered them since we quickly moved towards the main building. By the time the first stage ended it was evening.

“Time to head back then,” I then got my bag and started walking towards the train station.

Emil then tried waking Amelia up since she had fallen asleep during the course of the day. Watching others do the test was interesting to us but it wasn't to Amelia since she likes being active. Amelia then woke up and we decided to go back home. Our only sense of time was our watches and we never noticed how much time had passed.

Once we got on the train I was the only one to stay awake. I then started remembering how similar the simulation was to real life and wondered what would we feel if we got shot or cut. I knew that I would probably not like those sensations but I was still curious about it. Then after the train arrived to our station we went back to our houses. When I arrived home I found that everybody was already sleeping and headed upstairs to my room. I couldn't sleep well but I found that it became morning rather quickly.

Luckily I used my cellphone this time as my alarm and woke up on time. I got ready and headed downstairs. This time, I simply took a sandwich with me to eat on the train. My father was still getting ready and I did not see him around this time. My sister in the other hand is usually awake before my parents.

“How was school yesterday? There are lots of rumors on that school and I don't know which are true.” she said as ate oatmeal.

“It wasn't that bad but it is pretty advanced. The things such as holograms and virtual worlds are used there,” I said while I put got my backpack.

“Seems fun, I might go visit at some point,” she said with a grin on her face.

She was obviously joking but I still imagined it in my mind. Mia could go from telling others bad jokes to just saying things that would embarrass me. I still loved her but I did find her annoying at times.

This time I let Amelia and Emil know that I was getting up early for once. Thanks to that they were waiting for me outside. This time we were able to leave without needing to run.

“Sure feels weird not having to rush,” I said as to tease Amelia.

“It actually feels nice. Now why don't you do this every morning. It would make our lives much easier don't you think,” she replied with the most sarcastic tone ever.

“Can you two just go and date already? Your constant bickering doesn't let me think about how that simulation works.” Emil always loved technology and it was the main reason why we left everything technology related to him.

This time around we both knew he was joking but remembering the events from yesterday got me thinking on things we could have done differently. Amelia just kept walking in silence and what I would guess was joy. She was clearly smiling which made me remember she enjoys doing dangerous things.

The train was awfully full this time but we made it to our stop. Seeing all the students around was very different from yesterday. They were behaving like normal people and weren't as rigid. The results were going to be put up in the main school building so that was where we headed. Only twenty percent of the student population made it to the next stage. Those that assumed the test would be the same for everyone quickly found out that it was not the case. They could

appear in any spot of the school grounds and the small bags with resources would be in random areas. Others decided to also hide in a building but without killing the mutant and quickly found that the mutant could break in.

“Oh hey its group number one! Don’t think we are gonna let you keep your advantage” shouted a girl.

“Now how would going first give us any advantage?” Amelia replied with a ferocious tone.

This wasn’t gonna be good, but luckily an announcement started going through the speakers saying that we were to go to the gym. The other students would officially have their tour of what the school offers while we would continue into the next stage. This time when I entered the gymnasium, I noticed most of the seats had been put away and the holographic television was not above us anymore. The teacher was already standing on stage by the time we had arrived.

“This test will now focus on your puzzle solving skills. It will have some degree of resource management but you will actually select your resources before going in and the test will not be broadcasted this time. You will all have to go through the same obstacles without any knowledge. Those that spoil the puzzles will automatically fail. Now good luck to you.”

Just as the announcement stopped you could see everyone was tense. You could do so much as drop a book and it could be heard. The only thing you could barely hear were the whispers of the students on the back rows.

“You guys worried at all?” I asked nervously.

“Oh come one, you dealt with a giant scorpion yesterday. Clear your mind and lets just have fun,” Amelia said placing her hand on my lap.

“Hopefully I won't have to hack again, just that lock was a nightmare,” Emil said while shivering.

Then we were called to enter the simulation area. The only difference this time was that we had five items displayed on a screen right before entering the simulation. We could choose a cellphone, large hammer, grenades, a map, and electric gloves. Assuming Amelia would go for the hammer and Emil would pick the phone, I went for the map.

At first I thought that we would appear outside the buildings, but we actually appeared inside the building. We appeared in the entrance of the main building to be more exact. Each of us had our items in a bag that we came in with. Then a notice appeared in the corner of my left eye letting me know that if I left the building I would be disqualified. There was also a timer located in the same spot as before.

“So where do you guys think we should go to?” I asked trying to get up.

“How about we try the main office. It would seem to be the place with most importance at the moment.” Emil then went for the cellphone. To his surprise it did not have much battery.

“Sounds about right, but we don't have much time to look around. This building has three floors and splitting up would not be a good idea.” I then pulled out my map to look for the office.

When we reached the office door it was Amelia's time to shine. Three hits on the wooden door was enough for the lock to break. When we stepped in we noticed that there was a computer. On the screen it said, “Go to the place where the cherry blossom stopped being”. The only cherry blossom we knew of was in the school grounds and it was never cut down. Then I remembered that it stops existing once the simulation ends. And the place that the simulation ended on was the bathroom.

In order to get to the bathroom we first needed to go to the opposite side of the building. Our steps would echo in the halls and I found it pretty nerve wracking to not see anyone around. When I entered the bathroom I looked around and saw nothing that could be helpful in finding where we had to go next.

“ Hey Weiss! Some of these toilets don't have water on them.” Emil said as he opened all the bathroom stalls.

The tiles in the wall formed an arrow pointing to the right. This led me to think that this was a numerical hint since all the rooms in the building had numbers assigned to them.

If counting from left to right there would be three toilets with water and then two did not have water. The first number would mean the floor and the second would mean the number of the room.

I then suggested we use the elevator but when we arrived the cables were cut. The stairs in the other hand had metal doors blocking them. A hammer wasn't going to do anything against the door so we decided to use what little battery the phone had in order to hack the door.

“You guys are killing me here you know. Why don't any of you learn to hack for once. I could teach you without a problem.” Then we heard the door open. You could see Emil was at the point where he just wanted to hit us both with the hammer.

“How about I try it out, Amelia surely won't but I don't mind,” I then walked through the door and found that the room we had to go to was right beside us.

In the classroom were desks with holographic displays and seats that could be adjusted. In the window of said room was a pentagram. That painted at the tree where we started last time. Surely there would be something on each of the points in the pentagram.

“How about we all split and then meet up at the farthest point to the right?” I asked while placing the pentagram on the map.

“Sounds ok since we would be meeting up at a specific point. If we are lucky nothing gets in the way of us and the exit,” Emil said.

“If anything would get in the way we could probably smash it to bits anyways,” Amelia then got some paper from a nearby desk.

Small copies of the map were made in order to find said places we had to go to. We then each went to our destinations. The place I had was the one closest to our right. I at first thought it would be simple but right as I turned to a corner, I found that the passage to the classroom was blocked by water. The water had live wires in it and it would not be wise to step into that. There were three seats out in the hallway and those would be my best option. Luckily by using those seats I had enough distance covered to climb into a vent that connected the hallway to the room. I jumped and hit my knee in the process. It felt like I had scraped off the skin. The pain would stay present in the spot even if it was a simulation and it resembled how it would feel in the real world.

When I reached the other side there was no water around and I could walk. When I looked around, I found the glass window had a certain pattern drawn on it. The thing the drawing looked most similar to was flames. To get out of the classroom, I jumped back into the vent and decided to go the other way around since it was blocked from this side.

This time I was running since the timer was getting close to zero. Passing by I noticed the other two rooms and this time they were different from normal classrooms. The one Emil was in charge of had metal gates and Amelia’s room was the science lab. When I reached the meeting point Emil had started deciphering the puzzle that was there.

“Did you guys get weird drawings on your rooms too?”

“Yeah but apparently I had to release water in order to get mine,” Emil then scratched his head wondering what that was about.

“In my case I had to release a lever that said gasses,” Amelia said while looking at what Emil was doing.

“Oh shit, did you happen to read what type of gasses!?” I said right before looking at the hallway.

The hall at this point was starting to fill up with green gas which could probably mean game over for us. Emil just then solved the puzzle. The puzzle in this room was in the form of a cube where he had to align all the symbols. The symbols themselves seemed to be activated by use uncovering them on their respective rooms. In the end there was an image of a griffin and a key fell on the floor. On it was a nametag saying rooftop. The stair I had gone through had access to the roof but with the gas slowly closing in we decided to go one floor down and that way access the stairs. The gas was not on all the floors but rather was coming out of the third floor’s vents.

With the use of the map we made it to the stairs in no time. Since the stairs had their own doors the gas wasn’t gonna get in too fast. Then running upstairs there was another elevator and we noticed there was someone else inside, trapped. The elevator was badly broken and if we hit it hard enough it was possible to open it.

“Hey Amelia think you can finish opening that?” I asked while recovering from all the running we had to do.

“Sure, but we might be a bit close on time if we do that,” Amelia then started making the hole larger.

It was an old man in the elevator. He thanked us and then started running and when we looked on the bottom of the elevator we noticed that there was a small door. Since the old man was there before we didn't notice it. I jumped inside the elevator and try opening it with the broken key. To my surprise it opened and led to a tunnel.

My friends followed and mysteriously time had stopped when we entered the tunnel. Before long we found a bunker and inside was a full key. To my left there was also an exit. I decided to take the key and we walked through the exit. It seemed to be an absurd test since it would require you to get the key from before in order to complete. I wasn't complaining nor my friends.

This time as the test ended a vague message appeared. It read, "Go to the hidden room and give me a final answer". The only place I could think of was the place where the elevator was at. Then the simulation had ended and we appeared in the simulation room. The teacher from before was waiting for us but with watches.

"Here, the only thing I am going to say is that only head to that place if you want to protect what you have with your own hands. You have all shown your talents and they shine. You will have to wait until tomorrow though since the others have not finished," The teacher then went back to the glass room.

This time when I exited the simulation I was tired from all the thinking decided to head home. Amelia wasn't one to stay somewhere without any entertainment. Emil decided to walk around before going back. The train this time was empty and felt slower than usual.

"That was fun. Sorry for not asking before pulling that lever," Amelia said while looking out the window.

"That was fine. Even if we did wait we needed to pull that lever before solving the puzzle."

After that we arrived at our stop. This time when I arrived home mom was there. She would usually be working in her room but I entered when she was taking a break.

“So how was school?” she asked while she drank something.

“Oh it was fun. We had to go into a virtual world to solve puzzles as a test,” I replied while I was placing my bag beside the door.

After talking for a while I was tired and decided to go to bed early. I couldn't help but think about what might be waiting for us tomorrow. Even while nervous I ended up falling asleep.

This time I was ready to go see what was in the elevator. Emil was waiting for us this time in front of school. Amelia had caught up with me at the train station. The school today was left open for students to meet faculty members. The stairs weren't hard to find and soon enough we found the spot where the elevator was. This time however there was nothing there.

Our watches started glowing once we got close to the wall so we decided to place them there. Suddenly lines formed on the cement and the elevator was actually there.

“You guys sure we should do this?” I asked before heading in.

They both nodded so we stepped in and went down to a fourth floor. There was nothing anywhere talking about this floor. Before we could exit the elevator we had to say for sure that we were going to participate in the self defense program. When we finally entered the floor they had simulation machines and a hangout area. We weren't alone though, the professor was waiting for us.

“Hello and congratulations, I am sure you have some doubts but I will let you know how classes will work out for you once the other arrive,” said the Mr. Shaw while standing.

Seats were placed around suggesting we were allowed to sit. So we decided to do just that. Others shortly followed. A total of four groups made it through all the stages of the test.

“Now, why do we have this program in the first place?” the professor asked pointing to all of us.

“No one? That's fine I will inform you, this program was made in order to protect our research from other organizations. Especially from those that might want to use it for their own purposes. You were told that this was a chance to stand out and it is exactly that. A normal course would consist of history, math, sdf, english, and technology. Then after those you would have your electives. You guys will be taking advanced versions of these courses. An example I could give you would be that in sdf besides teaching you martial arts we will teach you how to operate mutant killing weapons and military vehicles.”

“Have there been any other groups that have succeeded through this course?” asked a student with blond hair.

“Why yes, part of that group would be the staff in this school. Each of them is prepared to act in the case of any emergency or attack. The other part of the group now works with the government in developing ways to explore outside the dome,” then Mr. Shaw decided to sit down and the teacher from the simulations came out from the elevator.

“Oh, I haven't mentioned this but Mrs. Ivy will be your homeroom teacher. She will be the one managing most of your classes so don't piss her off,” the professor said while smiling and diverting his eyes from the teacher.

“Now then, I am going to give you your schedule and a heads up about what is happening next week. Normally students have class from seven thirty to two but you guys will have have twice as much time in sdf and technology class. You will also be taking those classes with another teacher and not the main one. Now next week we will hold an athletic event so you better be on your toes,” said Mrs. Ivy while holding a tablet in her hand.

“I know this is off topic but what type of research are you doing that might interest another company?” Emil asked.

“We specialize on studying mutants and their bee like behaviour. Some companies would kill for a chance to get their hands on some of the information we possess. Anything else before we start? No, then let this school year begin.”

Chapter End