

THOSE REMAINING

A JOURNEY INTO A POST-APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPE
BY MIKE BRAZIL

*From the Desk of
Duncan Miller
Project Leader, Project: Avalon*

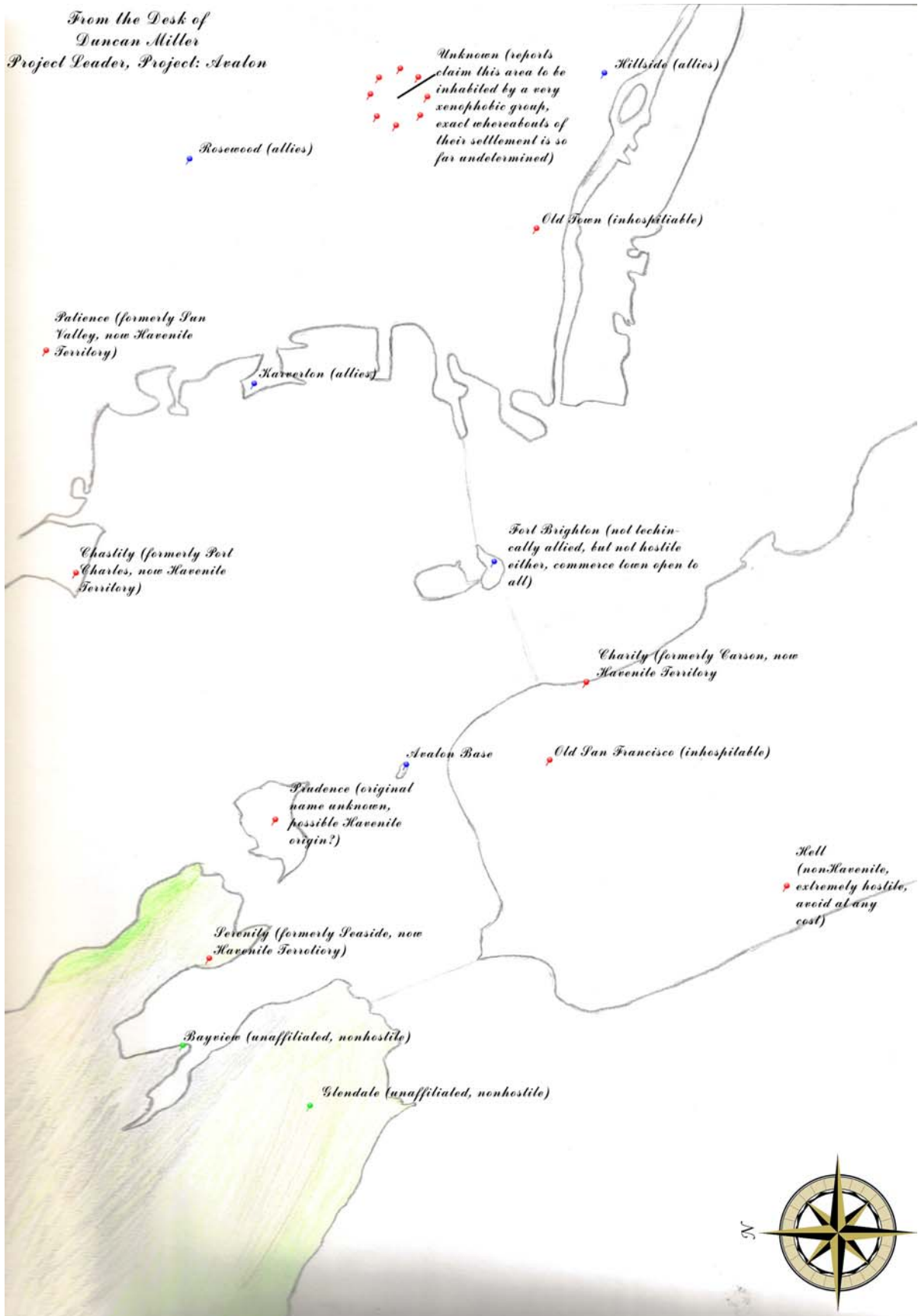


TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION	3
ABSTRACT:.....	5
PROLOGUE	6
CHAPTER 1: THOSE REMAINING... SURVIVAL.....	7
CHAPTER 2: THOSE REMAINING... THE GRAYS.....	10
CHAPTER 3: THOSE REMAINING... PROJECT: AVALON	16
CHAPTER 4: THOSE REMAINING... THE OTHERS.....	19

INTRODUCTION

“Thank you for coming.” Duncan rose from his chair as I entered the rather Spartan room. I quickly saw that the only item of comfort in his office was the cushion on his wooden chair. “I realize that you just came back from an outing and the last thing you are interested in is going out again, but I have something for you.”

“It’s not like I had anything better to do today,” I replied with a grin. Duncan gestured for me to take the chair opposite from his and walked over to the table near his desk.

“You must be parched. Would you like some water?” He asked as he began to pour himself a glass.

I nodded and accepted the glass when he handed it to me. It was quite cool and tasted rather clean, the filters must have been changed again recently. “What can I do for you?” I asked as Duncan retook his seat.

“Right to business, then... fair enough. I’ll be frank with you. Our best projections state that, at our current rate of consumption, our supplies for Avalon Base won’t last for much longer than a year, tops.” I almost dropped my glass when he told me that. Duncan was never one to exaggerate about such important topics, and yet it was still hard for me to believe that we were that close to falling apart. “I see that surprises you,” he continued. “We have actually known for awhile that our supplies were running thin. We thought it would be best for the bulk of the settlement to be ignorant of that fact.”

“How could that be a good idea?!?” I blurted. “We all believe in you, Duncan. Many would say that, by not telling them, you are leading us all to our doom!”

“We did what we believed was best for the community!” Duncan leaned forward in his seat. “The last thing we could handle was a widespread panic. We need to all stick together to get through this, and that would only work if the people in charge are allowed to make decisions, for the good of us all, without having to worry about people panicking and doing something that could bring us all down!”

“But we could have started rationing... or did more to get supplies when we left Avalon Base. Something that could have helped us!”

“Have you not been giving it your all already? Or do you know of anyone who has been slacking off?” He was right. We always tried whatever we could to get things for our group. But I wasn’t going to let him get off that easily.

“That’s not the point and you know it. We are a team here. A team with leaders, sure, but still a team. This is something that should have been brought to us as soon as you guys were aware of the problem.”

Duncan sat back in his seat and slumped his shoulders. I suddenly got the impression that he aged twenty years in an instant. After a moment, he began to speak. “We’ve known for around two years that things were getting bad. Ever since it was brought to our attention that something could be wrong, we’ve had endless arguments over how to proceed. Most wanted to say something to everyone else initially, but, after constant debate, it was decided that the best course of action would be to keep things under wraps for a time... to try to see if we can fix the problem without anyone knowing about it in the first place. As time went on, it became harder and harder to inform the rest of the settlement. We saw the end fast approaching, yet kept convincing ourselves that we could regain control. A majority in the council still feel this way.”

I was still angry, but my anger began to change to confusion as it slowly dawned on me that I was being told something that no one else in our community outside of the council knew. Something must have changed in my expression, because Duncan picked up on it almost immediately.

“I bet you are wondering why I’m telling you all this if I just said that we are still voting to remain silent on this matter. Like I said before, we are projected to run out in a year. I convinced the council to send out a team to make contacts, gather resources... whatever it takes to give us some more time before we can become completely self sufficient. I also told them that whoever leads the team would need to be apprised of the situation, to be completely informed about our situation and the dire nature of the mission. They only agreed to it if you were the leader. They respect your skills, and so do I. They also trust you to keep things quiet... even from your team. You can take whomever you wish with you, and take whatever you think is necessary to complete this mission, but we need to hear back from you in no less than two months. If we have not heard back from you or if you have not found any help out there, then I have informed the council

that I will personally tell everyone what is happening, and begin any evacuation procedures we deem necessary as a society.”

“I won’t let you down,” I said as I rose from my chair. I was still pissed at being kept in the dark, but I knew that what was being required of me was more important than continuing to argue with Duncan for something I was no longer sure he truly believed.

“I never believed that you would,” he replied as he reached out for my hand.

After shaking, I turned to leave. As I closed the door behind me I still wasn’t sure if I would keep my team in the dark... at least not after we had ventured out into the world...

ABSTRACT:

Those Remaining is what about what has been left behind almost 20 years after the end of civilization. After a devastating plague, and the events that followed, wiped out the bulk of the adult population, the surviving children struggled to survive in a hostile world.

Those Remaining analyzes and explores the results of that event.

PROLOGUE

On September 6th, 20XX, what is now known as “G Day”, a plague was released in key areas of each country, infecting 98% of the population that had reached puberty and leaving those who had not completely uninfected. This plague, nicknamed the Gray Death, was a wasting disease. Victims of the Gray Death initially suffered only from a nagging cough and the chills. Over the course of anywhere from 2-4 days, the victim's skin took on an ashen-tone, any wounds they got wouldn't heal, and nothing would satisfy their hunger. By the fourth day, the victim of the Gray Death passed away.

With no adults, no one alive that was older than 12, no one able to respond to a completely unexpected threat... the deceased victims of the Gray Death rose from the grave. Those that fell victim to the vicious bite of the grays (as they have been called) became infected themselves, dying in a few days after initial infection and rising a few days later to swell the ranks of the undead.

18 years later, the survivors of the Gray Death and the horrors that followed have developed their own mini societies... some have flourished, and some are struggling. The constant fight to ward off famine, disease, and the remaining grays is more than some can handle. Finding the right place to begin anew requires someplace isolated, easily defended, and capable of sustaining a society one way or another.

This is the state of the country. Due to failing communications and the lack of people who knew how to fix it, no one knows the state of the rest of the world.

Welcome to Those Remaining...

CHAPTER 1: THOSE REMAINING... SURVIVAL

“I was a fat 10 year old whose only concerns were going to McDonald’s and playing the newest, hottest video games when G-Day happened. Since then, I’ve had to lose weight, get rid of my video games to lighten my load, and learn how survive on my own. I’ve done many things that I’m not proud of, but I survived. You all have done the same or worse, so who the fuck do you think you are to judge me?”

-- The last words of Dan Wilson right before he was hung outside the limits of a settlement near what was Oakland

When the Gray Death hit, its initial infection, as an airborne disease, spread like wildfire. A few days after the first wave of infection, the nature of the virus changed into one that is transmitted through body fluids. The danger of catching the virus through airborne infection subsided, while the danger of catching it through contact with an infected victim skyrocketed. Only those who had already reached puberty, however, were in danger of infection, while those who had not were immune, even if they were bitten by a gray.

In the days that followed G Day, panic swept through the streets, causing even those who remained uninfected to turn on their neighbors, in an attempt to survive the chaos. Some adults succumbed to the initial infection, some died by being attacked by the grays, and others fell before the havoc that fear, distrust, and panic bring. With most of the adult population dead, most children were left to survive and fend for themselves. Some were successful, others were not so lucky.

In the 18 years after G Day, society is now completely different than it once was. Gone is the protection provided by the federal government, for it no longer exists. Even state governments are there no longer. While sizes of settlements and styles of government vary from “town” to “town”, most settlements are no larger than a small village, typically ruled by one or two people, if any. What holds true for most settlements is the wall surrounding it.

While, for the most part, settlements tend to be away from the previously heavily-populated areas, the danger of the Gray Death still exists in the form of the grays that still walk the earth. The bulk of the grays are around big cities and suburbs, but a few strays

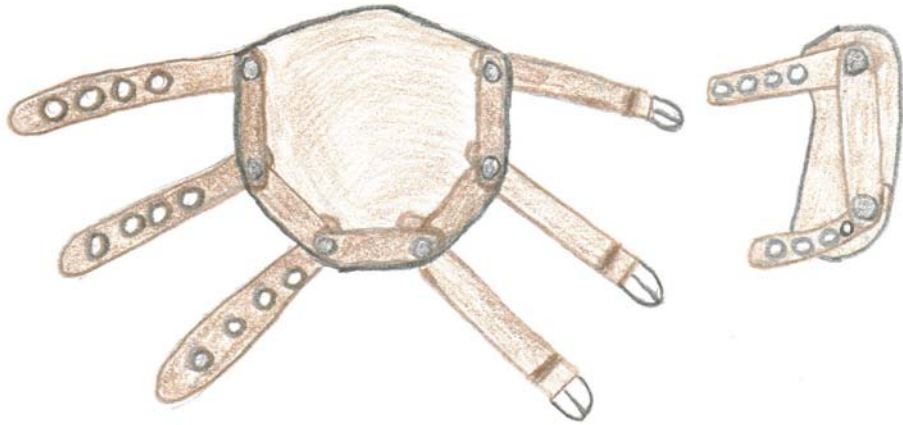
have been known to turn up in the most unlikely of places, causing a new outbreak in unprotected locales. Villages that took this into account and set up some sort of protection tend to be the villages that survive.

Some settlements are in remote locations that allow for some advanced knowledge if anyone (or anything) approaches. This was commonly achieved by choosing an area that had no surrounding obstacles and a relatively flat plane, such as with farmland in the Midwest, or by creating such a space, such as by taking a sparsely-wooded forest and cutting down the trees. Some villages were built in nearly inhospitable locations that would have had less population before G Day, thus cutting the chances of any grays being around in the first place. This was commonly in underground areas accessed by caves (natural and man-made), as well as in desert climes. Most villages, however, protected themselves by building walls around the area, of varying materials and thicknesses, to keep out grays and, quite often, people who weren't part of the village's community.

Survival of a settlement wasn't just based upon outside factors, however. As the years went on, few people died from the actions of the grays. More often than not, death was caused by the more mundane concerns that hadn't really been much of an issue to people from the "civilized world" in many generations. Children who were raised in a world in which they could just go to the refrigerator or be taken to a fast food restaurant whenever they needed to eat now had to forage, hunt, and grow their own food. In the beginning, this mainly consisted of kids taking any edible food that they could find: from grocery stores, fast food restaurants, etc. As edible food began to run short, new sources had to be found.

For some, this was not such a big deal. Those who were raised on farms and/or learned how to hunt were far better off than those who were born and raised in more urban areas. For the former urbanites, as their supplies began to run thin, they had to make a choice. Either learn how to survive off the land, or find someone else who already knows. Even if someone who knows how to survive off the land can be found, they may not be willing to share their resources and knowledge.

Muzzle



Graycatcher

CHAPTER 2: THOSE REMAINING... THE GRAYS

“Watching my parents die was the second worst thing that ever happened to me when I was nine. Watching them come back a couple days later was the first. All I could do was run as they stumbled towards me. I cry myself to sleep every night, thinking that they still might be out there, stumbling around, trapped within a rotten shell, constantly searching for something to eat.”

-- An account from a survivor 12 years after G-Day

The Grays. The Walking Dead. Zombies. Known by many names, but all with the same meaning: death. The revenants of the Gray Death still roam through hospitals, offices, grocery stores... pretty much anywhere that had a high concentration of people when the Gray Death initially struck. Those that survive the circumstances of initial infection slowly waste away over the course of the next few days. Around the first hour after initial infection, pain and a slight discoloration of the infected area was reported in most cases. By no more than 8 hours later, the victim generally has a fever of 99 – 103 degrees F, chills, slight dementia, vomiting, an increased appetite and acute pain in the joints. In addition, their skin would take on an ashen tone. After 24 hours had passed since initial infection, victims suffered a numbing of extremities and infected area, increased fever (103 – 106 degrees F), increased dementia, and a loss of muscular coordination, while the tone of the skin would be more ashen. 24 hours later, day four, symptoms included paralysis in the lower body, overall numbness and a slowed heart rate. By somewhere around day three, the victim would slip into a coma. 12 to 24 hours after slipping into a coma, the victim’s heart would stop. Post G-Day scientists determined that the Gray Death has a 100% mortality rate after four days. Anyone who dies while infected, whether the death was caused by the disease or by some other factor, rises again within three days.

By now, the virus has completely spread through the victim’s system, infecting all of their major organs. The effects of the disease bring about a type of necrosis to most of the victim’s organs: the heart stops pumping, the liver stops filtering toxins, etc. The only major organs that “survive” are the brain and the muscle tissue. The virus seems to have

no noticeable effect on the muscle tissue, leaving it pretty much as it was before infection. The brain, however, has a more curious reaction. The dementia evidenced during the course of the infection is an outward symptom of the slow dissolution of the brain's higher functions. The disease seems to feed on those areas of the brain. Once the areas of the brain that are responsible for higher brain functions are rendered useless, the virus seems to stimulate the remaining areas of the brain, allowing for the corpse to become reanimated, albeit in a more inflexible way. Stimulation of the lower areas of the brain has the side effect of over stimulating the brain's hunger response. In effect, those infected by the Gray Death think that they are constantly hungry, no matter how much they eat. Post G-Day scientists have also noted an increase in the olfactory response, allowing for the infected to discern the difference between fresh and spoiled meat, especially if the meat in question is infected. It is speculated that the taste of spoiled meat is abhorrent to those infected with the Gray Death, based on the observation that they do not feed upon one another (since they are dead and their flesh is no longer fresh), nor have they been observed to feed upon the carcasses of dead (non-moving) creatures.

There is much debate on a gray's mental capacity. Experiments with captured specimens have determined the following results:

Eyesight: The eye and the ocular nerve of a gray remains untouched by the virus. Since it is attached to a dead body, however, the eye does begin to decompose as normal. Experimentation with grays in various states of decomposition has lead researchers to believe that the loss of eyesight has little to no effect on the gray's capabilities. Furthermore, grays that were blind before contracting the virus and grays that have less than two eyes are just as effective as those with a healthy pair.

Scent: As previously mentioned, the olfactory capabilities of a gray are just as acute, if not more so, as a normal human. In addition to their ability to avoid tainted meat, they have been known to follow a potential meal based on what scientists have theorized is scent alone. Attempts to mask the natural scent of a human with perfume and deodorant have, thus far, proven unsuccessful.

Hearing: Experimentation on the hearing capabilities of a gray has thus far determined that the hearing is no greater and no worse than that of a normal human

being. If the person could hear before infection, they can seemingly hear just as well afterwards.

Taste: No reputable evidence has come to light that shows that the sense of taste remains with a gray after reanimation. Since there is a link between smelling and tasting, however, it is assumed that the sense exists in some form in grays. What is known is that they have been observed to eat any type of meat as long as it is unspoiled. Spoiled meat is completely ignored.

Touch: The Gray Death kills most nerve endings in a victim, leaving them completely numb. This has the effect of making them immune to pain. For example, whereas a normal attacker could be warded off with the threat of fire, a gray could be set aflame and keep coming until the fire completely destroyed them.

Thought: It is commonly held in most circles that the grays are completely without thought. While it is easy to come to this conclusion, a few notable exceptions warrant a second thought in this matter. When a gray has sensed a possible “meal”, a soft, yet constant, moan can be heard. The moan increases in volume and intensity the closer the gray gets to its target, culminating in a sound that can be heard for quite a distance. This moan has two effects. First, it serves as a veritable “dinner bell” to all grays that may be in the area. Secondly, it has a quantifiable psychological effect upon humans that hear it, triggering an immediate fight or flight response that quite often leads the untrained individual into a situation in which the grays have an advantage. Since the heart of a gray no longer beats, blood no longer pumps through the system. Therefore, oxygen is no longer being distributed. For that reason, it is obvious to researchers that grays no longer need to breathe to survive. This has been proven time and time again when a gray has washed up on shore, unharmed from its time without air. That being said, it has been determined that the lungs of a gray still take in and expel air. Whether this is purely a reflex action or serves some other purpose is unknown.

Some grays have displayed some minimal problem-solving skills. While it is common that most grays simply wander, some have been known to lie in wait, playing dead until food has been sensed. This simple trick has been used by some as proof that part of the original victim exists and that they could be rehabilitated or trained to handle menial tasks. Thus far, no one has been successful at training (or rehabilitating) a gray.

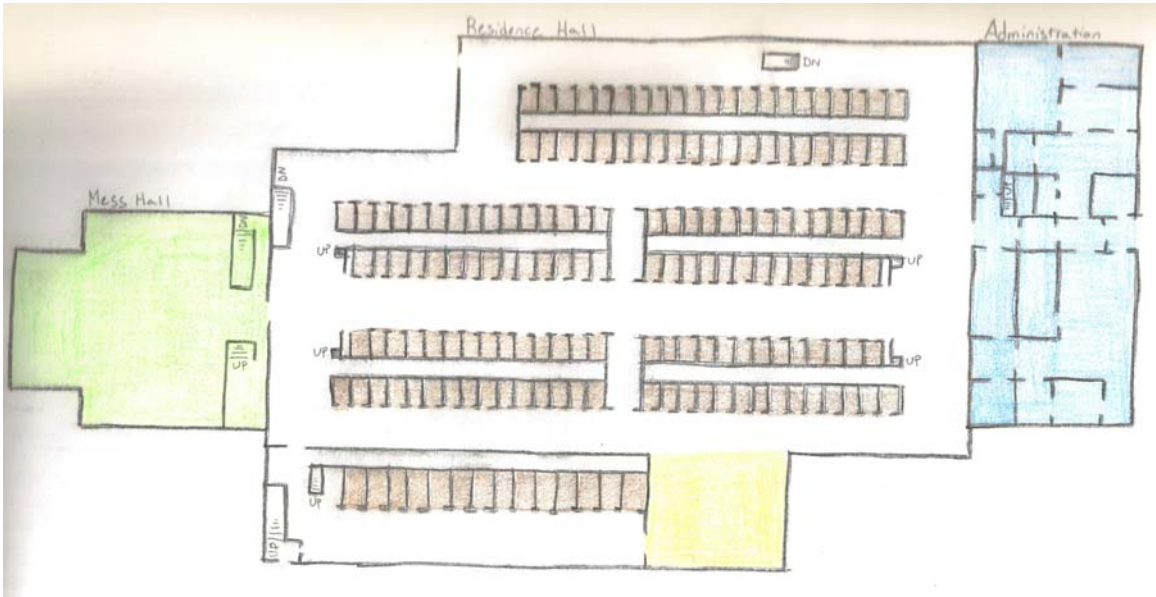
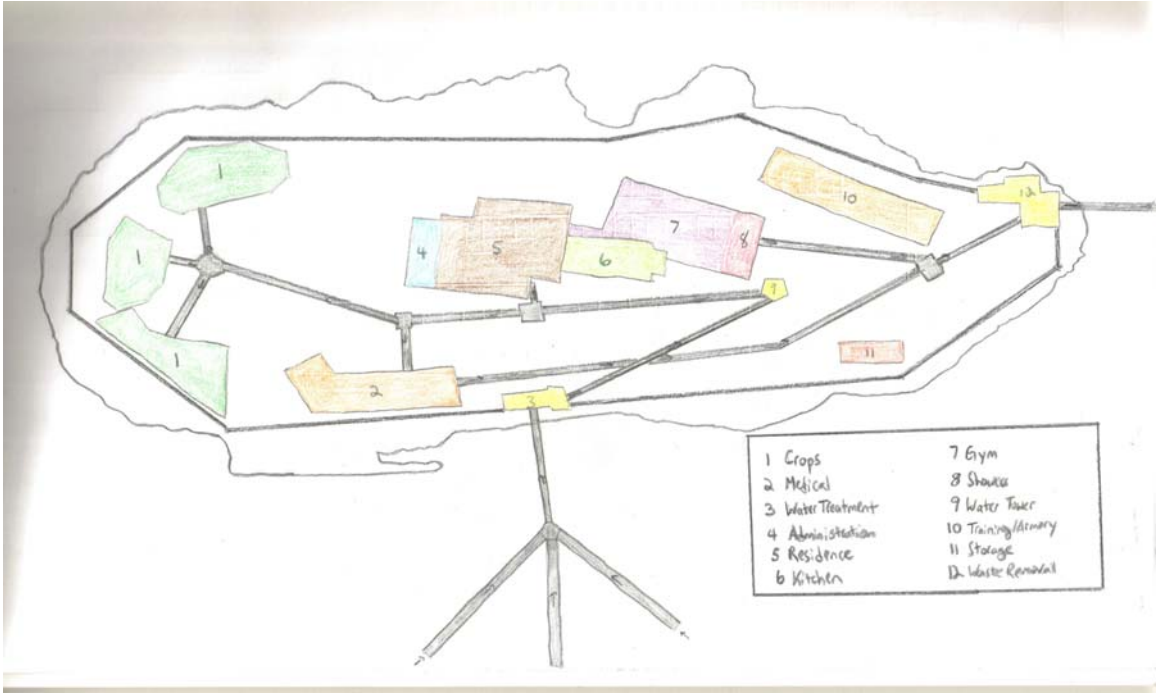
Capturing a gray is no easy feat. In fact, it has spawned a whole new “occupation” meant solely to draw grays out of hiding and into traps. Sometimes voluntary, often not, these “runners” (also known by other names including graybait, coneys, and chum), these people are trained to avoid the attacks of the grays by evading them, but still drawing them out to run into traps or ambushes. Runners value speed over stealth and agility over strength.

New tools have been developed based on previously existing items. In order to facilitate the capturing of a gray, an item that has been developed based upon a weapon developed and used originally in the 18th century: the mancatcher. The mancatcher was primarily designed to pull a man from horseback and drag them to the ground. Since the original design had spikes in it to deter the captured individual from attempting to escape, the spikes are effectively useless on captured grays. The graycatcher, how it is now commonly known, has had the spikes replaced with metal or wooden knobs on compressed strings. This has the effect of allowing the graycatcher to better conform to the size of the captured gray, while not allowing for much movement once captured. Other than that, the design of a graycatcher is the same as the tool upon which it is based. It consists of a pole mounted with a two pronged head. Each prong is semi-circular in shape with a spring loaded 'door' on the front. This creates an effective valve that would allow the ring to pass around a victim and keep it trapped.

Once a gray is captured, it still can pose a threat through its bite. Attempts to use muzzles built for canines have typically met with failure. Normally meant to fit something with a snout, those muzzles tended to either slip off or snap completely. A new type of muzzle was created that was designed specifically to fit a human face that is also reinforced to keep it from snapping off. While putting one on an unrestrained gray is dicey at best, the design of these new muzzles allows for quick application to a restrained victim.

As recently as five years ago, it has been determined that some teenagers are not going through puberty. Referred to as “lost boys” regardless of gender, these teenagers have exhibited no signs of puberty and, it is theorized, will never go through puberty at all. It is not known how this could have happened. It has been speculated that it is through evolution that has made a human naturally immune to the Gray Death, but the

first case was of a 14 year old who was born before G-Day, and, since they never reach puberty, never reach sexual maturity and, thus, are forever infertile, it doesn't seem like something that would natural evolve. Some have speculated that it is a result of genetic tampering, but, as far as people know, there is no one out there capable of pulling something off like that. Either way, the lost boys remain immune to the Gray Death, and are commonly pressed into service as runners.



CHAPTER 3: THOSE REMAINING... PROJECT: AVALON

“We represent a group attempting to recreate a cohesive society, combining settlements together into one, completely democratic, government. Project: Avalon was created to make alliances with successful groups and to provide aid to those not as successful. We collect knowledge, experiment with different food production techniques, and learn new methods to protect ourselves... all of which we are fully willing to share. Are you interested in hearing more?”

-- A representative from Project: Avalon speaking with a potential ally

Based on what was once known as Alcatraz Island, Avalon Base is now home to a burgeoning society that was formed to fulfill the admirable goal of recreating civilization. Started around 8 years ago, the group started off as 12 members and has grown to over 50. Using books and knowledge that have been collected over several years, the founders of Project: Avalon re-appropriated different buildings on Alcatraz and repurposed the prison into a living space for a community dedicated to rebuilding civilization.

Little is known about the history of the founder of Project: Avalon, Duncan Miller. What is known is that around 10 years ago, he started gathering people together that were knowledgeable in different areas to help implement his idea of recreating society. Once the perfect location was found, they began work on fixing up some of the buildings, reworking the existing water system, and building up a wall around the island to protect the newborn settlement from outside forces.

Every so often, teams of people are sent out from the island to look for potential allies, collect information, and any supplies the society needs. Like most of the bigger societies, Project: Avalon has a team of runners (called Griffin’s Graybaits after the first runner in Project: Avalon), but Avalon Base’s isolation limits their usefulness. To stay in top form, runners will often go out on the expeditions to make contacts. While out, they will, on occasion, find opportunities to hone their skills in real world situations.

Avalon Base has an extensive library due to Duncan’s standing order to bring back as many books as can be found. Everything from How To books to Romance novels to reading primers, anything that can be used to entertain or to educate is of high value to

the members of Project: Avalon. They also routinely share their knowledge. While a specialist in a field of knowledge can be handy at times, if that person were to die, they would be hard pressed to find someone to replace them. Due to this, the sharing of knowledge is an important part of life to them, to make sure that everyone is kept up to speed as well as being used as an opportunity for community bonding.

In order to facilitate the pumping of water into the base as well as the removal of waste material out of the base, the designers had to find a solution that did not involve electricity. They ended up attaching several stationary bicycles to the equipment, allowing for muscle power to replace electrical power. A system was devised that required every member of the society to contribute a certain amount of time to keeping the water and waste flowing. What they came up with was an ingenious idea that not only did what they wanted, but also helped keep everyone healthy.

After the water gets sucked into the pipes, it goes through several layers of filters to block any animals, debris or dirt that may be in the water. As the water makes its way to the water tower, it is heated and turned into steam. The steam rises and settles in the water tower where every night the cool air converts the steam into clean water. This water is then pumped to the rest of the base where needed. Every so often, the pipes are cleaned and checked for leaks to make sure that the system keeps Alpha Base in clean water.



CHAPTER 4: THOSE REMAINING... THE OTHERS

“The book has given us our laws. Hear its words.

“The book has spoken. Follow its wisdom!

“The book requires but three things from us. Hear its words.

“The book has spoken. Follow its wisdom!

“The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth: The book warns us that the weak and insignificant will run the Earth. The events of G-Day proved this. It is our duty to return control of Earth to the powerful. Hear its words.

“The book has spoken. Follow its wisdom!

“Let He Who is Without Sin Cast the First Stone: The book tells us that only the righteous can take up arms against the wicked. Only those without sin can fight the fight. Hear its words.

“The book has spoken. Follow its wisdom!

“Judge Not Less Thee Be Judged: The book tells us that only those who are willing to be judged can lead the fight. Only the worthy can condemn the unworthy.

“The book has spoken. Follow its wisdom!

“Follow its wisdom and you shall be saved. Ignore its wisdom and be judged accordingly. That is the way of the book. The book has spoken. Follow its wisdom!”

-- Heard at a Havenite rallying meeting

Other settlements have appeared in what was once the San Francisco Bay Area. The most notable of these is from a hidden locale referred to only as Haven. Havenites (as they are called) started off as a religious order, a group of children who found a bible and began reading it on their own. Led by a minister's son, the Havenites live their life based on what they have learned on their own from the bible, without the benefit of adult guidance. This has led to them having a skewed version of the bible.

Havenites believe that the end times came and went, with the worthy ascending to heaven while those found unworthy blocked from passing on to the afterlife, becoming grays. Children, who were too young to be judged, were left behind, to start anew and rebuild society the way God intended, or at least as they viewed His intentions. The

societies that have sprung up, however, are not at all what the Havenites see as correct. They believe that the meek (those that they have determined to be weak and unworthy in His eyes) are gaining far too much power and the Havenites have been charged with showing them the true way.

Much like in Project: Avalon, Haven sends out teams to gather resources and gain potential allies. Called “congregations”, these groups are far more brutal in their methods than their counterparts from Avalon Base. “Follow or be judged accordingly” is often the last thing that is heard by settlements unwilling to convert. Settlements that have been converted to the Havenite way of thinking are typically referred to as “believers” and have a representative from Haven stationed within their community. These “shepherds” tend to the new flock, teaching them the ways of Haven and sending a portion of resources generated within the new Havenite community back to the main, hidden, Haven main base.

Another settlement worth mentioning is known only as Hell. This “community” is more of a gang of brigands, thieves and murderers that have been brought under the leadership of someone who refers to himself as Lucifer. Every so often, a settlement is found burned to the ground, all traces of food and resources gone, most of the populace missing, and the old and sick found butchered. Every survivor found relates the same story. A group of men with shaved heads and spiked collars, covered in leather from head to toe, ride in horses swinging clubs over their heads. After riding through town pummeling all who stand up to them, a second wave comes in, dressed the same as the others, each pushing along a gray whose neck has been restrained in chains threaded through metal tubes. Anyone who looks like they are still willing to stand up to the attackers are either beaten, forced into a face-to-face confrontation with a gray, or both. Everyone knows what the bite of a gray means, so very few people are willing to put up a fight. Despite that, some are still made into an example for the others. Those that are bitten are then chained themselves and led away, presumably to become part of a future invasion force. Those that are healthy are taken away, while the rest are beaten and mutilated. All useful resources are taken, while everything else is burned to the ground. What awaits the captives is not completely known. Some believe they are converted into grays for use in other invasions. Some believe they are used in some slave labor force.

Others who have noticed that very little crops are taken from the destroyed settlements believe that there may be a darker purpose.