

Jason Jeffries had done everything he could to keep his family safe. They had been enjoying a family vacation to Seattle when everything had changed. The two kids had been at their most excited as they rode the Great Seattle Wheel when it had stopped mid ride. The cars were big enough to hold the whole family, so they were at least not separated when it all went tits-up as Jason's boss liked to define such situations.

The first second or two had been calm. Jason had assumed it was a simple malfunction that would be fixed in minutes, hours tops. At two thirds of the way from the top they even had a great view to enjoy and keep the kids occupied while they waited. But then that ended up being the problem.

With a view to everything that was going on it was impossible to deny this was a simple fixable malfunction of the Wheel, or even isolated to one pier, or even just the ground. They watched as one of the ferries that had just left the docks lost power and started drifting. Worse yet, and this was before they noticed the ferry was slowing, Brad pointed out a plane that had been on final approach to SeaTac.

It literally dropped out of the sky. Not that it stopped mid-air and plummeted, but then neither did it glide to the ground. No, it entered into a death spiral and fortunately disappeared from sight behind a rise of land just high enough to conceal its fate, but not the cloud of smoke signaling its end.

The piers below them emptied. Ships other than the ferry drifted in the waters of Puget Sound.

Alerted to the possibility and seeing it almost as a challenge, or a sick wicked game, Brad and Shelly took turns pointing out planes falling from the sky. He thought that perhaps it was fortunate they were too young to understand the people on board those planes were certainly plunging to their deaths. Jason and Jennifer shared a look as the kids finished their game of Name That Brick. There were no more aircraft turned into unguided missiles to point out, only rising columns of smoke. By that time the piers below were mostly empty of pedestrians.

It had taken hours for work crews to rescue them. One by one the rescuers had had to somehow manually rotate the wheel and break open the door to let them out. They were then directed to make their way to a staging area at the foot of the pier. There no one had any idea how to care for or even control the numbers of people that showed up.

Jason had led the family to their hotel but getting in their suite turned out to be impossible. Their key card no longer opened the door. On seeing that the little red light denoting the lock rejecting his card was not even working Jason knew they were truly stranded. Back in the hotel lobby and sorting through the rack of travel and sightseeing brochures for ideas he decided to get out of the city the only way they could.

They had joined the multitudes of others streaming out of the city. By chance they had gone with a group heading to Interstate 90 with the intent of crossing the bridge to greener pastures and less dense populations. They may even have rubbed shoulders with Shelby at some point, but they ended up on Mercer Island when night fell.

They were spending the night hungry, tired and scared in the greenbelt that sat atop the I90 tunnel camping in the rough with hundreds of other refugees. Fortunately the night wasn't too chilly even though they were surrounded by water. On the bright side, Brad and Shelly had taken to the change of plans as a novel adventure. They were somehow immune to the fear and near panic of so many strangers around them.

Jason was sleeping restlessly and woke at the commotion somewhere to the east of their camping spot. Standing he saw a glowing white sphere sitting on the grass a dozen yards away. Everyone near it was trying to get as far from it as possible. The trouble was, as Jason looked around at the frightened

sounds rising all around them there were more than a dozen of the spheres scattered all over. And that was just what he could see through the screen of people running in all directions.

With everyone on edge from the end of the world people had scattered at the odd provocation. Jason's focus was on keeping his family together. It was only a couple of panicked minutes before calm returned, leaving their impromptu campsite almost empty. With mostly open space around them he could see that those few left in the greenbelt were cautiously standing around the spheres. Jason ordered the family to stay where they were and slowly made his way to the nearest sphere.

Bright, but somehow not washing out everything around it the sphere was opaque, and when he reached out to touch the surface, solid. There were three other men standing with him looking the sphere over. If not for its size and odd appearance Jason would have described it as an egg. The man across from him rapped his knuckles on the top of the sphere. The sound was a solid thunk of flesh on an unyielding surface.

Jason went back to his family. "Time to go."

"I wanna see it." Brad said, his hushed tone almost a demand.

Shelly looked up at him, ready to make her own demand should daddy cave to her big brother.

With a look to Jennifer and a sigh he nodded. There was no way out of the greenbelt without passing close to one of the eggs anyway. Brad got his look, as did Shelly. Jennifer even brushed her hand over one of the eggs on their way out. They were in sight of the freeway when Jason stopped and listened. He could hear the sound of a running engine.

It had to be a generator. They followed the sound down to the freeway, up the next exit ramp and turned right. As they neared the Chevron station at the corner Jason couldn't keep the smile from his face, until they reached the intersection. The store was dark inside, but it was obvious that the shelves were empty.

Guns and rifles were being displayed by several men outside the Chevron. They hadn't bothered with the lights over the pumps either. The generator was set in front of the store with a table set in front of it. Two ordinary table lamps had been produced from somewhere and cast enough light to see the immediate area. As they came closer Jason could see the generator was wired to charge car batteries and cell phones. Why cell phones were a priority Jason couldn't answer. He suspected they wouldn't work even after being recharged.

He kept the family at a distance. It was clear they had no car battery to charge, and the men with rifles watched everyone with a peculiarly wary eye. There were plenty of other people milling about in the outer orbit of the chevron, out beyond the sphere of light from lamps.

He and Jennifer chatted with several. They managed to get a broader idea of what had happened, but not the why or how.

It seemed that everything electrical had stopped the day before. Unlike with something one woman called The Carrington Effect nothing was actually damaged. Whatever had shut everything down had left the infrastructure undamaged, for the most part. The reason it was taking time to restore everything was that every battery, capacitor or any other energy storage device had zeroed out. Emptied.

It was taking pull start generators to get everything jumpstarted again. Soon, with a bit of time and ingenuity things would be getting back to normal. Sort of.

There was no reasonable explanation offered for the glowing eggs. There was even one in evidence just half a block up the road. Jason and his family was gathered on the dark distant corner of the intersection debating the wisdom of returning to the city and their hotel room. If things were to return to normal that was the best place to wait for normality to return.

Jennifer was all but convinced when the shouting started. Looking around for the source of the disturbance Jason heard one voice above the rest.

"It's gone. The Cocoon is gone."

He looked to where everyone else was turning to see for himself. Sure enough, when he looked to where the glowing sphere had been resting there was nothing.