

I can't tell you much about who I am.

There are many things about myself that are a mystery. For example, I don't know when my birthday is. It might be March 20th, or maybe it's August 5th. I have no idea. I don't know how old I am or even what my last name is.

"It's *our* name," I'd say to my father when I was about four feet tall. "Why can't you tell me?"

"Some things are better left unsaid," he'd respond.

That line was one of his favorites.

Annoyed, I'd stomp to my room. I was denied an identity, so naturally, I made up my own. I made up a last name (Smith sounded respectable). I made up an ethnicity (I came from a long line of glovemakers in England). I imagined friends and siblings. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I'm writing this book to give future generations an idea of what it was like to live during this time. There are few people around who can provide their accounts — fewer still who can write. My story is also an interesting one with many strange and supernatural incidents that perhaps you, the reader, are qualified to explain.

I don't know how the world came to be this way. Many have been blamed for The Glorious Ruin, but it's always dicey to give weight to conspiracy theories. Nobody would dispute that one of civilization's oldest enemies played a key role. Historically, this foe ravaged the Byzantine Empire during the rule of Justinian. In the 14th century, it consumed over half of Europe's population. It was dubbed The Black Death. No less than one hundred million people died.

In the 21st century, the Bubonic Plague was back and, again, this appearance was far, far deadlier than its last. Eight billion people fell to the highly transmissible and highly lethal plague.

Gradually, the strain dwindled into extinction, but not before leaving most of humanity — and all of civilization — in its wake.

I was born a number of years later in a small cabin. It sat quietly in a wooded area of what used to be New Jersey. With three rooms on the lower level and two on the upper, our cabin afforded my parents and me a comfortable living space. Just outside, the grassy knolls unfolded in every direction. Some rolled on and on to the horizon, some dived down into lush valleys, and some broke off into groves or shady paths, which were excellent for long walks. Schools of fish danced and leaped in the running brooks and animals roamed about.

The oak trees around our cabin were like colossal wooden columns, dripping with lichen, swelling with gnarls. Time was sculpting and chiseling them at a relentless, imperceptible pace. The Summer days were long and sunny, and I'd spend them running and tripping in the fields. For what was supposed to be a post-apocalyptic hellscape, our little corner of the world was very nice.

There isn't much to say about my life in that cabin. It was not eventful or exciting; it was not luxurious or interesting. I lived a simple life with my parents, sheltered from the world and what it had become. We hunted, we fished, and we were happy.

At times, though, I ached to see the outside world. I'd go to my room, sit on my bed, and stare out the window, wondering about life outside my narrow view. I wondered if anybody was really out there. Were they plague-infested zombies or were they like me? What were they doing? What were they thinking? I thought I'd never find out because I was not allowed, under any circumstance, to leave home. Furthermore, I was denied any information about what life was like before I was born.