



CLEAR BLUE SKIES

By Nick Dinicola

It started as a light mist, which was normal enough in the colder seasons, and so no one thought much of it. The mist turned into a sprinkle, which turned into a drizzle, which forced the vain to finally open their umbrellas. The news called it a "light shower" and predicted clear blue skies for the day after. The drizzle eventually stopped and people prepared to go out the next day, but when the next day came the drizzle returned. And so it continued, on and off, on and off, for a few days more. The news ignored its mistake as usual and continued to predict clear blue skies for tomorrow.

Tomorrow came and went and still the drizzle did not stop. People looked to the sky for some sign, but all they saw were the same gray clouds that had hung over the city for the past week. Even with all the falling water the clouds had not changed in size or color. They were still the same shade of drab gray they had been since the mist. They covered the entire sky as far as the horizon and nowhere in that mass of haze was there even the slightest hint of blue. And still the news predicted clear blue skies for tomorrow.

The next day the clouds grew darker and the drizzle turned to rain. The day after, the rain turned into a shower, then a stream, then it began to pour, then it began to downpour, the downpour turned into a cascade, then a deluge, then a torrent, then a flood, and by then the clouds above were as black as a demon's soul.

The sewers backed up and the streets filled with water. Galoshes were of no use as the tide quickly rose above knee level. The authorities banned vehicular transport of any kind but that didn't stop the masses. The threat of being tardy or of missing a deadline urged them onto the waterlogged roads. Exhaust pipes were submerged and the cars died, backing up the streets as far as the eye could see. Some abandoned their rides to the rising swell but most stayed behind and simply rolled up their windows. Those that left worried about their paint jobs and CD's as they waded through the now waist-high water.

Soon the tide was so high not

even the tallest man could touch the bottom. Then the current came. The current wiped the streets clean. Those foolish or unfortunate enough to remain in their cars were now swept away by the forming rivers. No one went outside, and instead barricaded themselves in the upper floors of their homes. But the water always found its way in. Whether it was from the plumbing, the heating, a hole in the wall or a crack in the window, the water always found its way in.

Next the suburbs were submerged. The picturesque flower garden and well-manicured lawn were uprooted and spread across great distances. The welcome mat had disappeared long ago, and now the house paint began to peel. The lower portions had long since been stripped away and now the upper portions followed suit. Families continued to climb to higher ground but it was all in vain. Both parents, all three-and-a-half children, the dog, and even the white picket fence were washed away. And so the suburbs sank.

In the city the skyscrapers had become the last vestige of life. Hotels were filled with the recently homeless and corporate towers took on a temporary housing status. Every inch of dry space was filled with a person and, despite the hotel owners' best attempts, the rooms remained free for all evacuees. Most people went straight for the top floor stopping just shy of the roof. When the highest parts of the buildings were populated, rooms, halls and all, only then did the refugees go one floor lower. And yet not even the tallest tower had room for all. Even the floors currently being flooded were inhabited with those simply hoping to stay afloat.

Food was provided at first, but it was grossly overpriced for someone who had just left their life behind. Most of it was stolen and hoarded and brought to the top penthouses where it could be hidden in the minibars. Everyone who came afterwards flocked to the cafeteria for canned goods and frozen foods. The pantries and freezers were stripped bare and the thieves quickly made home in the upper levels. Everyone else resorted to raiding candy ma-

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chines as the water pooled at their feet.

The electricity had gone out long ago and the elevator shafts were shut to all. The only way up was the stairwell, and as the lower section flooded those poor folk who had nowhere else to go turned to the stairs for salvation. Only to find them locked by those above. The doors were thick and soundproof, so even when standing in the stairwell those above could not hear the drowning screams of those below as the lower floors were inundated with water.

The tiny spaces between the door and doorway were filled with whatever those above had on hand in order to stop the channel of water, and it worked. The stairs remained dry. But the water always found its way in. Whether it was from the plumbing, the heating, a hole in the wall or a crack in the window, the water always found its way in.

So the process repeated itself. Those Above cut off Those Below as the water outside rose and invaded each floor. Those Below quickly revolted, fighting their way into the higher levels of the building. Umbrellas became spears, keys became knives, and pens became swords. Those with real knives were feared, and those few with guns were considered gods. Those who lived in the penthouses immediately sealed themselves off from the rest of the building and survived on their own.

Those Below would constantly hammer away at each barricaded stairwell door of the upper levels and, through sheer tenacity alone, break it down and flood throughout the new dry land like the water they were fleeing from. The first twenty or so were always shot but then the guns clicked empty and the gods quickly fell. The rest of them re-

sorted to primitive slashing and stabbing. Being wounded was worse than being killed, as there was no first aid. Gangrene took many limbs and anyone who wasn't able to go on was left behind to fend for themselves against the unstoppable rising waters.

Those Above then fled from Those Below to the locked penthouses in the highest echelons of the tower. They banged on our door and begged and pleaded to be let in but the door remained locked.

No one knows what happened to any of them, but everyone assumes that they're dead. A few days ago there was a lot of commotion on the other side of the stairwell door and we prepared for war, but it stopped after a while. Some speculate that Those Below, after killing off the last of their oppressors, were too weak to continue fighting and gave in to the inevitable.

The water is still rising. It's currently outside the penthouse windows, low, but it's there, and it's showing no signs of slowing let alone stopping. A body was shoved up against the patio doors and got caught in the railing outside, so everyone inside was given a first hand look of their future. A feast for fish. Really colorful fish. They probably escaped from the aquarium.

Now when we look out the windows we can see beneath the waves, almost. The algae over the glass makes it hard to see outside at all. It's amazing how fast that stuff grows. It is only a matter of time until the windows break from the pressure. I think one of them is already cracking.

Most people spend their time arguing about how or why it happened. On one side, people compare this flood to the flood of biblical fame and say that it's God once again

cleansing the earth. On the other side, people say the clouds are actually a mass of self-replicating nanomachines gone out of control. Some agree with that, and go on to say that the nanomachines are the failed attempt by the military-industrial complex to control the weather. I like to listen to them ramble on and yell at each other, but in all reality the how and why of it doesn't matter anymore. Perhaps earlier, when the mist began, but not now.

I spend a lot of my time on the roof. Unlike the others I don't mind being wet, and there's no wind so it's not like I can be blown away. The rain flowing over the sides does present some danger, but as long as I hold onto the guardrails I'm safe. I like to look out across the water at the other skyscrapers. The clouds block most of the sun so I can't see much, but every now and then the flicker of candlelight or the flash of a gun stand out in the darkness as the few remaining people continue to fight each other.

More and more people are starting to join me on the roof. They don't watch the water though; they just stand around and stare up at the clouds. I don't understand how they can do it for so long, the constant hard rainfall hurts my eyes. I'd rather watch the other buildings be swallowed by nature. If I change my point-of-view just a little, it looks as if the world is sinking into that unrelenting blue mass that surrounds us. It really is beautiful if people would just stop and look at it.

A lot of people are on the roof now and more are coming every minute. It would get crowded quickly, but most of them jump off. They stand at the guardrails, mulling over a few final thoughts, then take the plunge. I can always tell who they are, unlike the others they don't stare at the clouds; they look out across the great blue sea, probably at the taller towers around us. I'd like to think they're looking at the sea, but I know better. Those few that stay on the roof continue to look up. Not one of them care about watching the slow birth of a new ocean and would rather watch the clouds for some sight, nay even a glimpse, of that now long forgotten clear blue sky.