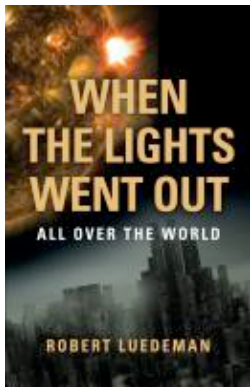


The background of the cover is a composite image. The upper portion shows a vibrant, fiery nebula or star-forming region in space, with a bright, multi-pointed star at the center. The lower portion shows a dark, silhouetted city skyline with several tall skyscrapers, suggesting a city at night or during a power outage. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and oranges from the star and nebula.

WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT

ALL OVER THE WORLD

ROBERT LUEDEMAN



A super solar storm creates an electromagnetic pulse that burns out everything electric on Earth. NASA predicts 90% of the population will die the first year. Brad Walker is trapped 300 miles from home. He picks up two teenagers, Angie and Carl, as he fights his way to his family and his father's small farm. He encounters gangs, escaped prisoners, looters, thugs, and a killer who is determined to kill him and his family.

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Robert Luedeman

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First Edition

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Day 2

Snake swore as he walked away. “Bastard would’ve killed me --- damn this hurts. I wonder if Bones made it.”

The day grew hotter as he stumbled along. He slipped his leather jacket off and looked down on his blue denim shirt. There were two bloody spots about the size of a half-dollar. He took a deep breath and gently touched one, pain shot through his chest, but there wasn’t a hole, instead there was a lump. “What the hell!”

The motor home was a short distance away and he decided to wait to investigate further. As he reached for the door he heard voices from inside, he was furious, nothing was going right today. He flung the door open and stomped inside. A young couple in their early twenties was sitting on the bench. At the sight of Snake they reared back in fear, their mouths gaped open.

“What the hell are you doing here!” he roared. “This is my camper! Get out! Get the hell out!”

They departed rapidly out the front without once looking back. They ran for fifty yards before looking back. “Ya know,” he said. “I think I could’ve taken him --- if I had a machine gun.”

“Damn people,” he growled. “Have no respect.” He unbuttoned his shirt and gently pulled it open. Two little lead slugs dropped to the floor. “Well kiss my ass! He reached down and picked them up. I’m gonna keep these and cram them down that little bastards throat when I catch him.”

He opened the refrigerator and found the two hotdogs that Brad and Carl had passed on. “You can’t hurt a hotdog,” he said, and gobbled them down. The refrigerator had a small freezer compartment at the top; he opened it and found two ice cube trays full of melted ice. He carefully removed one and drank all of the warm water down without stopping.

He sat the other tray on the counter, dipped the corner on a napkin in the water and cleaned his wounds. Purple and green bruises surrounded the depressions that stopped at the rib bones. He found a roll of masking tape in a drawer, and fashioned bandages of a sort from a napkin and taped them over his wounds.

He slipped his shirt back on, wincing at the pain, locked the doors and crawled up into the bed. Thoughts ran like wildfire through his mind. He imagined Bones overpowering both of them, sitting in the Ford eating their food and drinking their water, and then again, lying in a pool of blood, shot to death by that little bastard with his little gun. He thought of the fun times in Chicago, his favorite bar, the booze, the drugs, and especially the ladies, particularly Rose. Long red hair, a body that ---“Oh, well, can’t lie here all day, gotta get a move on.”

He reluctantly crawled down from the bed and made his way to the table. He found the sugar that Carl had left and poured some into the ice cube tray water. He drank it down while examining his jacket. “Two holes you bastard! You’ll pay for this!”

He carried his jacket tossed over his shoulder as he made the long hot walk back to the ambush site. He found Bones lying on his back, his right eye staring up at a cloudless Wisconsin sky, his left eye shattered and filled with dried blood. Snake shook his head. “Sonabitch! --- murdered him, shot him in the eye, all he wanted was a little food and water.”

He rolled him over and removed his wallet, took out the money and tossed the wallet. He checked for his switchblade and found it missing. “Dirty bastards murdered him and robbed him too! I’m coming after you! --- might take a while, but I will find you! That’s a promise Bones.”

17

Day 3

The laundry truck provided a good nights sleep. At the first light of dawn, they were up and eating a cold breakfast of canned soup.

“Gentlemen, and I use that term lightly,” joked Brad. “We need to be on the lookout for water, we are running low.”

“As of now,” said Chuck, I’m completely out. When I packed up and left, I was thinking more about food. I suppose my students would give me an F in survival.”

“Fear not Professor, we have enough to share --- for a while,” said Brad.

The next ten miles yielded nothing promising. They passed several homes obviously inhabited; more and more foot traffic appeared. Several people on bikes whizzed by; an old couple with a small dog followed another couple pulling a wagon piled high with what looked like food and clothes.

They came upon a house that had an empty look about it. No garage or car in the drive. It appeared to be a manufactured double wide modular home with a small porch added on the front. It had no landscaping and the high grass was fighting a losing battle with the weeds.

“Let me check this one out,” Chuck said, “You guys stay here.”

He walked briskly up the driveway, his briefcase in his hand, and onto the porch. He knocked on the door --- no response. He knocked again even harder. Suddenly the door flew open followed by a loud report. Chuck was hurled backwards over the porch railing landing face down. There was

a large bloody hole in his back. His briefcase had burst open and his canned goods disappeared in the high grass. A tall skinny shirtless man stepped out on the porch. The pupils of his wild eyes were tiny dots. He raised the heavy caliber rifle and aimed it towards Brad and Carl.

“Jesus!” Carl said, and started to bolt.

Brad grabbed his arm and stopped him. “Listen to me! Raise your arms and we’ll slowly walk away.”

With their arms raised they slowly walked away. The man with the rifle kept it aimed at their backs until they disappeared from sight.

Carl was shaken and kept looking back over his shoulder. “I can’t believe it --- he just blew him away! --- I can’t believe it, what’re we going to do?”

“There’s nothing we can do,” Brad answered. “The guy was high on something. We’re lucky he didn’t shoot us too.”

“We let him get away with murder?”

“Afraid so, if we see a cop we could tell him, probably wouldn’t do much good though. I think law and order is a thing of the past.”

The next ten miles they walked in silence. The sky had darkened and the threat of rain was in the air. A large yellow brick building lay sprawled out ahead. The sign in front said, ‘Candon Middle School.’ “We may be in luck,” said Brad. “Looks like a good place to spend the night.”

The glass on the front door was broken. Brad reached in and released the latch. They heard voices as they walked down the hall.

“Sounds like we got company,” said Carl.

There were three people in the first room, Brad waved and went on. Two more rooms were occupied on the first floor; they went to the second floor which was empty. “I’ve got an

idea,” said Brad. “Let’s check the restrooms and see if there’s any water in the toilet tanks.”

“Yuck!” Carl said.

“Hey ---it’s clean water, I’ll take it any day.”

The first four tanks were empty, but the last one yielded two full bottles. The boy’s room had three full tanks that filled the rest of their bottles.

“I keep thinking about Chuck,” said Carl. “Murdered by a drugged out sleaze ball, his poor family will never know what happened to him.”

“I know,” agree Brad. “I don’t know what’s worse, trying to get home, or waiting for someone to come home.”

They set up in a class room that looked out the front. Brad wedged his wallet under the door to keep it from opening in. He looked around; the alphabet was written across the top of the blackboard, and from the size of the desks, he guessed it to be a third grade class room. The smell of a grade school is one you never forget, maybe it was the mixture of chalk dust, crayons, and floor wax combined. The big old Regulator clock hung by a picture of George Washington, exactly like one in his junior high school eighth grade, it made him think of Kate. He first met her in the eighth grade where she stole his heart. Now he was starting to think like Eric---damn that fishing trip--should’ve stayed home.

The teacher’s desk served as their dining table. After their usual canned dinner, they made up their sleeping arrangements on the floor, using the backpacks as pillows.

Brad walked over to the window and looked out before he turned in. Lightning flashed and lit up the fading light, exposing a large bearded man wearing a camouflage shirt sitting on a bike next to the school sign. He didn’t recognize him.

19

Day 4

Dear Betty, as you already know, things are in turmoil. I hope you, Tom and Diana have arrived safely. Brad is somewhere in Wisconsin, Kate and I are headed to his father's place. We spent the night here; the key is back in the rock. Our prayers are with you.

Liz & Kate

A short mile from the house and they were on 67 headed south. They were greeted by a beautiful sunrise peeking over a field of waist high corn. The morning air was brisk and cool and they had both donned sweaters.

"How far is it?" asked Kate.

"I'm not sure---twenty, maybe twenty-five miles. We should make it well before dark."

A short time later they passed a strip mall, a supermarket and five other smaller shops plus a Mexican restaurant. They all had their windows broken except for the restaurant. There were three people standing outside the supermarket, one held a shotgun.

There were long lines of abandoned cars; most were headed north towards Indianapolis. Most of the people they encountered were walking south; they were the only ones on bikes for a while.

They were moving along at a steady pace when two riders came up fast behind them, a third rider lagged far behind on a rickety bike. The lead rider pulled up on the left side of Liz, a young man probably in his twenties with long dirty blond hair and a soul patch.

Liz didn't like him being so close and moved over on the shoulder. He pulled a little ahead of her and suddenly cut into her. Her automatic reaction was to turn away, she went off the road and down a swale and into a ditch. Her bike went flying and she landed on her back in the high grass. She looked up in time to see Kate and her bike sliding down the swale.

Liz jumped up and ran over to Kate and helped her get untangled from her bike. She felt a hand grab her arm from behind.

"Hello sweet thing, hope you didn't get hurt," said the lead rider. "We just need to borrow your bike--- one of ours is falling apart."

"Let go of my arm you bastard!" she yelled and jerked free.

He grabbed her arm again. Liz spun around and caught him full in the mouth with her elbow splitting his lip. He put his hand up and felt the blood. "You bitch!" he screamed, and hit her in the stomach. She stumbled backwards into Kate and fell to the ground.

He started towards her and Kate jumped up and got in front of him. "Leave her alone!" she yelled. "She ---"

He pushed her aside and launched a kick at Liz's head. She rolled back and deflected his foot with her arm. The third rider showed up and all three stood around them.

"Way to go Ross --- you showed her whose boss."

Ross glared at her. His fists were doubled up. He raised his foot and brought it down on her leg "Bitch! You gonna be nice to me now?"

The third rider smiled, showing crooked yellow teeth. "I get the young one. She got pretty eyes."

Kate crossed her arms in front of her chest and stepped closer to her mother.

"No way!" said the second rider, taller and more muscular. "I'm the one that knocked her down. You can have seconds."

“Fraid there’s not going to be second’s, boys!” came a voice from behind them.

All three spun around. “Where in the hell did you come from?” yelled Ross.

“Doesn’t matter,” he answered. He stood around five-nine, slender wiry build, grey piercing eyes, and had a blond brush-cut haircut. “I suggest you apologize to these ladies and get your asses out of here.”

“No shit!” Ross said with a smirk on his busted lip. “Who the hell you think you are? I suggest that you --- get your punk ass out of here, before we kick the living shit out of you!”

“Well, I probably should,” he responded. “Being there’s only three of you and that’s not quite fair. Perhaps if you had maybe three more thugs like you, you might be able to do it.”

“Ooooo,” Ross said. “Bad boy here, I’m scared,” he reached in his pocket and pulled out a switchblade. He clicked it open and said. “Hey, bad boy, what do you think of this?”

“Damn! Now that does present a problem,” he said shaking his head.

“You bet it does bad boy!” He flipped the knife back and forth in his hands.

“You see, now I have to make a decision. Do I take that knife and stick it up your ass --- or do I just jam it down your throat.”

Ross raised his eyebrows. “Think so huh!” He pointed his knife at him. “Let’s get him! Spread out!”

Ross was in the middle, smiling, holding the knife low. The second rider was five feet to his left. The third rider was somewhat reluctant and was edging away to his right, ready to bolt.

“Oh no!” Liz stood up and pulled Kate close to her side. It happened so fast it was just a blur. The stranger spun around and kicked the second rider in the face, and in one motion

brought his left hand down on Ross's wrist knocking the knife loose. His right hand came around and chopped his neck. Liz heard the bones break. The third rider ran the instant Ross went down, he didn't stop to retrieve his bike.

Liz stared at the two bodies. "Oh my God! Are they dead?"
"Quite possible," he said in a calm voice.

"Where did you learn how to do that?" Kate asked.

"Boy Scouts," he said with a smile. "With a little help from Uncle Sam"

There were tears in Liz's eyes. "You saved us --- where did you come from?"

"I was a bit behind you when they passed me ---I saw them run you off the road. Being a Boy Scout and all, I couldn't let them get away with it. Where are you ladies headed, if I may ask?"

"Southwest of Mooresville to my father-in-laws place, if we're lucky," she added.

"Out in the country huh --- good idea --- get away from this mad house," he said. "I've got to make a stop in Mooresville. I'll be glad to accompany you that far. I'm sure Ross here won't mind if I borrow his bike. By the way, I'm Mark Wade."

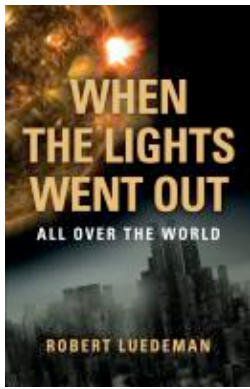
"More than pleased to meet you Mark, I'm Liz and this is my daughter Kate."

Kate brushed the dirt and grass from her mothers back. "Are you okay Mom?"

"Sore, but I'll live --- how about you?"

"Tore my sweater and lost my shoe, but it's around here someplace."

They checked their bikes and found them unharmed. Mark helped pick up the canned goods that came loose from Liz's bike, Kate found her shoe. They left together with Mark following close behind.



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