

In the early 22nd century the world is filled with chaos, the economy is destroyed, and the government has imploded under its own corruption. Joe Adams, a reluctant member of a secret society of Wave Riders is charged with solving an impossible cypher. As Puzzle Master, he can then unleash a weapon that will empower the people and save the world.

Wave Rider

By Mike Settimo

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MIKE SETTINO

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First Edition

Chapter 3

Once I got inside my building, I bolted up the stairs to the room next to mine and put my fist to the door, “Max, you up!”

Max Anstett answered the knock before the sound vanished. My band mate and one of the few whom in my life I would call a friend opened the door in haste and brought me inside. Max always wore a hat with a flap on the back that extended down over his neck. Inside the flap a sheet of flexible aluminum that covered the chip in his neck and helped diffuse transmissions. At six three and a hundred and sixty pounds soaking wet Max almost never slept and always seemed to be wired on caffeine. In our band Twisted Steel, I was the front man, the man with the guitar and the long hair and the average voice. Max was the guy who programmed all the electronics and banged the hell of the electric drums.

“There are more of you?” Max asked.

“Evidently. Listen we need to get out of here now.”

“What the hell happened down there? You defended yourself, no big deal, right?” Max asked in a slight panic.

“Yea, well it turns out it’s a big deal. One of them was Naric’s kid and the guy who came in the Mercedes was Browning. I don’t think he recognized me because he was too worried about Naric’s kid and the police.”

I never saw Max get our stuff together so fast. He opened his bag and starting stuffing everything, we owned until the bag had all of our clothes inside. In no time all the components for the band got compressed into one small case and stuffed in

the bottom of our traveling bag. Clothes can't be compressed as well as band equipment, but we travel light so we have what's on our back and two other sets is all we need. The thought of Naric chasing after me didn't scare me that much, Jennifer was a puppet for Gnorrot and the reason I knew that is because I worked for them once. For most people who dare even think about the good ole WOB USA as corrupt Gnorrot is a rumor, a myth, hell maybe he's the Anti-Christ I keep hearing about. But then there have been a thousand of them, Gnorrot I think is worse.

I opened the bag Max got together and without a word Stupid crawled inside and dug a nice place amongst the clothes. My rectangle unfolded I stepped on the board and Max stood behind me, "Try not to puke this time."

"Did you see what I just ate, I can't promise a damn thing," Max laughed, "I hate traveling this way."

"Yea, well this is the fastest way anywhere and it's better than Browning coming after us. As soon as that son of a bitch figures out who I am he'll want to do the death sentence himself."

I raised my hand with my palm face the ceiling and the world turned to shades of lavender and violet. My eyes now a deep shade of violet followed my hand while I searched for the wave I wanted to follow. The dark purple waves stretched all around me and I studied each one choosing the one I wanted. Small vines of electricity appeared and disappeared around me. The trick is to catch a wave where the data is flowing in the direction you want to go. It takes some time to feel the perfect wave but once you get the knack of it finding the wave becomes second nature. When I found the one, I bounced the board and Max and I jumped fifty feet sliding through walls and concrete and landing softly on the purple wave. We sat

motionless for a second, “What are you waiting for?” Max asked.

With my hand I scribed into the purple world next to the wave, 39.442001, -84.218803, “That’s where we are going,” I answered in anticipation of Max’s question.

“You are the only person who understands that ancient grid system,” Max said.

“If Jasmine and Cyrus are Wave Riders then they will see this marker. And if they are Wave Riders, they’ll understand it.”

My weight shifted so Max grabbed the bag on my back. In a moment I threw the board against the side of the wave and dug into the heart of the wave. The lights of the city muted through a purple shield below looked peaceful and calm. I leaned my body weight with the wave and the lights below turned into a blur of white streaks. My board jumped forward launching Max and I west. Max hates wave riding but I love the adrenaline I get from it. Rolling the board from one bank of the wave to the next feeling the power of the wave and the feeling of freedom in my face.

As my wave followed a path west, I leaned into each bend and dip of the wave. The electronic chords of energy displaced by my board sprayed in the air splashing against my arms and tickling my skin. I’ve never ventured to the blue clouds above, they looked menacing as if there is a constant thunderstorm happening all the time. I mostly stayed to the purple clouds that had the waves closer to the ground. But still there is something beautiful about the blue clouds above. They rolled and churned and for the first time in a while I wondered about them. I thought until I saw Cyrus and Jasmine that I was the last of the Wave Riders. The ones my grandfather told great stories of. For the first time in a while I wondered what was up there.

I checked my hand that gave me the longitude and latitudes of my location. Much to Max's anguish I bounced from one wave to another. With each landing on a new wave a crest of energy exploded from the wave covering each of us in pulses of energy. About then is when I heard Max lose his lunch. I sped up so that any fragments would fly behind me and not on me. We traveled on the wave to the eastern part of the north mid-west province in the southwest corner of what used to be Ohio. We landed north east of where the Ohio River meets Cincinnati. For Max's sake I slowed to a crawl and landed softly in the small town.

I'm sure this was once a nice place, lots of quaint little antique shops and specialty stores in a picture-perfect town. At least that's what it always looked to me from the burned-out Main Street and the names on the abandoned stores. I try to imagine what this county used to be instead of what it became. Folks walking along sidewalks lined with shade trees and flowers. The air smelled clean then too, like a spring morning. If I stretched my imagination hard enough, I could see families sitting at the counter of the local ice cream shop enjoying a shake or an ice cream cone. These small towns are what this country used to be all about, normal folks living a nice clean life and passing that on to the next generation. That is what was supposed to happen, and then greed came to town.

It's not hard to find Cincinnati from here, all you need to do is follow the line of black smoke and factories, you can't miss it. The further west you go in what used to be the United States the better the air gets, still there is no place that at least from the mid-west to the east coast where there is green the same as in the pictures that I've seen. Here in what used to be Ohio it's still pretty much a disaster. I guess it's a good thing most people have already died.

Walking down the Main Street of town I am always amazed that the people don't see what I see. A man about my age in

tattered clothes with sunglasses crossed out path and gave us a warm small-town welcome.

“Can I help ya! You look you’re looking for something?” he asked.

“We came to town and were looking for a place to stay. Anyplace good?”

“Nice place down the road here on Main Street, you’ll see it right after Sycamore, you can’t miss it.”

“Much appreciated”

“I spose you want to get out of this heat. The sun is brutal today. Enjoy your stay,” he said and moved on down the street sidestepping loose bricks as if they weren’t there and whistling.

The man walked down the street and I looked to the sky and chuckled. If there was any sun up there the black smoke prevented most of it from getting close to the ground. Max adjusted the shield that covered the chip in his neck, “Damn, hard to believe they can’t see it.”

Max and I made our way down Main Street and passed half a dozen folks similar to the man we talked to. The people we ran into seemed to be nice enough people. Always saying how do you do and asking if we need help, but I guess that’s either their good-natured genes or the work of the chip in their neck. Maybe the government is downloading good thoughts through the chip. I’ve known for a while that the government was using the Evernet to manipulate the masses. I’m going to think it’s the genes, at least I have a better feeling believing that instead of the illusion the government is downloading to their brains. The population in this town was down about two-thirds of what it was in its heyday. Morbidly, with less people it is a good thing, it’s better this way because I seriously doubt there would

be enough food to feed everyone if most people hadn't died in the past ninety years.

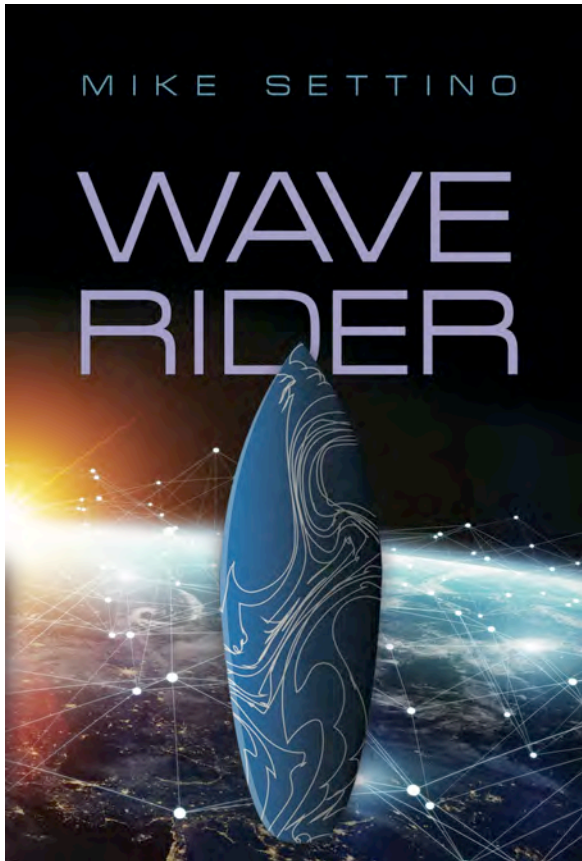
When we came to the inn if there was ever any name on the outside of the building it long since faded away. At one time there were two balconies one on top of the other, time rotted the wood on the top balcony leaving a distant memory of a frame. The mortar on the brick frame looked to be well past repair. In different spots bricks laid in piles where they fell from the building. Honestly, I've seen worse but not much. To the people in this town, this place is still the elegant hotel it was when it was built two hundred or more years ago.

I was tired from running and worried that the eye in the sky would catch a glimpse of Max. So with few to no options we went inside and tapped the bell on the front counter. A woman came from the back office looking a bit surprised to have anyone in her hotel.

"You boys want a room?"

I didn't want to raise any red flags, so I kept my tongue in check, "Yes ma'am."

Max looked at me in a way that he thought I must be ill, usually something smart ass comes from me when I'm asked such an obvious question. After we checked in, I asked about any clubs where we might get a gig. Martha gave me a few suggestions, so I thought I'd check out those leads after assuring her we had enough to pay for the room. In order to make Martha feel comfortable I paid for the first night in advance. I wasn't worried about finding a gig. I figured we can always find a gig, alcohol and oldies will always take your mind off of life. Of course, the folks here and everywhere else don't understand why the alcohol made them feel better, it just did.



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