

## CULLED - PART II

It was a solar flare; it was a government experiment gone wrong; it was fall-out from meteors. At least those were the theories being passed around about the disease that had decimated the population, when there were people around to express any sort of opinion. They'd been passed down, almost like folklore. Those of us who were left after the family groups had moved out did discuss it at distance but there was no-one qualified to give the lie to any sort of theory. The general consensus revolved around the disease being electro-magnetic in origin, affecting bodily synapses and spread by physical contact. As a theory it held water, given what seemed to be the neurological nature, and I guess that people needed to hold onto some sort of rationale - any sort of rationale - to explain what had happened. Personally, I always thought there was more to it than that. There had to be some sort of pathogen involved, although science had struggled to come up with a connection before the thing wiped most everyone out. I mean, how many people other than family and really close friends had any sort of close bodily contact before this thing happened? Certainly not total strangers, except maybe for sporting and crowded social occasions. Whatever, the contact theory took hold and shaped the society we had.

Of course, there were the crazy theories too: a god-borne retribution for the sins of the world. Take the 'god' out of the notion and it was as good an explanation as any. I don't think many of us - apart from the real crazies - believed in any sort of god after seeing our nearest and dearest just drop dead in front of us for no apparent reason. After that, there were three kinds of people left no matter what the root cause: immunes, people who knew who, how or other. There is not deal with that, both mutually exclusive, an involving extermination of the other, and none of them practical because no-one knew to which group they belonged without proper scientific analysis, which was non-existent. If there truly was a divine retribution, that was it: the not knowing. The fact that there were no symptoms before it brought you down was the real pisser.

For some it eventually became too much and they just ended it, leaving the rest of us to grapple with the consequences. Trying to dispose of a body whilst avoiding any contact and with little, if any, support from anyone else is nigh on impossible. But we did it. We had to. It was highly likely that, if electrical impulse played any part in the disease, then once life was extinct there would be no risk, but no-one was about to put it to the test. And anyway, as I said, I was never too convinced there was not something else at play. And the contact theory had taken firm root, particularly in the light of the experiences our group had undergone.

As far as friendships can be forged when you conduct affairs at 20 feet or more behind a ring of spears, there were some. It was the need for some sort of intellectual stimulation that drove it more than anything. There were even games of sorts, strictly non-team and absolutely non-contact, but it helped to pass the time. Romance was impossible unless you wanted to take the chance, and we had seen too often how that ended, so it was a case of look but don't touch for those inclined to dally. Not that there was a lot of opportunity. Women had tended not to fare too well in the grind for survival.