

## **Never Trust a Train Ride** by Adam Casalino

I begrudgingly stepped into the subway car. It smelled—bad. A homeless person had spent the night on one of the benches. Most of the idiots in the car stayed at the other end. The train lurched forward and I grabbed onto the bar so I wouldn't fall.

After an eternity of counting stops we neared mine. First stop in Manhattan was Wall Street, then Fulton. In the few seconds between Fulton Street and Park Place something happened. I couldn't tell—nobody could. We were underground. The thunderous booms sounded no different than the usual hysteria of the subway tunnels. Park Place. I got off, hauling my too-heavy bag over my shoulder.

It was early. Only one other person followed me up the escalator and to the station. The MTA attendant wasn't in the booth—that was normal, I never knew where they were. As I rounded the corner leading to the stairs, I noted the unusual amount of daylight streaming into the corridor. It was as if the Sun was shining directly into the stairwell. The guy behind me groaned and passed me as I hesitated. It was that one-second pause that saved my life.

I heard the man scream as my foot touched the first step. I looked up in time to see his body hurtle back towards me. It knocked me to the ground. A shadow passed over the subway entrance and disappeared. I rolled the dead body off me. Cringing, I took a look. His neck had been crushed by a giant vise. Blood was oozing from every pore. Mustering something close to courage, I climbed the stairs.

Every building was gone. In their place were massive piles of rubble—smoldering and crackling. A fog of smoke and dust magnified the Sun which was no longer hidden by towers. City Hall Park had been furrowed by a massive plow—every tree was uprooted and destroyed. Somewhere a police siren was ringing—probably coming from an abandoned car.

A deafening explosion pulled my attention uptown. The skyscrapers that still stood were being struck by flashes of white light. I heard faint screams as they crumbled to the earth.

Then I heard them. They were speaking to each other in harsh, mechanical voices. The sound came from somewhere behind me; I did not turn to look. To my horror the voices grew excited. They found me. I tried to run. Too late I realized I had been gripping the stairway railing. I inadvertently pulled myself backwards and fell down the steps.

I landed beside the dead guy. Furious footsteps were drawing closer. They barked like metallic dogs as they approached the stairwell. I plunged into the

station. I instinctively jumped over the turnstiles. I did not go down the escalator—the platform could not be safe. I ran down a set of stairs that led to an access hallway. A door hidden along the wall swung open. I nearly collided with him.

A haggard MTA worker grabbed my arm and pulled me into the closet. He had a wild look in his eyes (more so than the usual).

“Did they see you?” he asked.

“Yes. I think they’re coming down here.”

“Dammit!”

Before I could apologize for leading them into the subway, he handed me a gun. It was an old and dirty shotgun.

“We gotta hold them off,” he said as he cracked open the door. “They don’t know these tunnels. We have the advantage.”

“Where did you get these guns?” I asked, stupefied.

“We kept them here.”

“Really?”

“This is New York! What do you expect? Besides—I always knew this day would come.”

He gasped and quickly shut the door.

“Do you know how to work that?” he asked, motioning to the gun in my hands.

“Well...”

He groaned, irritated. “Pull back on the pump to ready a shot. Point *this* end at your target. Aim with this—keep both eyes open!”

I looked over the gun in disbelief. “I saw what they can do to a man. How do you know a gun will hurt them?”

“They can’t fit their cranes down here. They’ll have to search the station on foot—and they’re just as vulnerable to gunfire as you or me.”

“How the hell do you know all that?”

He didn’t answer. A noise from outside startled him and he pressed his back against the wall.

“Shh! Get that gun ready.”

I pumped the gun and held it up unsteadily.

“I’ll lead—you stay close.”

I edged towards the door. A strange, blinking light caught my eye. It was coming from the back of the closet.

“What’s that thing over there?” I moved towards it and saw a small desk, crammed against the back wall of the room.

“That’s nothing, get away from there!”

A pile of rags were covering up a laptop. A myriad of thin wires were streaming out of the back. They connected to a smooth, round device that blinked and glowed in a rainbow of colors. On the computer screen were a number of windows. They were flashing large lists of numbers, what looked like coordinates of outer space. Another window was scrolling a series of hieroglyphic symbols—though I assumed they weren’t Egyptian. A video screen—that was apparently tapping into a satellite feed—showed the space around earth. It was surrounded with alien ships.

“You have... been communicating with these things?”

From behind I heard the cock of a gun. I turned and saw his pointed at my chest.

“I didn’t know it would go this far...” he said, his voice flat and defeated. “I wasn’t the only one, you know. They sent those things to people all over the world. The things I saw... the things I learned... I never thought they would come here, to harvest us.”

“Harvest? They’re *killing* everyone.”

“They want our land. We’re only getting in the way. I’m sorry, but I can’t let people know what I’ve done.”

He pulled the trigger. His gun jammed—just my stupid luck. As he cursed and slapped it, I threw myself at him. We both hit the wall and slid to the floor. He had his hands around my throat. More noise came from outside. It was their voices.

The MTA worker pushed me aside. He grabbed the shotgun out of my hands and swung open the door.

“See ya, kid.” He ran outside. Before I could get to my feet he was already shooting. I heard him yelling. Then as soon as they started, the shots stopped. I lost his voice amongst theirs.

I grabbed the jammed gun and prayed it would work. The hallway was empty. I ran to the steps which led to the main station. The ground shook as flashes of white blinded me. The shotgun slipped from my hands and I lost my

balance. Broken rock and tiles fell all around me. I pushed towards the steps before I was buried alive.

I reached the station. It had become a ruin of twisted metal and steaming rock. The ceiling was still intact—for now—and I clumsily made my way to the surface. I did not see any of them. Whatever had caused the explosion drew the monsters away from the subway. As I neared the stairs that lead to the city, I heard the familiar sound of machine gunfire.

I climbed the now nearly decimated steps and reached the surface. The sun was still too bright and I could see nothing.

“Holy crap, there’s someone alive!” A hand gripped my shirt and pulled me to the ground. “Stay low buddy. Damn, we almost took your head off!”

My blurry-eyed vision slowly cleared to see a man in a green fatigues. It was a soldier. His soot-covered face looked down on me with a big smile. He must have just been glad to find a survivor.

“What’s going on?” I asked. I sounded like a child who just woke from a dream. I felt stupid.

“Hell, you don’t know?”

“I saw them kill a man... they blew up the city.”

“Not *all* of the city,” he replied, a hint of pride in his voice. “Our boys arrived almost instantly to fight ‘em back. They made a short work of downtown. Damnedest thing I ever seen. They don’t like bullets, though.”

I remembered the computer and the strange device the MTA worker was hiding. “You need to get down there. There’s something a man was using, to talk to them.”

“*Talk* to them? Crap, we gotta see that!” He pulled out a radio and shouted some commands. A cluster of other soldiers started walking towards us. He waved at them and they moved faster.

“Bout time! This fella needs a ride out.” He turned to me. “Our boys’ll scour the subway. If there’s anything left, we’ll find it. You, however, need to get the hell out of here. Franklin will take you to the carrier. We’re lifting survivors out by helicopter.”

The soldier escorted me to a dark green aircraft which sat in the middle of Broadway. I wearily climbed aboard. He motioned to the pilot who started the engines. I glanced around. There were only soldiers, no other survivors. As we lifted off I looked out at the city as it slowly sunk away. I doubt I would ever visit it again.