

*Prologue to CLUTCH: Book One of The Wrecked Earth*

When the meteors started to fall in late 2012 the first question the people of Earth voiced was, “Why weren’t we told?”

Certainly their governments knew, had to know, had to have had some warning that a belt of asteroids five times wider than the circumference of the planet was going to intersect with their home. Yet there was no warning to speak of, simply a few alerts in a handful of laboratories around the world. Governments, academic organizations, militaries, the common peoples of Earth – all were caught unawares and unprepared. All paid the price.

The first hint that doom had come was the death of cellular networks and TV signals. Companies that leveraged massive fortunes on the fulcrum of satellites went into a panic as they lost their most important technologies. People watching the night sky witnessed the wholesale destruction of satellites with excitement, believing the flashes of light to be falling stars – a phenomenon in modern times often considered good fortune. In the days before, when myth and fact shared much common ground, falling stars were seen as the opposite, a sign of ill fortune or even worse, of common doom. In the days ahead that ancient understanding would resurface and reassert itself, and the people of Earth would grow to fear the lines of light drawn across the sky.

As humanity looked up from their non-functioning data and voice devices and sensed that some much worse fate had arrived on their doorstep, meteoroids became meteors that rocketed surface-ward. The planet turned into the maelstrom and flashes of brilliance thickened the atmosphere, even in the light of day. Early morning commuters in gridlock, children waiting for school buses, shipyard workers breaking for lunch, harvesters in tea fields nearing the end of their day, backyard grillers flipping their steaks, all stopped and looked up in confusion, halted in wonder, and then ran in terror.

Those places not struck by falling space rocks bore witness to their neighbor’s obliteration, either by radio or television, on those few signals still cutting through the crowded skies, or by their own eyes. The strikes appeared randomly, capriciously, thirty days of unrelenting meteor strikes across the globe, a time later referenced as Rockfall. Townspeople watched in horror as stone rained down across the river and turned their sister town into a pure hell while they lived on, grateful that they were spared and hating themselves for feeling grateful.

Yet they were not untouched. As the world moved inexorably into Armageddon power was lost, water stopped flowing, emergency response teams stopped showing up for shifts, food was not trucked in across county roads chewed to bits by falling rock. Life, where life remained, became truly hard to hold on to. Where there was not disease there were riots, and where there was not civil disorder there were other disasters linked to Rockfall. Levies were shattered, weather patterns altered, nuclear power plants compromised, earthquakes triggered.

Governments tried to respond to protect their people and their interests. Fears that other Powers had managed to somehow harness the workings of the cosmos ruled the early days, causing valuable time and resources to be spent on futile plans to counter and riposte. No emergency response plans proved adequate to do more than temporarily alleviate the suffering and destruction of Rockfall. In most cases governments, from those that ran nations to those that ran townships, failed utterly to help and were themselves among the first casualties.

The meteor strikes alone claimed hundreds of thousands of lives directly in those first thirty days. The ripples they caused through the social, economic and political arenas, through the Earth itself, claimed billions. A survivor on the East Coast of the US couldn’t know how the people upstate fared much less those in another country or Continent. Uncertainty seeped in to fill the rare gaps in time when mankind was not concerned with seeking shelter from meteor strikes, the inevitable gangs looking to press them or consume them, or the starving wildlife turned bold now that the playing field had equalized. Were they the only ones affected? Would the military come riding in to the rescue, or had

they been wiped out by meteors or The Enemy? Was China now preparing to invade the devastated America, or where they completely wiped off the globe themselves?

The thirty days of Rockfall passed and the meteor strikes abated but did not end. For the next few years people emerged from shelters and fortunate isolation to try and rebuild. The old maps were useless for any who wished to travel, for the roads and rivers and even hills and forests and cities had all changed. Flood and fire, moving earth and falling rock had redrawn the topography of the planet, hampering any attempts to send aid far or fast—though there were few left to attempt to send aid of any kind. The people of the planet were on their own, and the Earth left to them was well and truly wrecked. Every community had their own name for the time of Mankind before and after Rockfall; one band of roaming bikers called the years immediately following “the Wrecking”, and the time before “Pre-Wreck”, or “Before the Wrecking”. They were called the Tribe, and where they traveled they did what they could and protected their own.

While the global human population plummeted during the Wrecking of Earth in some places the animal population exploded. The lack of hunting, expansion and pollution were all contributing factors, but there was something more. Those left to observe saw a steep incline in the size of dog packs, raccoon bands, deer families and rat swarms. For those who still had strength to ponder and look to the future theories abounded, the most popular among them revolving around strange radiation brought to the Earth on the backs of space-born rock. In truth some meteorites were radioactive, and in lands where those fell there was not only exponential population growth, but also strange mutations. Animals were born with extra limbs or faces and died, but many lived, and bore young with further mutation, and the cycle continued far faster than Nature intended.

So it was in some parts of the Wrecked Earth great herds of mutated animals competed with small bands of humans who lacked the numbers or resources to cope. Sometimes the animals wanted more than to graze unmolested, and the rare traveler would occasionally come across an outpost or holdout littered with human bones next to piles of animal scat and scattered mutant corpses.

It was deep in such a land, a place once called Texas, that the last son of the Tribe had made his home.

[Read the Opening Scene](#)

[Buy the Book](#)

[About C.E.L. Welsh](#)

