

The Beacon

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Elliot stared out into the green acidic rain. Behind the thick blanket of toxic droplets was a beacon, which gave light, hope, and protection to the whole city.

Elliot worked as a maintenance worker, which wasn't very easy. There were constant calls coming in from people around the city who needed help with irrigators, faulty showerheads, and broken traffic bots. Except, tonight was different. The acid rain had breached the containment balloons and was inundating the city. The only thing that could save the city was the emergency beacon that would give everyone a protective barrier between them and the rain. It would also give light to the whole city once the electricity failed. All Elliot had to do was run three city blocks and climb up eighty flights of stairs in about thirty minutes before the whole city failed and the reactor exploded.

Unfortunately, the maintenance kits that the workers were given only had a few pieces of equipment that would help in this situation. These included a first aid kit, an acid-proof torch, a 5-metre long grapple, and an acid-proof suit (that wasn't very acid-proof). He zipped up his suit, turned on his flashlight, and stepped into the hands of death.

Elliot ran into the rain and dashed for cover. If Elliot wanted to survive, he'd have to use his equipment well. He shone his flashlight into the gloom and saw a car on fire. Acid rain didn't put out fires. It fuelled them. The car was going to be engulfed in flames in a few minutes, so he ran until he made it to the next block.

One block down, two to go, he thought, as the light above him flickered out, followed by every other light in the city. Elliot turned on his flashlight to high beam and started jogging. A giant fireball erupted behind him. Pieces of debris and shrapnel from the exploded car were hurled in his direction. They pelted his suit, cutting it with their razor-sharp edges. One piece flew into his shoulder, but he didn't feel it because of the adrenaline pulsing through his bloodstream.

Elliot ran the block in thirty seconds without feeling a thing. It was during the next run that he began to feel the pain. His shoulder was bleeding all over his acid covered suit. He crouched down under a ledge and opened the med-pack and placed two of the six nanites on his shoulder. They got to work, numbing the area and sealing the wound with frozen nanobots. The pain vanished, but he'd have a jagged scar.

Puddles of molten tar and acid splashed at his feet and ankles as he ran to the skyscraper and slammed open the doors. He made his way to the staircase and began climbing the chandelier. He jumped and leaped through the acid-proof diamonds with his newfound confidence. He'd been dreading this moment the whole time, but it turned out to be fun.

When he got up to the tenth level, he had to grab the key to activate the beacon. He swung further and further to get to the staircase. He took the leap but overshot it and ended up hitting his head on the wall, tumbling through the glass barrier and hanging off the ledge, disorientated. He climbed up, grabbed the key, vomited, and sat down until he regained his senses. Terrible thoughts ploughed through his mind, but he pushed them away. He jumped up, ripped off his suit and shirt and ran up the stairs.

On the fortieth floor, he rested and discovered some energy bars in the med-pack. He swallowed all twelve of them in a minute. That's when the mutated demon-like creatures that everyone called the "Birds of Acid" started swooping. They came down from the green clouds, screeching and screaming. Elliot didn't have much time, so he grabbed a pipe that was lying on the ground and kept running.

On the sixtieth floor, Elliot was attacked. A small Bird of Acid about the size of a large puppy swooped and Elliot hit it out of the air with an almighty crunch. All his training in the VR Battle Grounds had led up to this moment. He jumped and knocked another creature straight through a window. He sprinted up to the sixty-fifth floor and jumped over a large beak protruding through the wall, smacking it on the side as it retracted. An even bigger one crashed through the bottom of the building and began making its way up the chandelier straight towards him. Elliot shouted, grabbed a fire extinguisher, turned it on, and threw it down at the dragon-bird. It squealed as the powder whooshed into its eyes and mouth. Elliot scurried up a pair of broken stairs to reach the seventy-second floor.

He had three minutes to make it to the top and turn on the beacon.

This was it, the real final countdown. He was surprised that a song from the '80s had made it to 2067. He climbed up to the seventy-third floor and looked down. The dragon-bird was on the fiftieth floor, speeding up every second. Elliot backed away and scrambled up to the seventy-fourth floor. He continued up until he made it to the eightieth floor.

He readied himself. He knew he wasn't going to be able to activate the beacon until the monster was out of the way. The dragon-bird busted through the floor, smashing and splitting the concrete like it was a cracker. Elliot jumped out of the way as a large glob of acid vomit splashed beside him. He threw the grapple around its horn and, as the dragon

swung around, he jumped up and looped the fire hose that he'd grabbed around its neck and tied a knot.

The rain burned and peeled his skin, but at this point, he didn't feel pain, so he didn't care. The dragon-bird screeched and gurgled as Elliot was thrown off into the barrier wall. He heard the almighty crunch as his leg came down first and then his body. The dragon-bird ripped off its choker and walked over to survey its meal.

As it bent down, Elliot saw his chance. He grabbed one of the broken antennae and lodged it straight through the creature's head into its brain. It collapsed, and Elliot rolled out of the way. He crawled, bruised, battered, and beaten, towards the giant lever. He placed his hand on the cool dark metal, pushed in the key, and pulled.