

# The Ark

by Christopher Coates

## Prologue

The comfortable looking home sat on a large open lot with a majestic oak tree in the front yard. The siding was faded, but the paint on the trim looked new. The windows all had curtains, and there was smoke drifting from the chimney. The house was located about three miles outside the village limit. That was not uncommon anymore, people had been willing to move out from the safety of the towns for about the last twenty years.

Without warning, the front door flew open, and a young girl raced out of the house and into the morning air. The summer sun was only starting to rise, but the temperature was already in the mid-seventies. Several birds were searching the lawn for food and they took flight as the intruder disrupted their quest. The girl paused briefly to stare at the birds since they were still such an unusual sight. She looked to be about nine years old and wore faded jeans and a plain red tee shirt. Her long blond hair was braided and almost reached the top of her jeans. She wore a small backpack and a cell phone was clipped to the thin belt around her waist. With excitement in her step, she moved quickly to the side of the house and grabbed her bike. Jumping onto it, she tore off down the road. The bike was red, like her shirt, red being her favorite color. The paint on the bike was new, however, if you looked carefully, you could see that the bike had been welded together in several places, clearly the metamorphosis of several cannibalized bicycles. Michelle wasn't bothered that her bike was not new. She'd never seen a new bicycle, and neither had any of her friends. It was generally assumed that there hadn't been a new bike made in the last hundred years.

The road she traveled was compact dirt with hazardous patches of broken asphalt which stuck up frequently. Michelle loved to ride her bike into town. She would usually go a half hour out of her way to ride down Bell Street, the one street on her side of town that had recently been resurfaced, and the first one Michelle had ever seen made of new concrete. Her parents told her that in time all the streets would be like that. Michelle loved to ride on it because it was smooth, and she could go much faster. Her grandma had told her how all the roads had once been made of cement, but that had been before everyone died. Today though, she took the quick route to town and sacrificed the ride down Bell Street. Today was her grandmother's birthday, and she was determined to be the first one to tell her happy birthday. She could have called, but she wanted to do this in person. Even at her advanced age, Grandma Amy had made sure to come and see Michelle on all nine of her birthdays.

When she got to the house, Michelle raced up the stairs and without knocking raced inside. "Grandma, it's me!" she gleefully exclaimed.

Her grandmother was in her chair, reclined with her feet up listening to music coming from a small stereo. The music originated from one of the two radio stations that were broadcasting. "Michelle, come give Grandma a hug," the elderly woman said, holding out her arms. In truth,

the term 'grandma' was not wholly accurate. Michelle was Amy's great-granddaughter.

The young girl gently approached and said, "Happy Birthday, Grandma."

"Thank you, sweetie. You're the best for remembering."

"Was I the first?"

"The first what?"

"The first one to tell you happy birthday," the girl stated with some sarcasm in her voice.

Laughing, Amy replied, "Yes you were."

"Good. I wanted mom to help me make you a cake today, but she said we wouldn't find one hundred and forty-five candles," Michelle said.

"Even if you had, you wouldn't have had enough. I'm one hundred and forty-six now."

"That's old."

"It sure is." the old woman admitted.

"Is it true back when you were young, people didn't live that long?"

That's true. Typically, people only lived to be about eighty. That's how it was then, and how it'll be for you too. Other than the few of us that are left, there won't be anyone else living this long."

"So I won't be able to be as old as you are? I only get about eighty years?"

"Why? Eighty isn't bad, I was just over eighty when I had my first baby, your Grandma Cindy." Together they giggled at the crazy sounding fact.

Michelle rested her head on her grandma's shoulder. She missed the days where she could climb up into that same chair and sit together, but she had gotten too big for the frail old woman to hold. As they sat now, Michelle's eyes moved to the shelves with the photos on them. There were pictures of her mom and dad, and some of her great-grandfather and her grandma. Most of them were photos of Michelle and her brothers and sisters and their many cousins. As much as she loved her family, these weren't the pictures that Michelle enjoyed when she visited. The ones she was interested in were the ones from long ago, the ones of her great-grandmother. She especially liked the one of her sitting in the pilot seat of the powerful military helicopter, dressed in her flight suit.

Michelle's favorite thing in the world was to sit with this woman and listen to Grandma's stories from another time. Even the pictures in books and on computers couldn't compare with hearing her grandma describe how people had lived a hundred and thirty years ago.

Grandma was great at telling about the busy cities, dangerous freeways, amusement parks, and traveling to exotic locations. It seemed these ideas were as crazy as some of the outer space TV programs about aliens invading Earth.

Michelle's parents had taken her to Denver last year, but it wasn't the same as her grandmother's descriptions of the city had been. Denver had a cold and empty feeling, the tall and once magnificent buildings seemed dead in this ghost town. There had been no life except for a handful of people, scavenging for useable items. The only other evidence of people she saw were the thousands of skeletons which seemed to be behind every door they opened.

The trip to Denver had been fascinating, and it certainly had made the global destruction seem more real. She was just glad to get home and hopefully would never visit a city ever again.