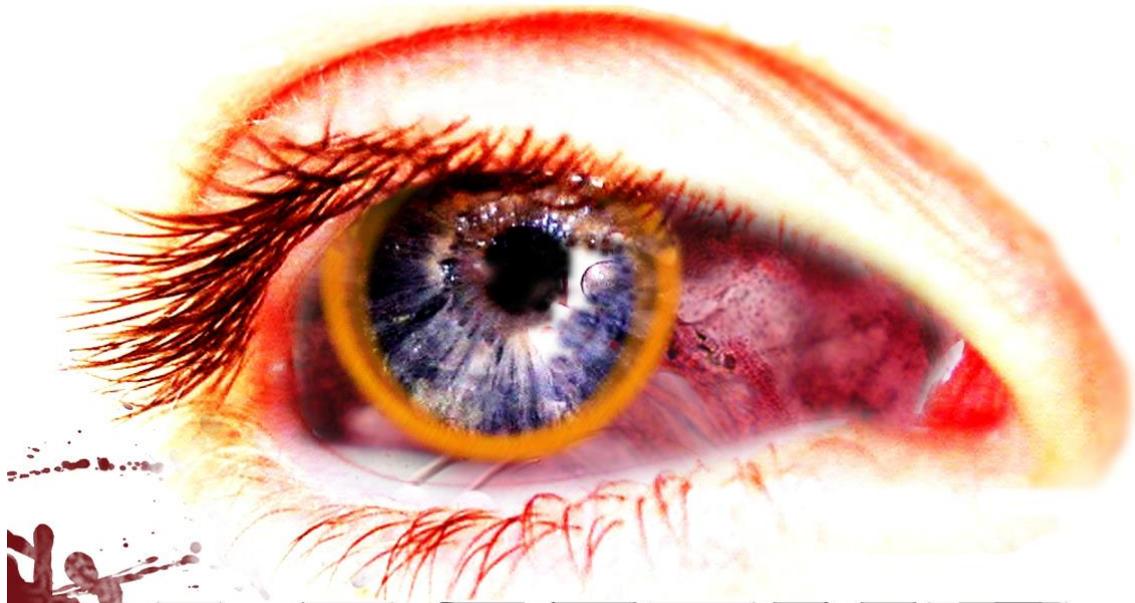


What happens after the zombie apocalypse?



LAMENT

FOR THE

LIVING

David Nicol

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by David Nicol

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A Note From the Author

Thank you for your interest in 'Lament for the Living'. What you are about to read is the first chapter as an introduction to one of the story's most resilient characters. 'Lament for the Living' is due for release on May 10th 2013.

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Chapter One

Anthony Redfern R.I.P.

(again)

Anthony Redfern had a good life. It wasn't a great life; he still bought a lottery ticket each week, but it was good enough for him to be mostly content. After kissing his wife and daughter goodbye, he left for work. The daily commute. The ritual observed by millions all around the world. Two buses, one train, shoulder to shoulder jostling with numerous strangers, standing room only, avoiding eye contact. Through the narrow tunnels, up the narrow escalator. Once out of the claustrophobic train station came the long walk. Flowing in the river of people. Human flotsam carried on the current of human commerce. Each day, a carbon copy of the one before. Weekends interspersed the routine, but came and went before they could be fully appreciated.

Each morning he'd stop at 'Happy News' to buy a newspaper. Over time his preferred broadsheet had succumbed to the changing tastes in the world where everything was being miniaturised except for prices and coffee portions. He handed over the cost of the newspaper, folded it and tucked it under his arm. He thanked Pablo the newsagent, and left the narrow shop to continue his journey to work.

A movement in the periphery of his vision caught his attention. It was out of place. Someone running. Not jogging, or running for a bus. Running like their life depended on it. It was a woman. Screaming. Her jacket torn. Another woman was bounding after her. Her clothes were ripped and bloodstained. People deliberately looked elsewhere, turned their attention to the floor, to their watches or phones, carrying on about their business. Right in front of Anthony the pursuer caught her prey, driving her to the floor as she leapt on her back and began clawing at her.

“Hey!” Anthony yelled. He swatted the attacker with his newspaper as if she were a disobedient dog, but there was no response. The woman on the floor was screaming and crying out for help.

“Someone call the police.” Anthony called to those walking past. “You,” he pointed at a passing businessman who looked back at him, startled “call the police. Do it now.” The businessman shook his head and quickened his step. Cursing to himself Anthony stepped forward hesitantly, unsure of what to do. He pushed the attacker with his foot. “Stop it.” She snapped her head around, growling through a blood soaked mouth, her teeth broken and ragged. Anthony froze as their eyes met, she glared at him, but seemed to be looking through him, her eyes bloodshot, the irises unnaturally pale with a yellow ring around them. Before Anthony could react, she lunged and sank her teeth in to his calf. He screamed in pain and fell heavily backwards, kicking out with his other foot. The heel of his shoe connected with enough force to break and spread her nose across her face, tearing the flesh from the bone and cartilage revealing the gaping nasal cavity.

Anthony was grabbed from behind and dragged away from the bloody mess on the floor. He looked up to see two police officers taking control. One, on his radio updating the control room, the other was barking orders to the badly injured attacker to back away. Two more police officers approached from the other direction. They drove the woman in to the ground and began to restrain her. One of the officers didn't move quickly enough and was bitten on the hand, a ragged crescent of ripped flesh oozed blood. Anthony noticed that the victim of the original attack was no longer moving. Blood was pooling below her and running towards

the gutter at the side of the road. Vehicles had begun to stack up on either side of the road. Impatient drivers, oblivious to what was causing the hold up angrily beeped their horns.

The attacker continued to struggle and snap at anyone who came close despite being handcuffed with two officers holding her legs. One of them held up his injured hand, examining the ugly bite in disbelief “I can't believe she bit me, the mad bitch.” He complained.

Anthony stared in wide eyed confusion at the scene before him. He heard someone speaking “Are you okay?” The officer that had pulled him back asked. Anthony turned to look at him.

“Uh, yeah, I think so.” Anthony replied absently. “A bit shaken up.”

“Do you need an ambulance?”

“No, no, don't be silly. I have to get to work.”

“Right. I'm going to take your details. We'll be in touch to take a statement later today. You've had a bit of a shock, if I were you I'd head home. But obviously that's up to you.”

Anthony nodded. He gave the officer his contact information and took a card with the incident details on it for reference. His calf felt stiff and he limped a bit as he walked away, his dark clothing masking the blood that seeped from his leg. He ignored the noises behind him as he headed back to the train station. In the background he missed the scene as one of the officers bent down to check on the condition of the victim of the attack, only for her to grab him and begin biting and clawing at him before the others could react.

Anthony walked down the steps of the railway station just in time to catch the home bound train. He rang his office to let them know that he wouldn't be in and briefly explained what had happened. He let them know that he'd catch up with emails at home then turned off his phone. By the time he got on the second bus in his journey he began to feel hot, his calf felt swollen and itchy. He'd have to soak it and then put plenty of Savlon on when he got home, he thought.

The house was empty. His wife at work, his daughter at school. A cup of tea and a nice warm bath would sort him out. He was sweating. His head hurt. Anthony turned the bath taps on and then made himself a cup of tea. Feeling tired from his chaotic morning he sat down on his favourite chair. Just for a minute, with his cup of tea. He closed his eyes.

Anthony Redfern died in his chair. The bath continued to fill. It overflowed, flooding the bathroom and the rooms below it. When his wife came home she found him. He killed her before she could be upset about the water damage, or realise he was dead. Their daughter came home later. She had been out with friends to an after school club. Together they killed her. Then the three of them made their way out of the house and visited their neighbours.

That was three years ago.

*

The early evening light pierced through the pine forest. As the dark shadows edged away from the sun on the thick carpet of pine needles, two sets of feet made their way through the half-light. One set, oblivious; the other, fixated. One pair wearing tired and muddy shoes, the other wrapped in sack cloth. The shoes clumsy and slow, the sacks swift and sure. At one time the shoes had been expensive; the type worn by a banker, accountant or other office dwelling professional. The sacks, indicative in the past of desperation; someone with no

alternative way of protecting their feet from the elements. Today, the sack cloth was not worn out of necessity but for another reason: stealth.

Shoes stumbled over the uneven ground, splashing in staggered steps through shallow puddles of rain water and rotting pine needles. He stopped as if unsure of which way to go. Sacks continued silently through the carpet of bracken and mud, halting when she saw that Shoes had stopped. Crouching down she pulled her hood back, her raven hair shorn on one side almost to the scalp. Shoes remained oblivious to her presence as she removed the bow from her back. The lightweight composite recurve design betrayed its previous life as the choice of champions; a Ferrari in the world of competition archery, now pressed into service against a different kind of target. Sacks narrowed her eyes, gauging the distance to Shoes, looking for signs of any breeze that could affect her shot. She nocked an arrow. The carbon fibre shaft slid back noiselessly as Sacks drew back the bowstring. The distance was about twenty metres, half the effective range of the bow, a straightforward shot. Sacks slowed her breathing, green eyes concentrating on the distance from the end of the arrow to Shoes. She made minute adjustments as she finely tuned her aim. Centre mass? Vital organs, heart and lungs: a nice large target, but not good enough this prey. The neck and spinal column? A good kill zone, but too tricky under these conditions. The head? Perfect.

Sacks breathed in, drawing back the bowstring to full extension. Finessed the aim one last time and let the arrow fly. She felt the bowstring brush the short hair at the side of her head, it sent a shiver of excitement down her spine. The arrow arced through the air, flashing as it crossed shafts of sunlight that broke through the gloom of the forest. The arrow hit its mark a little high and to the left of where Sacks was aiming. There must have been a breeze after all, but the outcome was not affected. The arrow smashed through the back of Shoes's skull, destroying what was left of his brain with a mixture of steel tipped arrow and shards of cranium. The arrow partially exited below the right supraorbital foramen, the eyeball already partially decayed, popped from the socket like a horror mask. What remained of the life of Shoes was extinguished before his body splashed down to the muddy ground. The noise of Shoes hitting the ground was louder than Sacks expected. She frantically looked around her to check that nothing else was coming to investigate the sound.

When she was sure the coast was clear, Sacks went to retrieve the arrow and search the body. Before she reached Shoes the familiar odour of the Infected almost overwhelmed her sense of smell. An odour she knew she would never get used to. A sickly sweet stench of decay and rotting, a cross between a butcher's bin and a stagnant pool. His suit had been 'off-the-peg', cheaper than his shoes, probably a middle manager. There was an open packet of chewing gum, a wallet, a mobile phone with a broken screen, and a set of house keys. Sacks looked through the wallet, discarding the money and the credit cards. Both useless in this world. There was a photo folded in half. Sacks unfolded it, carefully, and looked at the family smiling back at her. A man who was probably Shoes at one time, a woman and a child. They stood smiling in the sun, the background showing some tourist destination near a beach. The woman smiling down at what must have been their daughter as Shoes grinned towards the camera. A happy family. In a side pocket was a driving license. The driving licence named Shoes as "Anthony Redfern". Sacks looked at both the family photo and the drivers licence for a while before pocketing them. "Sorry Tony" Sacks said quietly. As she got up she pulled the hood back over her head before silently moving off.

The pine forest had been a choice that was both a gift and a curse for the Survivors that inhabited it. The soundless environment allowed them to hear anything approach, but the lack of wildlife had meant that they had to forage further afield, and at greater risk. Sacks wasn't foraging, this close to the Sanctuary had long been picked clean. There was the

occasional fungus growing on the dead wood of a fallen tree, but she wasn't experienced enough to pick fungi. Foraging didn't appeal to her anyway. She much preferred the patrol. It allowed her to be on her own. Being with the others made her remember the Before Times. Sacks didn't like to remember. On patrol the Before Times were the last things on her mind. On patrol she had to be totally present, aware of everything. The direction of the wind, the direction she was going, the sounds around her, the sounds she was making. Every second was broken down into milliseconds of awareness. The fatigue caused by being so intensely on edge for the duration of the patrol increased the chances of her sleeping through the night, without the dark claws of nightmares tearing her awake.

The image of the happy family in the picture remained in Sacks's mind as she made her way through the trees. In the Before Times, before the Outbreak, Sacks never had to fend for herself. Never taken aim at another living thing. Never loosed an arrow. Sacks had never killed anything. She had enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle, in a comfortable suburban home, eating pre-packed foods that were as far removed from the animals from which they originated as you could get. Spending her time watching inane television shows that concentrated on the shallow existence of celebrities. Whenever the Before Times crossed Sacks's mind it was like watching a film of someone else's life. That person was gone. Sacks tried to ignore the conflicting feelings rolling in the pit of her stomach. She fixed her attention to her surroundings, to the present.

Sacks could see the red painted trees ahead, her patrol complete for today. As she approached the trees that marked the boundary Sacks stopped and listened. Nothing. Before Sacks passed the painted trees she gave a short sharp whistle, twice. A single whistle sounded from somewhere in the trees. That was the signal to let her know that she had been spotted and it was safe for her to proceed. Without those whistles she would become a target for the same types of arrow she had used on Shoes. No one, and nothing, passes the painted trees unannounced; or if they do, they don't get far. When outside the painted trees, you're on your own, inside their boundary you'd better know how to whistle. Raised platforms about five metres above the ground and fifteen metres inside the boundary gave the sentries clear vantage points. They had overlapping firing arcs for their arrows; two sentries could target the same area if needed. The sentries watched silently as Sacks passed below them. Even though she had given the correct challenge response, Sacks knew that the sentries could still fire at her if they were suspicious of her movements. Never was there a better time to be sure footed, and never had there been a better term for the area she was traversing than The Dead Zone. Outside the boundary was No-Man's Land, the wild country. The Dead Zone ensured that the Sanctuary remained safe.

Sacks reached the palisade of pine trunks that provided the main fortification for the encampment. Sharpened stakes angled out of the ground to prevent intruders getting too close to the walls. Sacks approached the main gate. She stopped far enough away for the sentry at the overlook to see her.

"Sacks, returning from patrol." She shouted.

"Bitten or injured?" Came the challenge from the sentry.

"No." Replied Sacks.

"Arms!" The sentry commanded. Sacks removed the bow from her back and placed it on the ground before rolling up her sleeves and raising her arms so the sentry could clearly see the pale skin.

"Legs!" Sacks lowered her arms and pulled up the legs of her combat trousers to show that she had no injuries.

“Eyes!” Dropping her trouser legs, Sacks took a step forward and pulled her lower eyelids down so that the sentry could see her eyes properly. The lowering sun glancing off her irises, making them seem greener than usual.

“Open the gate! Patrol returning.” The sentry yelled down to the gate keeper.

Behind the gate Sacks could hear the large bar being removed from the barrier. It swung open and the sounds and smells of the encampment hit her. The pine forest had been practically silent and smelled of a mix of resin and musty earth. When the door was opened it was like stepping into another world. The sounds of people talking, there was the roar of the ironmonger's forge, some children laughing as they ran, chasing one another through the populous. The aroma of food cooking, of the various trades that were going on there, and the aromatic stench of rotting dung. All these sounds and smells were unknown outside of The Dead Zone. The boundary of red painted trees was as far as the sounds and smells of the Sanctuary travelled.

Thank you for reading chapter one of Lament for the Living. The full book will be available on May 10th 2013. In the meantime, the following titles are currently available:



Hannibal House: a horror tale of a house that attracts lost souls.

The Deluge of Elias: a futuristic dystopian tale of divine intervention... or is it?

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