

The Cerritos Confederation

by Aiden Chen

Argus raced down South Street, his heart pounding hard like an engine to power his legs, a set of well-oiled pistons pumping up and down. He'd been a cross country runner before the Crisis. As he rounded the corner onto Bloomfield Avenue, he had only one thought in mind: get to his destination—and fast.

He was pretty sure that he hadn't exerted himself this hard since the day the Crisis happened, just over a month ago now. The day that life as he'd known it had dissolved.

Argus distinctly remembered the troubling feeling he had as he biked over the 91 freeway and noticed that it was completely deserted. Not a single car. Then, he noticed that the lights that usually emanated from the windows of the stores in the Towne Center had all been replaced by a vacant darkness. It was way too early for any closing time.

But he was even more startled when a stranger accosted him. "The heck you doing? Get home!" Argus was so alarmed, "What's going on?" "Haven't you looked around you? The Internet has collapsed! A worldwide power-outage. Anyone with any sense would be indoors, but soon the chaos will begin. With enforcement crippled, the city will descend into anarchy!"

In the following weeks, Argus lived through a fever dream. The stranger was right disorder had reigned as life turned into everyone for themselves; Cerritos, once a united city, had disintegrated into a loose confederation held together by a council made of representatives from the self-interested neighborhoods the city had shattered into, based at the old Cerritos Library.

Which was where Argus was sprinting to. As a watchman, he was in charge of reporting any "significant or strange happenings" from where he was situated: near the Artesia border. And what he'd seen definitely qualified.

Argus burst into the lobby of the library. He sprinted up to the third floor, his shoes making echoing thuds on the stairs in the otherwise silent building.

Bursting into the old skyline room, he unceremoniously interrupted an ongoing argument. The council looked up as the yelling abruptly ceased.

"Do you have anything to report?" one of them said, all diplomatic-like, as though they hadn't been yelling at each other a moment earlier.

"Yes..." Argus gasped, struggling to catch his breath. "An incoming mob of people coming from the east; I think they're people fleeing their failing communities! They'll be on us very soon."

The council started arguing again, but at that moment another person exploded into the room, more out of breath as Argus had been.

"Emergency... on Bloomfield, now!"

As one mind, everyone in the room huddled to the window overlooking the street outside. Sure enough, a huge cluster of bodies were streaming down Bloomfield like water gushing through a pipe. Everyone exchanged looks.

"We need to work together to face this new threat," Argus stated.

"Back together as one community."

The other messenger looked at the assembled council expectantly.

"Well?"