

*Flames Resound*  
By Danny Cove

It happened in the flash of an eye. As I was walking in my backyard, admiring all the plants that lined the fence, I began to smell the pervasive odor of smoke wafting toward me. I sniffed once, twice, trying to determine its origin. Then came the rumble, a distant quaking in my feet which carried up my legs and moved as far as my ears. I heard the echoes, the repeated blasts of some distant dangers. I heard it again and again, but I couldn't tell where the smell or the sounds were coming from, so I began to run back into my house for safety.

But when I got to the door, I found that it was shut tight, trapping me outside, away from shelter, where more rumbles and the smell of more smoke began to grow stronger. I briefly looked around at the yard, spying the shadows which were stretching menacingly, as if clawing at me, threatening to pull me into the nighttime gloom which was almost upon me. I noted the gate of the fence and was dismayed to see a padlock, for which I had not the key to open it. But not far away, there was another possibility: a hole dug out but never finished. Running to it as fast as I could, I stretched forth and began pulling the dirt away, expanding it. More smoke, more rumbling pounds from some distant location, more digging furiously beneath the fence, the protection which may have become my doom due to its great height.

At last, the hole was big enough for me to squeeze under. I felt my innards compressed by the immobile boards as I pushed and pulled myself under them, but finally I emerged on the other side, no longer trapped by walls of wood and nails. Another rumble brought to my realization the fact that I was now beyond the bounds of safety, out in the world and closer to the angry mystery.

I ran around to the front of my house, but the door there offered no more passage than did the back. I screamed for help, but after only a few seconds, an explosion much closer startled me and I backed down into the yard, afraid that such an explosive sound would tear down my very home. I saw eyes under the porch and hunkered down to see my cat hiding under there, presumably from the same thunderous, ashy danger that I could sense. I wanted to reach in and pull her out, but she was feisty and would surely scratch me something fierce, so I left her and ran out into the street, hoping to find someone who would know what was happening.

My friend, Ben, came running up to me, the same look of panic in his eyes that I'd seen in the eyes of my cat. "Ben, what's going on?!" I yelled as another rumble rolled up my legs and along my spine.

"I don't know!" he called back, his voice high and frightened. "I've seen fire in the skies, and everywhere is the smell of burning! What should we do?!"

"I don't know!" I yelled back, but stopped as I saw someone standing on a box down the street, their voice calling out in an attempt to rival the power of the peals of thunder. "Maybe he will!" I howled as a crack from the sky echoed in my ears, making my bones quake and my mind begin to ring.

"That guy's crazy!" Ben responded. "All he talks about is the end of the world!"

"Does this seem like anything else?" I asked as I took off at a slow pace, keeping myself hunkered low in case any of the fire Ben spoke of made an appearance. It took less than a minute for us to reach the geezer standing on the street corner. There was a milk crate below him and he was calling out to anyone who would listen, his cries and howls being, for the most part, totally ignored. But we were listening, Ben and I, to the strange words from a stranger elder.

“The days of the human race have come to an end!” he cried out, his voice not even reaching the other side of the street, it was so weak.

“What’s happening?” I asked him, my voice going hoarse from the smoke, which seemed to settle on my tongue and tickle my throat.

“The fire from the sky!” the old geezer screeched, and as if on cue, there was a sudden flash in the sky above him, a crack of white lightning followed by an all-consuming darkness. Seconds later, there was another flash, this one radiating out like a great wheel in the sky, with tendrils stretching out from the core in all directions. “The human race has brought its end!” the old geezer continued. “This is the day spoken of by our kind for a hundred generations! The day when fire will consume the sky, when the footsteps of their end will echo in their bones and when it all is done, only silence will fall and smoke will remain! This is the end of days, of nights and of time itself!”

“You’re crazy!” Ben yelled back at him.

“Am I now?” the old one asked. In the dark, his eyes almost seemed to glow, reflecting the explosions which preceded every rumble and burning odor. “Mankind will fall to its doom before this night is through!” Seeing the terror on mine and Ben’s faces, the old one softened somewhat and he looked down at us from atop his crate. “Do not worry, my sons. The few of us who survive will live on, and in a few generations, all memories of this night will be lost, vanished in the dark like the humans who called forth the burning light.”

There was a shrill whistling from nearby, a high-pitched sound barely able to overcome the great quaking in our feet. I followed that sound, leaving Ben with the crazy rambler as I moved toward the shriek in the night. I at last found its source at my very own house, where a beautiful young woman was standing with the door open. “Come inside!” she called to me, and I obeyed, stooping low as I ran inside. But even inside, I could still hear the rumbles and cracks filling my ears with their terrifying noise, could still see the light illumining the windows. Scrambling, I scurried under a nearby table, shoving the chairs out of the way as I moved.

“It’s okay,” the beautiful woman cooed softly, stooping down to my level. “It’ll be over after tonight.”

I heard her words, and I trusted her words, and as she put her hand gently on the back of my head, I began to remember what had happened last year, and the year before that. The end of the world was a recurring event, it seemed. Fire in the sky, thunder in the ground and smoke in the air...this time of year is always difficult for my kind. That’s why it’s a common saying among dogs: why, oh why, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?