

## IN THE GLOW-ZONE

by

# Brian Lumley

Mommy is dead.

She is dead and there is no water and no rats left. The water has turned very hard and thick now so we can't fish. And we can't dig roots because the ground is hard too. There was cold-white when we woke up and found Mommy dead. That was three days. She is cold and thin and stiff and still. She is dead. She is like the rats we trap or throw stones at when they are dead. Except they are sometimes fat and she is very thin ...

We all cried when we saw her. She had told us she would be dead soon. When the rats were all gone from round here before the water went hard and the cold-white she said it. She told us I am going into town for rats I will be back soon. If I don't come back keep warm. Eat roots and rats and drink river water. Try to find clothes in the villages – *and keep away from men!*

Before she went into town she said this will be the death of me. She meant the Green Glow. Nobody lives in the town, it is all broken down and at night there is the Green Glow. We can see it now fading as the sky gets bright. Mommy is sitting in the corner all stiff and cold. She has a Green Glow too now.

Before she died she said you are to eat me if you get too hungry but please bury my bones and make a little cross to mark the place. We think she did not know what she said. We will not eat her, we would not like that and anyway she has the Green Glow. We never ate rats with the Green Glow and we will not eat Mommy. She once told us the Green Glow is your father, it is more your father than the rotten bastard who ran off on me when the war started. *Men are all bastards* she told us.

When she came back from town we ate. She had small rats and one very big one she called a cat. There were more cats she said but all mutants. This one was a very old cat from before the war. He remembered people and went to her so she could hit him with her axe... The axe is ours now she is dead.

She roasted some rats and we ate but soon she was sick. Next day her hair came out. Next day it came out a lot and blood too. Then she said the Green Glow has got me and I will die. And she did. And three days are gone and the rats too and the cold-white is here and we are hungry.

Over there is smoke. It has nearly always been there. Mommy only made fires at night. She said she knew the Woman and Her Two who made the fire. She said she had met them long ago when we were little. The Woman was nice but Mommy was frightened of Her Two. They were not sensible they were like animals Mommy said. They aren't like you she said they bite like rats.

The smoke is still there but it is quiet now. Before there was sometimes noise. When there was noise Mommy said they were hunting for food the Woman and Her Two. Then she would make us hide but nobody ever came here ...

The Woman and Her Two are very quiet now. Perhaps they are dead like Mommy. We think the *men* got them *men* and their dogs. Dogs are like rats but big even bigger than cats Mommy told us. We couldn't see the dogs much but we heard them making loud angry noises. We saw the *men* a lot of them running through the village over there. They had ropes and we saw things jumping on the ropes where the cold-white was deep following the *men*. Because the cold-white is deep we couldn't see the dogs very well but they jumped and made angry noises and we heard them.

We heard the Woman too she was crying very loud and Her Two were making noises like the dogs. That was before dark. In the night the *men* laughed and the Woman made very bad noises. Now there is no noise but the smoke is more than before. We think the *men* made a big fire before they left. The cold-white is falling but over there we still see the smoke.

We know all *men* are bastards because Mommy said so and she said what the bastards would do to us if they found us. We think they did it to the Woman and Her Two. We will only light our fire at night. Then the *men* and their dogs will stay out of the Glow-Zone ...

Once before when it was warm and there were roots and some fat rats and a few fish a *man* found us. He was a bastard.

When Mommy saw him coming she said hide and we did. He didn't see us right off but we could see him. He didn't say a lot but we knew Mommy was frightened she was frightened of the *man*. We never saw a *man* before he was a lot like Mommy. He had a stick-thing. Mommy gave him some fish to eat and showed him a place to sleep when he was asleep she came to us and said he might be OK you stay there and when he wakes up he might go away. *Don't let him see you* she said. She said he has a gun it is that stick-thing he carries it can kill very quick .

While she was talking the *man* got up and came over. He said what you got there in the back and shoved Mommy out of the way. Then he said Goddamn might have known it a girl like you alone in the Glow-Zone well you treat me right and there'll be no trouble.

He caught hold of Mommy's hair and started to pull her and we moved at him. He looked very frightened he pointed his stick-thing Mommy said *no stay where you are it's all right*. We knew it wasn't.

It got dark soon we stayed where we were and listened to the funny noises in the dark. The *man* was making a lot of little noises and Mommy was crying but quietly. It was very dark when she came to us she said go get the axe the bastard's really asleep this time we'll kill him but let me get his gun first.

We got the axe she got his gun and he came awake. Mommy stood back and we got hold of him quick before he could stand and hit him in the body with the axe. *No no* Mommy said *his head get his head*. He was shouting *oh my god my god* we hit him in the head. There was a lot of blood.

Next morning Mommy said we won't bury such as him he'll feed the fish so we took him to the river. His body moved slow in the water towards town right in the middle of the Glow-Zone. Serve the bastard right Mommy said.

It is very cold we think of a fire. A fire will bring *men* but not if we use the Woman and Her Two's fire. We think they must be dead. Anyway we are cold.

We go to where the smoke rises through the cold-white. Nearly there we find things we think they must be the Woman's Two. They are dead and stiff there is a lot of blood and little holes in them. We see how they look and remember what Mommy said we are glad they are dead. The Woman is near the fire she has no clothes she is stiff and cold. There is blood on her face and body she looks a lot like Mommy and we are sad. She is dead. There is a cave in a big heap of bricks it has a blanket hanging at the front. The Woman and Her Two lived there we think. We move towards the cave perhaps it is warm.

There is a loud dog noise a dog jumps at us through the cold-white. We grab him and hit with the axe he is dead. A *man* comes through the blanket in front of the cave he says *what the hell* .

*Jesus Christ boys lookee here* he points his stick-thing called a gun and we rush at him. We are angry all *men* are bastards. There is a very loud noise and we are hurt. We are hit in our body and the gun has smoke but we don't stop running on all our hands and legs. The *man* points his gun again but we are on him. We knock down the gun we swing our axe at his head. There is blood on the cold-white the *man* is down we stamp on him.

The blanket is torn down other *men* the *men* from last night are there they have guns. All the guns are making loud noises and we are hurt very bad in the body. One man turns to run when we are near and we hit him hard our axe sticks in his back when he falls he makes loud noises.

One other bastard says *Great god in will you look at what a bloody – look out!* We rush at him but the guns are loud and there is much blood from our body and too much hurt. We jump on the *man* and pull an arm off him and stamp on him.

Now there are dogs jumping and they have teeth. We are torn the guns hurt we fall down in the cold-white it is red now.

One of our heads is hit we hurt so much we crash all our arms and legs.

Our body is all red we are very tired.

Another head is hit.

Another... We will soon be dead our body will be stiff and cold.

Like Mommy.