

James B. Jones

Writer, Editor, and Narrative Designer
Web Portfolio Sample

Fortaleza Antigua: At the Edge of the Storm

Hello, everyone!

We are back with another entry from the journal of Emmanuel Almas, as he travels across New Eden. At the end of his last entry, he was running for his life from Empire MacArthur, straight towards the tiny neighborhood of Fortaleza Antigua – the only few buildings which remain of what was once Fortaleza.

With it so close to the Melding, the area has been long abandoned. Yet, as he begins to investigate this dangerous place, he learns that it may not be as empty as it seems...

Before the crash of the Arclight, Fortaleza was considered to be a cultural, economic, and social epicenter for northern Brazil. The capital of the Brazilian state of Ceará, millions flocked to this place to witness holmgang matches, visit numerous museums, or simply enjoy the beautiful vistas.

Fortaleza was also “ground zero” when the Arclight crashed, leaving much of the city in ruin and swallowing all but a tiny sliver of Fortaleza proper within the Melding. The tiny sliver of the city that remains, now known as Fortaleza Antigua, sits atop a massive cliff. Below it is Sunken Harbor, and in the distance the lights of Copacabana flicker against the backdrop of night. This place sits empty, long evacuated by the Accord. But walking through it serves as a stark reminder of the truly destructive power of the Melding...

The climb to Fortaleza Antigua is still something of a blur. I can hear my heart pounding from the adrenaline as I raced across Empire MacArthur and began the climb up. But now, roughly half-way up the side of the cliff, I realize that this may not have been one of my smarter decisions. But, as I look down to see three rather large and very angry men waiting for me, I know that there’s no turning back now.

I also know, in this moment, that the good doctor Steranko doesn’t know his front from his back. Perhaps it was a sign of growing old, or weariness from being in the same area for too long – or maybe he was setting me up? No, I can’t let myself think that – he’s Accord. He was probably just confused in all the excitement.

As I finally climb to the top of the cliff and roll, exhausted, onto the wooden lookout deck, I take a minute to catch my breath. At this altitude the wind has a cold nip to it which motivates me off of my back and to my feet to take a look at my surroundings, and the first thing that sticks out to me is how undisturbed this place is. Dinnerware still sits on tables, as do the bottles of beer resting on shelves behind the bar. The flowers, red roses that were probably brought down from northern Mexico or the United States, are still alive – a testament to Accord engineering and the automated watering systems that are somehow still active.

James B. Jones

Writer, Editor, and Narrative Designer

Web Portfolio Sample

As I head up the stairs, I see the large anti-aircraft cannon on the cliff side. Although the Accord doesn't dare come here, it's apparent that the cannons are still active. They're most likely remote-controlled. Smart move.

I'm taken aback by the complete sense of aloneness I feel. It wasn't even a year ago that this place was filled with life, of people looking forward to a reprieve from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Now they sit empty, untouched by humanity for what feels like eons, but I know it's only been a couple of months. The eeriness of it all gives me chills.

Turning a corner, I see a wall of large billboards. Flickering on and off as the power fades, the ads highlight "Destination Relaxation" and implore residents to "cast your worries away". As I take in my surroundings, I see small fragments of debris floating in the air around me – large, wispy clouds of black smoke whisk past me. A nagging feeling takes hold in the back of my mind, and I feel myself compelled to follow the smoke clouds.

Passing by the billboards, I see something massive in the distance; large and black, with glowing red cores. Immediately it hits me - this is what Remigio was pointing towards, back in Stonewall. This sight, frightening from kilometers away, now towers no more than ten yards in front of me. Yet, I can't help myself. I have to see this for myself, and I begin the ascent up the staircase.

It's a tree.

A massive, black tree that had been absorbed by the Melding and twisted, grown to monstrous heights and now slowly wraps itself around the buildings of Fortaleza Antigua that had been spared. For a moment I could swear that I saw it pulsing, but I quickly write that off as the Melding wall playing with my eyes. Despite my better judgment, my curiosity takes the better of me and I start approaching the tree where it hangs over a railing. Just as I reach out to touch it, I hear something – a voice.

"Hey!"

I snap around, certain that I'm going to be face-to-face with a squad of Chosen. Instead I see a lone man, wiry and wide-eyed, briskly walking towards me. I take a step towards him, my head cocked to the side like a curious dog.

"What in the hell are you doing? Are you insane!?" He shouts at me, stopping at the base of the stairs near the advertisements.

"What are you talking about?"

"Are you deaf?!" The strange man runs up the stairs and grabs my wrist, practically dragging me away

James B. Jones

Writer, Editor, and Narrative Designer

Web Portfolio Sample

from the tree and back down the staircase. “That thing is pure freakin’ evil, amigo! We need to get inside!”

I dig my feet into the floor and yank my arm free from his grip. “Who are you,” I demand, locking eyes. “And what in the hell are you doing here!?”

“My name is Jonas and I’ll explain inside.” The man and I make our way through the long hallway and up another flight of stairs before climbing onto a nearby balcony. As we travel, I take the time to play twenty questions with the man. He ignores all of them. As I lean against the balcony the man, Jonas, approaches the door and pushes with a mighty effort. I can hear the steel creak and groan against him, but eventually it gives slightly and he slides inside, between the door and the arch. A moment later he reaches a hand out and signals me to come inside.

I’m in no position to debate.

Forcing myself inside the small opening, I’m immediately given pause. The room is pitch black, save for some candles and solar lanterns that are scattered around the room. The front door – which would lead to the rest of the building, is barricaded with heavy crates – as are the windows. Data tablets, open MREs, and countless discarded papers lay on the floor, and the walls are scribbled with random notes about Trans-Hub, the Melding, and a crude drawing of what is either the Arclight or a shoe-horn. It’s hard to tell in this light.

“What were you trying to do out there,” Jonas asks. His tone is almost accusatory.

“I was looking at... whatever that thing was.”

“You mean you don’t know?”

“Know what?”

“That thing is alive,” he says. “It lives, and breathes, and consumes. It’s consuming us right now. Slowly, but surely, it’s taking everything that was my city and absorbing it.”

“Your city? So you lived here before the Melding?”

“My whole damn life! When they deployed the wall, I wasn’t about to leave. I’ll be damned if I let their goons scare me out of my home!”

“So,” I begin to ask, arching a brow. “Why in... why... how did you avoid detection?”

James B. Jones

Writer, Editor, and Narrative Designer

Web Portfolio Sample

He looks me up and down as he sits in an old cushioned chair. "I think you know."

"What am I supposed to know?"

"Hell, they sent you!" He shoots out of the chair and takes two large, fast steps towards me. "They sent you to keep an eye on me! They sent you to make sure I was still here. I'm what's keeping this place free for the people."

"What in the hell are you blathering on about," I shout him down. It's becoming quickly apparent that he's not living in the same reality that I and the rest of New Eden are. Regardless, whatever tone I used must have worked as it snapped him out of his tirade.

"You really don't know?"

I take a nerve-calming breath. "Don't know *what*?"

"This," he says. "Was all planned."

"What was planned?"

"The wall! The "Melding", as they call it. Brought in to sweep across the Earth and scare the rest of us into complying with those fascists in Trans-Hub!"

"Wait," I say as I try to wrap my mind around... whatever he just said. "Are you implying that the Accord intentionally created the Melding?"

"That's exactly what they're doing! Project Five-Five-A: an artificial creation of the Melding wall!"

The 'Project Five-Five-A' he speaks of was an abandoned attempt by Accord scientists to recreate the Melding on a small-scale basis in order to study its effects on fauna. It was commissioned by the Accord six weeks after the crash, and decommissioned two weeks later as it posed a "severe health risk" to those involved.

This guy is completely bonkers.

"How did you find this out," I ask him. He points to a large stack of data tablets collecting dust in the corner.

"They came here, looking at the... thing..." He closes his eyes and takes a breath, as if to calm himself.

"They want to drive us off of Earth. To drive us to Alpha Prime!"

James B. Jones

Writer, Editor, and Narrative Designer
Web Portfolio Sample

“But why?”

“Because there are no borders on Alpha Prime. There are no regional governments, or holdout nations, or violent warlords. There is only the Accord. They move humans to Alpha Prime, they control humanity’s future! That’s why they deployed the wall. That’s why they’re forcing all of us to the coast – to wait for their *Tecora* to arrive to ship us to our new ‘home’.”

“It’s called the *Aegis*.” My voice is calm, my tone steady.

“I know what it’s called, but it doesn’t matter. Names are pointless – what matters is purpose. And that fascist Nostromo has no intention of keeping us on Earth.”

“Nostromo is single-handedly responsible for trying to build up Accord defenses along the Melding. He’s been quoted saying that he’ll hold Earth to the last man. I think you’re mistaken.”

“No!” Jonas slams his fist against the wall. “That’s the charade, dammit! Think about it. Just... think about it for a damn second! They keep us fighting, keep us thinking that hope is alive, and then just as the *Aegis* is on its final approach he’ll tell us that the war is lost – that our only salvation is to retreat to Alpha Prime.”

“Okay, okay,” I’ve backed up to the door at this point, which remains slightly ajar. “But... if you’re so certain of this, tell me... why?”

“Why? What do you mean, *why*?”

“Why sacrifice the Earth? Why... why the Chosen?”

He goes to speak before pausing and thinking about it. As he thinks, I slip through the doorway and pull it shut behind me – door closing much easier than when it opened. I hear his body slam against it from the other side, and see the door slowly begin to pull itself open. I climb over the ledge and drop down, hearing the door open just as I land on the stairs.

The stairs.

I land and immediately tumble downward, curling myself into a ball as I roll down the stone and wood staircase before landing with a thud at the base. I groan, looking up to see Jonas staring at me with clenched jaw.

“You’re blind! You’re all blind! They’re going to ship you to their prison world! You’d be Nostromo’s

James B. Jones

Writer, Editor, and Narrative Designer

Web Portfolio Sample

slave!”

I roll onto my stomach then push myself off the ground, scrambling before taking off in a dead bolt down the walkway and down another flight of stairs. Once I’m clear from his view, I slow my pace to a steady walk as I approach another guard railing. I look out, at all of New Eden that lies before me – waiting for me to see. As I look across at the horizon, and feel the whipping wind from the Melding wall against my cheek and forearm, I mutter a single question to myself.

“...how the hell do I get down?”