THE METEOR

A chilling seriocomic
written by
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Boston was on the edge of a cliff. The date was precisely the 15th of February, 2060, the day after Valentine’s Day. Some fair men took their girls on a date; ice skated on the frozen pond at the Commons, ate dinner in a fancy French restaurant, and kissed the night away until they could actually qualify for the Guinness Book of World Records. And, of course, there were other men who depressed themselves to solemn slumber by listening to Christopher Kirkbride conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the recital of Mahler’s Second Symphony sixteen times consecutively. Continuing on the subject, it was just a regular winter day in the city of Boston, in a new democratic society where everyone can live the wealth and welfare they so cherish. That is, the day was perfect–before the thing came.

It was approximately four o’clock in the afternoon. The sky tinged a beautiful, crimson-colored sunset. People were going home to their loving families. The great maestro Christopher Kirkbride was scheduled to give a concert of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony that night at eight o’clock. Thousands of humble citizens had reserved their tickets for the evening. However, some people only felt like spending a quiet day at home.

One such place was the newly built environmental research laboratory on Commonwealth Avenue. Every day, scientists living in the Suffolk county area would discuss scientific plans of a new future for Earth. For the past few years, scientists had worked on new and improved hydroelectric transportation for the people in New England. Their so-called “Land Shark” locomotives would make a milestone in the history of alternative energy. Head scientist Dr. Brady W. Plog had proposed before the global science convention in Brussels a new innovation in the setup of hydroelectric Land Sharks everywhere. This proposal had officially become known as the Plog Plan, and researchers from around the world are currently working on numerous experiments to ensure the credibility of Dr. Plog’s dream of a purer world without oil or natural gas.

Five of Boston’s own scientists have been particularly active to test out the Plog Plan. Under the authority of Dr. Dennis Brake at Boston University, scientists Eric Eakin, Tyler Gilpin, Nathaniel Dorantes, and Tiffany Howard are currently working on plans for a new hydroelectric train designed to roll from Boston to Pittsburgh. Progress has been slow because of the freezing winters. The idea was put on a small hiatus from December-January, because of the frequency of flurries and severe snowstorms.
Dennis Brake is a 33-year-old professor of inorganic chemistry at Boston University, who has been in the field for four years now. For his doctorate, he had written a thesis on stereochemistry, how molecules are structured. He has loved his job with great pleasure since, and has made great colleagues with the other faculty scientists.

Four other scientists collaborate with Professor Brake. Tyler, 28 years, earned his Master’s from Concordia University in Ann Arbor, Michigan a year ago. His favorite pastime was watching old episodes of *Bill Nye, the Science Guy* and *Jason Woodham’s Mysteries of Parallel Universes*. His first book was *Contact* by Carl Sagan, which was a Christmas present he received from his mother when he was ten. He went on to study Astronomy and Environmental Physics in high school and enrolled at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. After earning his Masters of Science and Technology, he moved to Boston to conduct research on the uses of solar energy, and is currently working at Boston University.

Nathaniel Dorantes, 29 years, is a first-generation Mexican American. He was born in Albuquerque to Mexican immigrants who were easily welcomed and naturalized. His father was a Catholic priest who worked at the Queen of Angels Chapel, who would receive confessions at least thrice times thirty a fortnight. Dorantes’ mother was a gardener in a floral shop downtown. Her knowledge of flowers and horticulture inspired him to delve into biology in high school, and he studied at Boston University, where he continues to be a member of the faculty.

Tiffany Howard is the youngest of the group. An intelligent woman, she grew up a Bostonian, graduated a salutatorian of her class, and skipped ahead in college. Her thesis on wind energy granted her the opportunity to study environmental sciences with the team she was associated with today. She shared a relationship with Eric, the last member of the faculty. He had a marvelous sense of humor, and would every day share jokes with his students and colleagues. He was born in Toronto whose father was a hod carrier and mother was an optometrist. He studied science after touring one of his father’s brick construction trips, and he soon moved to Boston after he graduated from high school to study more on environmental science, calculus, and masonry. His major interests are studying the climates in the Middle East and the ecology of Washington’s inimitable Hoh Rain Forest.

The five were about to leave for the night.

“Okay, everyone, your findings on building the train is coming along nicely,” said Professor Brake with high esteem. “Tomorrow we shall commence with the project.”
“High five?” asked Eric.

Tyler chuckled, “Why not? We worked seven light-years on this project. Let’s get this thing done!”

Everyone shared a hand, and went into the backroom of the laboratory to get their coats.

Tiffany asked Eric, “Do you want to go buy some Italian at Sigona’s?”

“It’s a date,” replied Eric. “Let’s just hope you don’t spill the ziti like last time.”

“That wasn’t me, that was the wait–”

Eric turned to the other guys, expecting a joke. “See, this lady is too reluctant to admit to her own faults.”

Eric got the last laugh. “Yeah, I knew it was the waiter. The waiter was all drunk with Chianti. I just wanted to get in the one-liner.”

“Well, sometimes a practical joke just falls flat,” said Tiffany, chuckling.

They both pecked, and they were the first to leave. Professor Brake just put on his green cardigan and said, “Well I am no Jack Benny, but I am just going to waltz my way out. Does anyone need a ride home?”

“I’ve my bus pass. Should be no problem,” said Tyler.

“My apartment’s not that far, so I might just walk with Tyler to the stop,” replied Nathan.

“All right, I think we should close shop, guys.”

They turned off the lights and headed outside. Tyler walked out shivering for a moment. But both he and Nathan were determined to walk over to the bus stop. Professor Brake took off in his 2055 Lexus CT Hybrid. It was a nice Napoleon blue car, polished to perfection. The car had clean seats, decent mileage, and had 5-speed automatic transmission with a built-in electric hybrid.

Professor Brake’s apartment was not that far from the campus, actually near Fenway Park. He lived in a 600-square-foot studio in a large complex on Longwood Avenue. It consisted of a furnished air-conditioned living area with a 54-inch Toshiba television set and a surround-sound entertainment system, a reasonably-sized kitchen with a bar, a small dining square, divided bed space with a comfortable Serta, and a bathroom with a clean bathtub and shower. Brake casually laid his cardigan on the floor and nearly collapsed on his sofa. But he managed to disguise the fatigue and tuned to reruns of Nova on PBS-WGBH.

* * *
Douglas Herron was just an average boy driving a Domino’s truck for a living. He enjoyed his job, the co-workers, and aspiring to befriend every man, woman, and child who was starving for a nice, warm pan pizza within his range of the 30-minute policy.

The next house he arrived was one on Ridgemont Street. It belonged to an old woman named Mrs. Lorette. The pizza arrived precisely on time, the pie still warm. He stepped up onto the cement porch and rang the doorbell. The old lady answered the door.

“Why, Douglas, you brought the pizza,” smiled Mrs. Lorette.

“Yes, ma’am, still fresh with all the garlic and seasonings, just like you wanted,” assured Douglas.

“How much do I owe you—let me bring out my wallet.”

Douglas raised his hand and smiled. “It’s no trouble, Mrs. Lorette, it’s all on me.”

He handed her the pizza, and she quickly set it on the trolley adjacent to the door.

“Bless your heart, Douglas.”

The old lady gave him a hug of confidence, and Douglas gleefully drove off, waving to her. He did not need a tip from her, since her sweetness was enough.

And now it was on to Verndale Street. A couple had ordered a pizza with extra sausage and pepperoni. Verndale was not far from Ridgemont. He just drove approximately ten blocks. The pie was still warm. He modestly rang the doorbell. It was Mrs. Rumbold.

“Well, let’s see. Now a large pan pizza for both of us...you said the total was $11.18?”

“Just fine, Madelyn. I am just hoping I can just survive in this bitter tundra,” replied Doug, almost trembling.

“Well, let’s see. Now a large pan pizza for both of us...you said the total was $11.18?”

“That’s right,” said Douglas.

“All right, here is that plus $5 trip.”

“Thanks, ma’am.”

She also gave him a hug of confidence, and afterwards he continued on, knowing he has some priceless friends.

* * *

Meanwhile, renovation was being done at the TD Garden, stadium of the Boston Celtics. Rebecca Rubbra was the person in charge of the project. She was the head engineer of Remis Construction and Associates, headed by the current chairwoman Artemis Remis, who decided to
pass the management on to her entire team in the North Boston branch. Explicitly, the company
functioned on democratic principles.

Right now, construction is slow because of the weather. Despite the layman’s maxim of
drivers working whether in rain, sleet, hail, or snow, the workers were operating the cranes in the
middle of a cold snap. The icy weather was overcoming them. At least six accidents were
reported to the foreperson in charge of the day. They were fine, but they had to head home with
sick pay due to broken arms.

But Rebecca was still safe. She worked most of the day with her other co-workers. When
everyone’s shift was over, and everyone punched in their time, Rebecca smiled triumphantly at
the near completion of the new embellishments of the basketball stadium.

* * *

The Radisson Hotel was bustling today. People had come from all corners of the
metropolitan area to the hotel to see the Electric Luna Society revue which was to be performed
tomorrow. The playbill features a veteran juggler named Sean Lauder, an endowed man who
retired from circus life but still continues on with his juggling career. He had loved juggling
since he received his first ball for Christmas as a kid, and learned to continually bounce his
objects in the air. Next on the bill was Levi Neumann, an African-American puppeteer who
mainly makes a profession making dolls in his own workshop in New York. Some others include
a magician, a guitarist who can also play Elvis Costello on the piano at the same time, and last
but not least, the big finish is the rock concert performed by the famous British punk rock band
The Nihilist Nine, comprised of four appealing musicians. The band was led by eccentric front
man and keyboardist Bert Russell, with Brandon Gingell on electric guitar, Forrest Lorimer on
bass guitar, and Brandon’s brother Joel on drums.

“Ah, you must be the Nihilist Nine. One of my bell boys is a big fan of your music. He
was wondering if he could get an autograph,” said the front desk clerk.

“Does he have a reservation?” joked Bert.

The clerk chuckled. “I have no idea. I’m not sure.”

“Oh, no trouble. Where do we sign?”

There was not much paper to be found. The clerk looked in a drawer to find a used
notepad that guests had been using for grocery lists.

“Here, use this,” suggested the clerk.
“Thanks,” said all the musicians.
“I’ll give this to him after he’s done showing some guests to their rooms. By the way, here is your room key, and one of the other porters will escort you to your room.”
“Thanks sir,” said Bert kindly. The other bell boy followed instruction and led them to their room on the third floor. Meanwhile, from behind, the juggler and the doll maker were rehearsing backstage for their acts tomorrow. They had become good friends during their durations of rehearsal.
“You are good with your puppets. Would people consider you the ‘Black Jim Henson’?” asked Sean, the juggler in a complimentary manner.
“No, absolutely not. I would give that credit to Kevin Clash,” replied Levi.
“Ah the man behind that little furry creature of our childhoods called Elmo,” Sean sighed.
“And Clifford too. He was a brilliant Muppeteer.”
Afterwards, a thought came to Levi’s mind. “Say, Sean, would you care to volunteer for my puppet show?”
Sean initially hesitated. “I don’t think I could do it.”
“Really it’s nothing, you just have to use your hands to control the puppet, and a voice to provide character. Your hand is like a skeleton; without it, a puppet has no life. Even strings cannot get sole support for a marionette; you must always have your hands to give it life.”
Sean thought it over, his teeth clenched to his lips.
“You don’t have to be talented to perform a puppet show. You just need hands and a voice.”
Sean relented but accepted with a sigh, “All right, I’ll try.”
Levi smiled. “Here, it’s really simple.” He quickly grabbed one of his puppets out of an old trunk. It was a doll that resembled a princess with a purple dress. “Can you do a falsetto, but with a more authentic sound?”
“Ummmm, my falsetto is embarrassing,” Sean shook his head.
“Don’t despair, my friend. Sing from your diaphragm and you will be fine. Make it sing, make that voice stand, and make those hands dance.”
“Magnificent!” shouted a voice. It came from Doug Bonnet, Progressive Democratic state legislator of Massachusetts representing Middlesex Colony, who came to watch the
rehearsal. He had rented a room on the second floor of the hotel, because the legislature was going to hold a special session at the Capitol tomorrow on managing the annual green budget.

“I didn’t know I was into this line of work,” said Sean blushing.

Bonnet chuckled. “Heh, the only theatrical work I can do is tap dance in front of sheep. The sheep don’t mind at all.”

Bonnet paused a little. “But, in my opinion, I must say you two are talented to do an act together. Get out there and give the people that talent!”

He winked and left the stage. Sean and Levi smiled, knowing deep in their hearts that a politician had just complimented them.

* * *

Aaron Gregory was quietly walking down Washington Street, escaping the troubles that had embraced him. Aaron was a sixteen-year-old junior from Fenway High School. He was an intelligent kid, but shunned by his peers because of his timidity. He only had some friends who understood his pressures and could stand beside him all the way. He never had a girlfriend; girls were afraid to come near him. They all fitted the “Popular cheerleader gets the captain of the football team” archetype. But Aaron always kept hope in the pockets of his coat. Tomorrow was simply another day.

Katelyn Halsey was in the same boat as Aaron, but actually more the reverse. She is a pretty sight: light brown hair, outstanding smile, and beautiful blue eyes. She also attended Fenway High, and was definitely a cheerleader. She was a soccer player, one who could kick a hard ball into the goal. But she was tired of the dates she had to bear, the drabs and dweebys. She was tired of being the popular one, and so she joined the harem of shunned “losers” characteristic of adolescent society.

Aaron was on his way to the public library, starting from the bus stop on the corner of Newbury-Exeter. He was looking for a book on Norway, particularly history books on Grieg and the development of New Norway which had succeeded in transforming Norwegian politics in the past twenty years. He walked down the street, head looking down. While finally turning left on Boylston Street, he had bumped right into Katelyn, while carrying a huge stack of books of her own. Her books fell and landed scattered on the sidewalk.

Aaron looked at Katelyn with remorse, “Sorry miss, let me pick those up for you.”
Katelyn steadily smiled. She was questioning an immediate image in her head that gave her prognostications of the perfect date. After Aaron stacked and gave her books back, she thanked him. And then, he carefully looked at Katelyn and an image popped into his head, as well. This was perhaps one of the first times a girl did not seem timid to approach him. He also visualized having a date with her.

_Don’t feel scared to ask her. Do it now before it’s too late!_ he thought.

They both said in unison, “Would you…”

“After you,” suggested Katelyn patiently.

“You are beautiful, miss,” complimented Aaron. “Mind I ask who you are?”

“Katelyn,” she replied. “That was a nice thing to say. No guy friend has really said that directly to me. Thank you. And who might you be, kind sir?”

“A-” he stuttered. “Aaron. It’s a pleasure meeting you, Katelyn. Where were you going on a cold day like this?”

“To the library,” replied Katelyn.

Aaron awed. “Fancy that! I was going to the same place! I’m looking for books on Scandinavia.”

“Awesome! I am looking for books on Arthurian legend. And nerdy wizards.”

Aaron initially did not know what to say. He was also an avid fantasy fan, who admired the talents of Tolkien, Rowling, and Martin. He soon grew ecstatic.

“Umm…would you care to go the library together, and afterwards—have some coffee at the coffee shop?” asked Aaron, accompanied with a little sweat coming down his forehead, nervous that she would reject him.

“I…would love to,” said Katelyn.

They both held hands and walked to the coffee shop.

* * *

Meanwhile, Professor Brake was at home in his apartment. He changed into his more casual wear, and was about to prepare some of his best eggplant parmigiana. As he was putting in the butter, he was about to reach the television remote with his left hand. He turned the TV to the local news. After a few headlines about the Al’kheidmi peace movement in Syria, a breaking news story was about to catch his attention.
“Breaking news tonight,” read the anchorman. “Some sources in the metropolitan area have spotted a shining red light growing in size as it is falling to Earth. Scientists estimate that the fireball is going to land in Massachusetts…which I hope they’re wrong, goddamn it!”

On the way to Sigona’s, Tiffany and Eric had glanced at the sky. The sky was bloodshot, bleeding a deep crimson-vermillion red never before observed. “Lava mango sunset” they called it. Piercing through the skies was a giant shadow shaped like a deflated ball.

Tiffany screamed, “IT’S A METEOR!”

“It appears to be heading for Boston Common!” said Eric, trying to track the magnetic force of the rock.

They skipped dinner to cautiously investigate the meteor.

Nathan and Tyler were both relaxing on a bus when they saw the flash. The bus driver shuddered as he made the left turn. The eighteen other passengers panicked, as many imagined whether the ball, by sudden impact, would strike the bus.

“Let’s duck and cover,” suggested one dazed passenger.

“I don’t think primitive methods would stand against a meteor,” said another unsure passenger.

People then began to signal the bell instantaneously, desperately heading for shelter away from the radiation flares.

People ran for cover. People hid under the bus seats, people scurried off to who-knows-where, and some even imitated the primitive 1950s method of “Duck and Cover.”

“Should we calm them down?” asked Tyler, unsure of what to say.

“I think we need to hide, too,” replied Nathan, also unsure of how to act in a situation like this.

While people were trampling each other down the bus like a rock concert, Nathan and Tyler evenly ran down Arlington Street. They looked for the nearest place they could find, and decided to head for the Rotary Club. Once there, they had thought about calling Professor Brake, reporting to him the horrific news on the fire in the sky.

“I already know,” said Prof. Brake as he sighed, talking to Tyler over his cell phone. “It has becoming the breaking news all over the city.”

“Should we check it out?” asked Tyler.
Brake began to stutter. “Too risky – we will lose many lives in the process, but if we were to stop this meteorite from doing further damage, it would kill us in the process.”

“I think we need to take that risk. Better to kill only a few from radioactive particles than biologically wipe out the entire city,” suggested Tyler, taking deep breaths, realizing that he stuck his head out for this.

“Alright, I will meet you at the Rotary Club in an hour or so,” replied Professor Brake, as he hesitantly put his cell phone back in his left pants pocket.

Now Tyler had contacted Eric.

Eric picked up the phone and responded, “Hey, Ty…Did you see the thing?”

“Yes,” said Tyler over the phone. “We are safely at the Rotary Club, watching the rock fall.”

“We’ll be down there right away.”

“Bring gas masks and aluminum suits with you…we may need them.”

Back at the Radisson Hotel, Sean and Levi found out the news from watching the huge screen TV in the lobby during rehearsal break. Senator Bonnet approached them curiously and asked, “What’s going on?”

“You have to see this, Senator,” said Levi.

Senator Bonnet focused on the flash. He slightly panicked, though trying to maintain his political reputation by remaining calm as if he knew such a catastrophe was going to happen.

He thought to himself, *We need to check this out. Examining this meteor more closely could help enhance my political career.*

He rubbed against their shoulders eagerly. “Come on boys! It’s science project time! Grab some goggles and suits, we are going to check this baby out!”

Sean and Levi stared at the Senator thinking that this guy was a dead sick loon and should not have voted for him. But they reluctantly went with his war games and followed him outside.

While the troupe was heading out, the band was rehearsing in. The Nihilist Nine were practicing over one of their newer musical numbers, “The Ballad of Ronnie ‘Wonny Wiener’ Rayman” which would segue to their next number, “Hatcher the Snatcher.” Brandon was warming up on the seventh progressions of his guitar solo, while his brother was preparing his deafening drum solo at the end of the medley.
'Okay, that was a take, mates,” concluded Bert.

“Break time,” said Brandon, relieved. “It’s time to lag, what a drag.”

It was when, as the band mates stepped outside, they saw the flashing ball fall slowly
towards the park. They tried to ignore it as they were going to buy a round at the nearest bar.

Douglas was about to clock his shift out at Domino’s when he saw the meteor. He could
not believe his eyes. Although he felt timid initially, his reactions shifted towards curiosity, and
he suddenly wanted a close-up of the rock.

Rebecca was unloading the next stack of bricks when she saw the meteor. A sweat of fear
rushed along her cheeks. She immediately grabbed a soiled handkerchief in the front seat of her
bulldozer, washed it, and went back to work, trying to ignore the monstrosity while listening to
her favorite Miles Davis tunes on the Sirius.

It was almost 5 o’clock, and the band was enjoying a nice chat and drink at the Bristol
Lounge on Boylston Street, while everyone was crowding in on the band, either wanting an
autograph or asking them to order lagers on the house.

“The Nihilist Nine, eh,” said the bartender. “Here for long?”

“We’re going to be performing at Orpheum Neo tomorrow night,” replied Bert.

They all presented their ID’s.

“I’m a big fan of you guys,” admired the bartender. “I’ll give you my best Samuel Adams
on the house! Guys wantin’ a round, now’s the time! First come, first serve!”

The crowd of barflies raced towards the bar, looking for a stool. There were around
twenty-four people in the bar, not counting the band themselves, the bartender, or the barmaid. It
seemed like they were expecting free tickets and backstage passes if they were the first ones to
get a barstool.

“Bottoms up!” said the bartender.

And then suddenly, a huge tremor began, and the ground shook like an earthquake.
Everyone began to huddle together and cover their heads. The tremor subsided after a few
minutes. But the bar was a mess. Everything needed to be cleaned. The bartender was lucky that
the roof did not collapse.

“Is everyone alright?” asked the bartender, worrying for everyone’s safety.

“I am,” said Brandon. “But what caused that shaking?”
“I heard there was a meteor falling towards the city, but could a meteor cause such a tremor at such magnitude?” asked a lone physician.

The band shrugged. “I’m only a musician,” Brandon mildly joked.

Meanwhile, Aaron and Katelyn were enjoying a good chat and drinking coffee at a small coffee shop near the public library, not too far from the site of the meteor crashing.

“We have such a lot in common,” said Katelyn.

Aaron was trying to finish swallowing his scone and to keep acceptable etiquette, “We do. So you are into this new movie that’s coming out about the Rabbit and this land of ‘vivacious vertigo?’”

“Yes, it looks like an interesting movie. I have always been into avant-garde fantasy. It brings back memories of my childhood reading Lewis Carroll,” Katelyn suddenly paused.

“Would you like to go to the movies with me this weekend?”

Aaron suddenly paused. “I’d…love to. You’re a very pretty girl…and you have that charm, you know.”

Katelyn chuckled. “I don’t know… I think you’re more charming than me. I wish people would see that in you, because you do.”

Aaron smiled, took Katelyn’s hand, and quietly said, “Let’s go.”

They both stared directly at one another, knowing with the power vested in them by the state of Massachusetts that they were really meant to be together. With smiles in unison, they both walked out and headed towards the Common.

All five scientists had arrived, not being able to withstand the extreme radiation particles. They had all considered preparing themselves with protective gear.

Tiffany first responded, with her voice muffled by her hands as she was not trying to breathe the fumes. “How many gas helmets and aluminum suits do you suppose we need?”

“The five of us cannot destroy a meteor that size. Fifteen suits will suffice, but we need ten more people brave enough for the cause,” explained Prof. Brake. “Knowing the damage this thing can do, it is highly unlikely if any of us will survive the impact. But a physicist is supposed to take dangerous risks like this.”

“Could this thing, if left alone, kill people?” asked Nathan.
The professor shrugged. “It could. I cannot conclude what radioactive properties this rock contains. But I assert that if we don’t take this out immediately, Boston could soon be an American Chernobyl created by natural forces.”

The entire team felt insecure. Of course, they probably knew their fates were inevitable, but they had to think about what the future would bring to the entire Northeastern United States. They had to act quickly. There was no time left.

In the meantime, the scientists kept their distance from the meteor. They needed fresh air where the fumes could not reach them. They laid out their plans.

“How long do you think you can bring fifteen suits, Eric?” asked the Professor.

“We’re only eight minutes away,” replied Eric. “I think it will probably take me twenty-five minutes total, depending on traffic.”

Eric raced towards his car, a 2057 Hyundai Elantra. It was a silver beauty, capable of out-speeding a horse on a dirt road. And the ecology was right. He gave a short wave as he prepped up the ignition and took off for the campus.

While the other four waited for Eric to come back with protection equipment, they needed to look for other bystanders who were eager enough to stop a possible holocaust that was to come. The Professor, brushing against his brown beard, brainstormed for some ideas, but a number of them did not hold much weight of plausibility. He suggested posthumous compensation, but that would easily repel more people away. Stumped, he asked himself, Would a calf help her mother in an emergency?

He ultimately concluded that the optimal suggestion was no matter the consequences it would bring, they needed to draft fifteen people interested. Five lives just would not suffice. There had to be an extra ten bold ones to arrive at the situation by circumstance. Evidently the decision did not come so easy to the intelligent Professor.

“We have no other alternative. It needs to be liquidated with enough power,” concluded the Professor. “Does everyone know what to do?

The other three scientists hesitantly nodded, regretting the inescapable decision.

Douglas was the first to arrive. He had just hung up his Domino’s cap at home, and drove his truck to investigate the incident. He was interested in geology, despite the current profession he was in.
He had arrived in a black overcoat. The coat was a graduation present from his mother’s. He preferred it over the other winter wear he had worn in his childhood.

Douglas was the first bystander to arrive at the scene. He had approached them slowly, towards the Professor in an exuberant manner. “Are you…Dennis Brake, the young head of the Science Depart—.”

He rushed to shake the Professor’s hand. “It’s an honor, sir. Geology has always fascinated me.”

“It’s a pleasure,” said the Professor. “So I assume you are familiar with meteors and such?”

“I am interested in the phenomena,” replied Douglas.

“Would you…excuse me, sir, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Douglas.”

“Douglas, although this meteor may look interesting from close-up, in reality it could be dangerous vermin to Earth. We are considering blowing this rock up.” The Professor then sighed. “This is an ultimate risk, but would you like to help us out?”

Douglas really did not know what to say. He seemed delighted being offered to blow up a rock by a high academic authority, but he also thought of his life, too, his sick mother, and his everlasting job of smelling the load of pizzas a few inches away from him.

“Think about it, but we don’t have much time,” warned the Professor.

Reluctantly, Douglas agreed, slowly shook the Professor’s hand twice, and he welcomed Douglas aboard.

The second person to approach the meteor was Rebecca. She was worried about the aftereffects of the meteor like every other ordinary Bostonian. She had driven her 2049 Toyota Prius III on the way to the park to check out the scene, listening to Boston’s hot jazz radio station on her ultra-surround CD player. But the red-orange sky distracted her from listening.

When she got there, the scientists were anticipating Eric’s return. They were all trembling in the frosty, wintry snow. They were all trying to maintain a little optimism.

“What’s going on?” asked Rebecca. “Why are all of you just standing there in front of that…thing?”
“We are waiting for one of our colleagues,” replied Nathan as he glanced at his watch. “He should hopefully arrive in ten minutes.”

Rebecca paused for a few seconds. “Can I do something? That thing is worrisome. Whatever it takes, count me in.”

The Professor promptly shook her hand and gave her a hard pat on her left shoulder. Like Douglas, she had her apprehensions, but she wanted to maintain the symbolism of her construction work: dedication, responsiveness, and courage, willing to put your life at risk to finish a skyscraper.

After Rebecca’s arrival followed Levi, Sean, and Senator Doug. All three grabbed a donut and some coffee at a cookie-cutter café which was only a few blocks from the Radisson hotel. They basically talked politics and had a few laughs. But realizing the terror that was put in front of them, they realized their happiness was too soon out of priority. All three of them felt committed to put their lives at risk. The Senator did it for the state of Massachusetts. Levi did it for his dolls whom he loved and cared about. And Sean, although still juggling, was too old and knew his prime was behind him.

The trio arrived at the Common without delay. When the Professor, however, saw Senator Doug Bonnet, he drew a blank expression on his face. “No, Senator, you don’t need to involve yourself in this.”

“Is it more logical to selfishly watch a thousand animals die one-by-one, or to do it for the animals and nature? My priorities rest with nature. I don’t care if I live or die,” said the Senator bluntly.

This time, the Professor solemnly shook the Senator’s hand, feeling as if he had assassinated a prestigious official. Nonetheless, he admired the Senator’s valor, and still remained faithful to his actions.

At around the same time, Eric returned to the park, with fifteen aluminum suits and helmets in the trunk of his car.

“Eric, you’re a life-saver,” said Tyler. Tiffany kissed him on the cheek, knowing it may be their last.

“Well, we need a few more people. After that, it’s all for naught,” said the Professor.

All members of the Nihilist Nine were planning on returning to the Radisson. After experiencing the minor earthquake back at the bar, they needed to unwind from the commotion.
But the Gingell brothers and Forrest were still curious. They needed the exercise. But Bert had instructed them to return to their hotel rooms to rehearse for the big concert tomorrow.

“We’ll be with you in a little, mate,” said Joel. “But we are going to be out to check out the rock.” Bert was feeling pessimistic about the whole reminder, but reluctantly permitted them to check it out.

The three of them, completely unaware of what was actually happening, slowly took off behind Bert. “Don’t be long, guys. I worry over you guys, sometimes. I don’t know what to tell the manager if you run into an accident.”

Brandon tried to shrug it off, but realized it was critical for them that they kept themselves safe. But after thinking about it for ten seconds, Brandon decided to shrug it off, “Would you get going, you punk? You’ll miss us either way.”

The three musicians walked to the park, all conversing about the rehearsal, their dainty girlfriends back home, their fans, and the meteor, perhaps their #1 fan for this night. And yet the odds were still stacked on top of them.

When they arrived at the park, the Professor was in a situation he just did not know how to confront. He was astonished, and nearly fainted. His real intentions were to get regular bystanders to help out with destroying the meteor, not musicians and government officials! Even the other scientists were shocked at this unexpected sight.

“Look, we came here to check out that rock,” said Brandon. “Mind if we take a picture of it?”

The Professor sighed with relief. “I thought you guys wanted to volunteer destroying it.”

The three members paused. They did seem thankful that their lives could be spared, but they also thought of their lives, as well. The Nihilist Nine are a rock band in any case, and they saw themselves pressured by the leviathan of the entire industrial complex. It was nice having fans, they thought, but in the end, is it worth being popular and having fans? They realized the expression in their songs were far significant than the screaming fans that constantly bothered them, and the reporters bloodthirsty for a scandal.

It took them some time to come to a real decision, but with such reluctance, they accepted their fates. “Actually…um, we, uh, changed our minds,” said Joel.

“Yeah, everyone has problems, we have problems, and we simply don’t care,” said Brandon.
“Ditto,” said Forrest as he gave the peace sign.

Nathan and Tyler were trying to keep straight faces. The Professor simply did not understand psychological behavior, and what drove these celebrities into insanity and irrationality. Tiffany admired their courage. Douglas felt betrayed. Rebecca wanted to listen to more jazz. Senator Bonnet wanted them to play a dubstep version of “Hail to the Chief.”

But they all made their decision. They decided that their life was a drag, so they requested the aluminum “bag.” They put on their suits, laughing with each other because of their silly appearances. But they all seem poised to do the job.

Aaron and Katelyn were strolling down Charles Street holding hands together, together like other harmonious couples in the city. There was a sense of true love there. It felt like, whatever danger was to befall, their love was like a shield, defending them at the backs of barbaric marauders.

Enamored in a dreamlike state, the couple was still fully aware of the ever-present danger. They noticed the meteor about a couple blocks away from the park. They walked over to investigate the situation, the destructible wind blowing in their faces.

They approached the Professor, by this time wiping the sweat from his face. He felt embarrassed. He felt like he had crushed fifteen innocent lives at the palms of his completely perspired hands. He did not know what to say or expect.

“Wow, that’s one big rock,” said Aaron, glancing at the giant glow. He was amazing by the meteor’s mass. He almost wanted to walk all the way there to measure it, but was not really serious about it.

“Yes...i-it’s big,” stuttered Katelyn anxiously.

“Take your time, kids. Please don’t rush,” advised the Professor. He still felt like he had drunk a quart-size bottle of ether, ready to faint. He did underestimate who wanted to volunteer, and why they chose to volunteer. Sometimes he wondered if he took back his decision to recruit fifteen innocents for a guilty rock. He thought to himself, What dilemma have I put before everyone? Can the five of us suffice? Am I ready to put my life before everyone else’s? In spite of these questions racing inside his troubled head, Professor Brake decided to shrug it off and continue with the task at hand.

Aaron and Katelyn felt aghast. They knew they had to consider their futures ahead of delusions of heroism. They were both in high school, pursuing different paths, achieving
different goals. But at the same time, they both felt star-crossed. Aaron was the definition of “loser” among his peers. It may have been because of his fascinations of subjects uncharacteristic of the school body, or it may have been because of his softer personality that shuns him from the rest of adolescence.

Katelyn’s aspirations, however, were more successful, and that was her dilemma. She felt her endeavors made her unhappy. She saw popularity as a façade, one that disguises the realistic qualities of life. It was not the way to discover the innermost truth. And ultimately, she realized that to seek the truth, she must sacrifice her physical qualities for the nobler.

But it was primarily the world’s abject absurdities that made the couple decide on their fates. Was it for the better to sacrifice their flesh for a radioactive Serpent? Or was it better to cower?

There was not much time. To prevent tremendous radioactive destruction, the team of fifteen had to dispose of the meteor posthaste. Everyone tried to brace themselves. They knew they only had a fifty-percent chance of survival, given the circumstances.

Before blowing up the meteor, the Professor gave his closing words, “Well, this is it…if anyone wishes to get out of this mess, then you have my say-so. I’m sorry I put everyone in this situation, and I hope you can all—,” he gave a sighing breath before continuing with the speech. “—forgive me somehow for putting your lives at risk. But we haven’t much time.”

Everyone bowed their heads for a few seconds. They knew what they had to do. All dressed in their aluminum suits, they helped unload the nitroglycerin, and doused much of it onto the meteor. Afterwards, they brought out fifteen detonators, one for each volunteer. After that, they could not determine what was going to happen next. They just hoped the meteor would select them as the worthy ones.

They silently gave three long, deep breaths. The scientists all looked at one another, knowing they may never see each other again. The rock musicians accepted the meteor as their possible swan song. Senator Bonnet trembled, knowing he was staring at the assassin. Douglas probably would never see his recipients anymore. Rebecca cried, knowing she would leave behind her jazz music and her love for construction. And Sean and Levi would probably never entertain the world again with their doll creations, juggling, and puppet shows.

The Professor started a countdown. Still sweating with inevitable fear, he shuddered after every number being counted down. By the time he counted down to “5”, he started trembling
feverishly in the bitter snow. And when it came down to zero, he loudly gulped. Zero became the new symbol for certain death.

At that moment, at roughly seven o’clock in the evening, everyone detonated the meteor. The meteor gave an extremely loud, deafening explosion, accompanied by rocks and thermal energy extending everywhere. And then everything immediately went black.

The aftershocks of the meteor explosion were largely tremendous. Many Bostonians observed in horror as small rocks flew like debris, and a hole was left over from where the meteor landed. All fifteen lay unconscious in the cold snow when the whirling sounds of helicopters and howling noises of ambulances rushed to the park. All fifteen looked in severe condition; unaware of their surroundings, deafened, and tranquil.

* * *

Loved ones rushed to the public hospital closest to the park, where the fifteen heroes received legitimate health care treatment. Aaron and Katelyn’s parents were there, fretful, caring. Bert, the band frontman, and their manager were also there to hope that the band could hold together. Mrs. Lorette, the Rumbolds, and even a few Domino’s regulars came by to pay their respects to Douglas, who almost did not seem like he could ever drive a pizza vehicle again. And the scientists even received flowers and a letter from the university president and the dean, a rainbow bouquet of violets, marigolds, and white lilies.

The Professor felt grateful for the flowers, but poor old Sean, who shared the room with him, was quickly fading, having an immune system that seemed too vulnerable to continue just a few more years of life. Brake was not feeling well either; his lungs were severed from the meteor’s dust.

Eric shared a room with a sick woman who was not involved in the disaster. Rather, she had suffered an enigmatic fever that not even the most esteemed of physicians could diagnose, so consequently her case was labeled “Scarlet-48.” He felt a little upset that he was not in the same room as Tiffany, and was not allowed to leave the room except for restroom breaks. He wanted to know if his girlfriend was all right.

Tiffany was in another room with one of her students who was injured in a car accident on her way to a hockey game featuring the Bruins. She was getting around, while her professor was in critical condition from the meteor that she could barely speak, if keep herself conscious. “I heard about what happened at the park,” commented the student. “I will make sure the class
knows about your heroism, Miss Howard.” Tiffany tried to make out a smile. But she knew that her present condition made her a lost cause, and she was near death. So she had hoped to sleep peacefully without any more pain.

Tyler and Nathaniel fortunately shared a room. But like the others, they were too weak to converse with one another or play hand games. Nathaniel instead stared at the dark, lavender-colored sky sadly, feeling remorse accompanied by physical and emotional pain. He internally celebrated the destruction of the meteor, but they had still left behind a large hole in the ground that will take years of natural repair.

Tyler, however, remained motionless. The effects of the meteor had wounded him in the stomach greatly. And steadily, creepily, he had contracted gangrene from the wounds to the point where there is only about half a chance the wound can be urgently treated.

Senator Bonnet did not have much time either. He had severe head trauma from the aftereffects and consequently suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. One of the nurses, dark blonde, strong, idealist, came to check on his blood levels and reported it was hopelessly low. Bonnet, hesitating to speak, would like to sign an autograph for her as a last memento, even though her views were further to the right of his. But it was a generous gesture, so she kindly agreed.

Levi and Rebecca both shared a room together and talked about nothing but dolls, construction, and constructing dolls. They both reminisced about the certain kinds of dolls they had when they were children. Levi, if one could believe, used to keep Barbie dolls in his closet, while Rebecca once had complete Bob the Builder sets and rooms plastered entirely out of Logos. Evidently, this inspired Rebecca to go into the construction business and be lucrative, and Levi’s fascinations with dolls and puppetry made himself a successful doll maker.

Meanwhile, the doctor who treated the band members felt lamentably reluctant to reveal the bad news to the loved ones, viz., Bert and the manager who were itching for a miraculous recovery so that the tour could continue as scheduled. But the doctor’s expressions remained serious.

“Mr. Russell,” said the doctor, accompanied by a long sigh. “We did all we could do, but your band is dead.”

Russell looked down in shame, questioning himself and his actions to look after his fellow band mates, and slowly clenched his fist, about to whisper a soft “D…” His manager, also
solemnly trying to maintain his expressions, tried to console him, knowing that nothing could be done. The band’s glory could not continue on as it was.

“If there’s anything I could…” said the doctor.
“No, it’s fine. Thanks doc,” said Russell, bereft.
“All right, well I will notify of their families and call the mortician to ship their bodies back to London,” the doctor finished.

Some of the nurses came to check on Douglas’ condition. Some of the reports indicated that he will be doing fine, but he will have to be put on leave for delivering pizzas.
“At least he is alive,” said one of the nurses.
“That is worth celebrating a pizza,” joked one of the nurses while still trying to maintain a serious expression.
“Yes, mind your dignity, Janine. They suffered a pretty fearsome explosion. That could burn fifty pizzas in one blast!”

While the nurses were sharing a dry joke, Aaron was resting snugly in his hospital bed with his caring mother at his side. She had emotions of both distress and relief; distress that her son nearly destroyed himself in a suicidal feat, and relief that her son was alive with minor injuries.

After a brief coma, he woke up seeing his mother’s face, and hearing her muffled words of ‘wake up.’
“…Mom, is that you?” asked Aaron trying to regain his senses.
“Oh thank goodness,” she replied, accompanied by a few tears and a hug.
“Where’s Katelyn? Is she al—”
The mother interrupted with a ‘shhhhhhh’ following a whisper. “It’s alright, child. She’s all right. Your girlfriend’s in the other room, sleeping.”
“Are you positive, mom? I hope you’re not jealous of our relationship or anything that you are lying to me.”
“I’m your mother, right?” Aaron’s mother chuckled. “Mothers are faithful, loyal, and true to their children. They want all their young ones to live life to its fullest.”
“Yeah, you told me that a long time ago, and I suppose you have not renounced that,” concluded Aaron.
While his mother gave him a wide smile, thankful that her son was alive, Katelyn was alive and recovering in the other room. Katelyn had far more injuries than her boyfriend, though. The debris from the meteor had damaged her hip and leg muscles. She felt immobile, not being to walk upright anymore but limping like a weary soldier.

One of the doctors came in to check up on her. He started to smile.

“I see you’re coming around, slightly wiggling yourself,” commented the doctor.

Katelyn was unsure how to reply. She felt immensely numb, and struggled with trying to get up.

“Be thankful it was your bones, not your organs, missy,” assured the doctor as he was examining herself.

“But, d-doctor,” stuttered Katelyn as she was struggling to breathe. “How can I move?”

The doctor sighed facetiously, “There is a reason why God made wheelchairs.”

“You mean…I’m going to be confined to that thing?” asked Katelyn.

“Well, I guess you can say that. That meteor out there badly damaged your hip and leg bones, causing paraplegia. They’re vital for mobility without a wheelchair, but considering your injuries, it is imperative you ride in what you call that ‘thing.’”

“For how long exactly?” Katelyn wondered.

“I don’t know for certain. In your condition, and given the time it takes your bones to completely heal, I would estimate around ten years maximum.”

The doctor was ultimately right. Katelyn would be confined to a wheelchair for ten years, impeding her abilities to play soccer and cheerlead. So if she wanted to take her sweetheart to the cinema, she and Aaron would have to sit in the middle section of the theater. But knowing of Aaron’s kindness and true feelings towards her, she then thought that maybe it was not all that bad. She grew tired of her athletic activities, anyway.

Katelyn impulsively struggled to get out of bed so that she could see if her boyfriend was recovering. But her struggle only prolonged the pain from her hips.

“I’m sorry, Miss Halsey, you are in no shape to leave the room right now. I will let you know when you are ready for the chair,” insisted the doctor.

Understanding her situation, Katelyn slowly nodded.
“From what I hear,” continued the doctor. “Mr. Gregory has been coming around, and will be able to be back on his feet in another hour or so. I will check back with my cohort, so don’t worry.”

Katelyn understood the statement, and tried to remain positively, knowing that he was alive and well.

Sean, however, was no more. His frailties and the effects of the meteor had devastated his body. A person his age would have been extremely bold and delicate to survive an impact like that. But he was proud to consider helping blast the meteor as his final accomplishment and he had no regrets for dying.

One of the staff reported the bad news to Levi, who felt like he had lost a student, a pupil destined to learn the art of dolpetry. He was unfortunate not to teach Sean any more lessons on how to master puppetry with Levi’s dolls. But in the midst of his bereavement, he also understood how old Sean was, and accepted that his life was well-deserved. But in the meantime, Rebecca consoled him as best as she could.

Professor Brake’s condition was growing worse. His right lung had ruptured because of the meteor dust he had inadvertently inhaled while the debris was flying. He felt regretful, but he was thankful that the meteor was gone so it did not cause widespread pandemonium. He knew of the risks, and knew he would only be offered a half chance of life.

Tyler’s condition was also irrecoverable. He had just a few short moments left of life. The medical staff tried to administer the best medicine in order to save him only to come too late. The gangrene was declared incorrigible, and Tyler was in a flinching pain and barely breathing. He could only utter soft syllables inaudible to Nathan. Tyler wished he could speak louder to exclaim his dying words, but there was little time.

Tiffany was also dying. She had more time than her other two colleagues, but she was in dire pain. Her student had tried to calm her down when she virtually screamed in agony.

“Doctor,” called the student. “Is Miss Howard going to be all right?”

Luckily the doctor arrived in time to silence Tiffany with anesthetics.

The doctor whispered, “There you go, Professor. That ought to calm you down for a few minutes.”

He crescendoed up his voice as he continued. “She isn’t. The meteor’s radiation had apparently ruptured her both mentally and physically. No, I’m afraid her case is terminal.”
The student felt tongue-tied for a second. She tried to regain her senses so she could speak more coherently.

“Oh. I-I-I…A-are you sure?” she had an urge to strangle the doctor, but she restrained herself.

“Our health care methods are the best, but not even the best treatment can conflict with nature. I’m…afraid she has about a day left to live.”

The student tried to take heed of the doctor’s words. She could not react. Knowing her professor was about to die, she looked down in grief. She felt helpless, feeling like she was responsible for not trying to cease the pain. She tried to overcome her feelings by lying back down in her bed. It did not improve the situation.

An hour later, Tiffany’s doctor came back in her room, with her bedmate watching distraughtly, still trying to dispel the thought that her science professor was going to die a few feet away from her. Tiffany’s pain had stopped for the time being, but she knew it would soon return.

Just after he was quickly checking her, Tiffany slightly tapped him on the shoulder, requesting, “Doctor…I want…the drug.”

The doctor paused and looked at her. “Are you certain, Miss Howard?”

She slowly, softly uttered, “Yes.”

After a brief pause to regain her ability to speak, she continued, “This pain is terminal…for me. I want to just live for another few hours and then I want to die with dignity.”

The doctor slowly nodded his head in allowance. “All right, I will check back this evening with another nurse to administer the injection.”

Meanwhile, Professor Brake’s vision blurred. He could not see clearly anymore, except some silhouettes of doctors and a secular humanist giving the professor his valediction. He wiggled himself a little to try to exert what remaining energy he had.

After a few minutes, he slurred, “Thank you, life, for the benefits that you have given me in the short period of my existence. Thank you, doctors and medicine, for trying to prolong my existence though little avail. But you did your best, and that is all we could do to help our fallen comrades. I give my thanks to my team, and I especially would thank all the volunteers who helped my team eliminate the meteor.
“It is sad I will not be able to continue with my life as it is, contributing to improve science. But I believe it was Darwin who once said, that ‘to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life.’ And in the thirty-two years I have lived, I have not wasted any precious time trying to fulfill my life. And I am happy that I was able to accomplish much in my short years, so I do not regret it. I have discovered the value of life, and my achievement is immortal.

“So…can you tell my colleagues that I value them a great deal, and I bequeath my wisdom and give thanks to those still alive?”

The Professor smiled, and then died at 9:31 P.M.

It was within another hour that Tiffany’s doctor, accompanied by a nurse, came back with the drugs needed for lethal injection. She gave a small smile, and nodded. “Thanks, doctor. You can take it from—” She was briefly interrupted by an outburst of pain. “—here. Am I permitted a final request?”

The doctor nodded. “You may express your last wishes as you so desire.”

“Just tell Eric…to move forward. As the universe always progresses, so should humans. Humans have universal qualities, never to forget, but ever to move on.”

She then turned her head towards her student and continued, “And that also means you, Abigail Jameson, to move forward…to do great things…to never forget your mentor…and may you always strive in your struggle to make the world better for everyone.”

While the doctor was trying not to shed a tear, he calmly said, “I will tell your wishes to your boyfriend. I’m sorry that you won’t see him longer. So…with that being said, are you ready for the fun part?”

This time, Tiffany was not afraid to show a wider smile and replied, “Yes, doctor. I have accepted Life, and I will now settle my terms with Death.”

The doctor sighed. “All right, Miss Howard. Nurse, will you help me do the honors?”

They applied an anesthetic to help Tiffany sleep. After a few minutes, they paralyzed her muscles. And finally, after ten minutes for the paralysis injection to settle in, they both took a deep breath before they stopped her heart. Tiffany died with no regrets, posthumously a heroine, relieved to feel no more pain.

Tyler’s condition was also grim by this point. He still could not speak. He could only grunt, for the gangrene hindered his lungs, and the head trauma impeded his ability to speak. If
he needed anything, he was compelled to write everything down. But sometimes his condition made it difficult to reach the notepad.

His end growing nigh, Tyler requested to one of the doctors to hand Nathan a note expressing his last feelings to his cohort. The note said as follows:

Nathan, buddy, you might already know that the rock devastated me. I must’ve been a fool to participate in such a calamity. Was it out of conscience? Was it loyalty? [The next three sentences are illegible.] But I just want to tell you that I was thankful to be your comrade. May you continue your scientific exploits and I will see you.

The doctor handed Nathan the note, not even bothering to review the contents himself. Upon receiving the note, Nathan read it and crumpled up the note and tucked it inside his pocket. He wrestled to hold back his sorrows. He knew his friend and colleague was in terrible shape. It seemed hopeless for a recovery. But at least the doctors tried to restore his friend.

By 10:30 P.M., Tyler was dead. He had no pulse, and his heart stopped. The doctors tried to prevent the gangrene from spreading enormously. He would be the last victim to die from the meteor’s wrath. But before dying, he chuckled a little, unintelligibly whispering, “The rock gave way, heh,” followed by a cough.

* * *

A memorial was held in honor of the fallen two days after the event, with their bodies transported to Evergreen Cemetery. The survivors of the meteor attended, as well as thousands of Bostonians wanting to express their gratitude for securing their lives. It was an unbearable sacrifice, certainly. But disasters are a factor of nature. No human can control a hurricane. No human can conjure up a tornado to destroy their evil neighbor’s house. No overpowering wrestler can cause earthquakes. All people can do is rely on meteorological readings to maintain their safety. And once a disaster is over, they must help each other out to rebuild their community, and start anew. Everyone is a hero as long as it is a priority.

Eric was the head speaker of the eulogy. He solemnly bereaved over everyone who lost their lives in destroying the meteor, and gave special regards to his mentor and lifelong friend, Professor Dennis Brake, who dedicated his thirty-two years of life and work into making Earth a more livable place. Afterwards, he calmly acknowledged everyone else’s efforts, and advised
everyone to reflect on their accomplishments and keep their memories living, that although they were casualties, their efforts will forever be immortalized.

Two days later, the seven survivors were awarded a special medal of Services to the City of Boston at the Boston Common, again attended by thousands of citizens. They all did not care that much about the award in particular, but felt it was a kind gesture for the altruism they had put forth. A few of them wanted the ceremony to end early, still feeling exceptional pain in their bodies from the meteor.

The mayor, while honoring the other half of the team who died, announced the recipients as follows. “It is a tragedy indeed…but the seven here on stage have fulfilled their duties and will carry on their fallen friends’ legacies.” He took a deep breath before presenting the names.

After all the medals were handed out, everyone applauded for the heroes’ efforts. The heroes looked at the crowds, having long sighs, freezing in the cold. Katelyn’s legs were very numb as she fidgeted in her wheelchair, while Aaron and his mother tried to keep her from falling off the stage. Levi wanted to go back to his doll puppetry. The remaining scientists wanted to take a few days off to recover. And Bert, who was accepting the award for his band, tried to avoid massive publicity.

After the awards were handed out and the Bostonian crowds clapped, the seven survivors stood shivering in the cold, reminding themselves of their luck. And they will never forget the other half who sacrificed their lives for the city. Their altruism provided honor, and their deaths were not in vain. They were slaves forced to be food for a hungry meteor. It was as if the meteor was only there to hold fifteen knights in ransom, asking one half of the knights to be ambrosia before appeasement, while the other half and all other civilians can go free. And once demands were met, the meteor would be no more and life would continue as usual. In the end, the meteor had spared seven knights who would savor their quests.