

T H E E X T I N C T I O N T R I A L S

The creature rose from nowhere, a dark-green flash, jaws wide apart, snarling, fast as lightning. All she could see were the inky fixed eyes and the scaly reptilian skin. There was no time to react – no time to do anything. The scream was lost in her throat as the boat upended, tossing Lincoln, Rune and Leif into the shallow waters.

Leif was luckiest. He landed only a few millisecondars from Storm and quickly scrambled ashore. Lincoln was up to his knees in the muddy water and turned to grab at Rune.

But the creature was quicker.


It lunged, jaws gaping.

Rune let out one shriek; the muddy water flashed red. Time froze...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Extinction Trials is S. M. Wilson's first teen novel. She lives with her family on the west coast of Scotland.

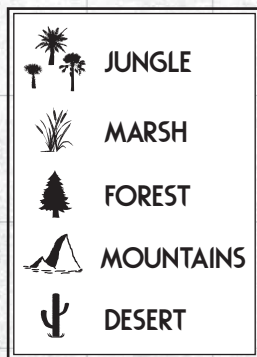
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THE EXTINCTION TRIALS

S. M. WILSON

USBORNE

UNCHARTED
TERRITORY



PILORIA



This book is dedicated to my two sons,
Elliott Bain and Rhys Bain.
Finally, a book you can read!

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PART ONE

THE BEGINNING

ONE

L I N C O L N

She couldn't see him. She didn't even know he was there. Lincoln pressed himself against the dark red walls of the cave. Maybe it was the artificial light that made her look so unwell. They'd been rushed out of their old home and moved into this one so quickly that he couldn't even remember when he'd last seen his sister in natural daylight.

She thought she was alone and that's why her defences were down. Her pale skin was almost luminous in the darkness, the blue veins evident under her skin. Her legs were tucked up underneath her on the chair, her arms pulled tightly against her chest.

He could hear the rattle. Even from here, on the other side of the room. Everything echoed in the caves – even the quietest whisper. Now that she wasn't trying to hide her illness from the family, he could see the skin blisters were swollen and painful looking. Some were red and sore, some

had already burst, leaving her open to infection. Layers of skin were peeling from her hands and arms. He could see the rapid rise and fall of her chest. The shallow breaths, trying to feed oxygen around her starved body.

And no one would help. Health care wasn't a priority on Earthasia.

The dangerously overpopulated continent had a clear focus on trying to provide enough food and energy for its people. Time couldn't be allocated to anything else.

Who cared if diseases spread and people died? They couldn't provide for the current population, so losing a few more to the rapidly spreading "plague" was a welcome relief.

Only the important people had health care. Only the scientists, the leaders and the national heroes. Who else mattered? And who else cared?

Lincoln cared.

TWO

STORMCHASER

The siren blasted for the second time. Stormchaser blew her fringe off her forehead as she cut through the water. She was hoping it was only a drill and no one would care that she didn't show.

Milo was swimming right alongside her. It had almost become a ritual for them both – even though it must have been a strange sight – human and plesiosaur side by side. Swimming in the lake was Storm's therapy. It helped release the knots in her muscles from lugging hay bales all day and distracted her from her empty stomach.

The siren sounded again. This time it was different. Three short sharp bursts. The sound that told everyone under-tens shouldn't attend. This was no drill. The plesiosaur lifted its elegant head above the water and stared at her for a few seconds. In the last few years, blocks of grey housing had rapidly built up around the lake and the creature seemed to

have got used to the sounds of the city. Its wide flippers slapped against the water, exposing the vastness of its grey sleek body, five times longer than any boat the loch had ever seen.

“Sorry, Milo, I’ve got to go.” Storm bent forward and pressed her head against his. Or was Milo a her? Two years on and she still couldn’t work it out. It didn’t matter anyway. Her feet hit the hidden platform in the lake. She scrambled out of the water and grabbed her discarded tunic and sandals from the shingly shore. She pulled them on and walked backwards for a few steps. “Same time tomorrow.” There was a flick of an enormous tail and Milo disappeared under the water.

Storm’s heart quickened when she passed between the first buildings and glimpsed the number of people. The street was teeming with bodies all heading in one direction – to the city auditorium. There was no way they would all fit in there. Space was at a premium everywhere. A few years ago most families had their own home, now they had to share with another family and sleep in shifts – it was either that, or agree to move into the caves. But Storm didn’t need to worry about that. She didn’t have family any more. Single teenagers were housed in the Shelters – not that they offered much in the way of shelter. There was no point in having possessions there. Everything disappeared. And as for the noises in the corridors at night... Storm always made sure her door was barricaded.

She looked around. Dell was waiting for her at their designated spot. He nudged her as they were jostled along by the crowd. “Farming or energy?”

She shook her head. “I don’t care.” The sirens sounded at least three times a week. Most announcements were about the fact that the land wasn’t producing enough food, or the stations weren’t producing enough energy.

As they squeezed into the auditorium, Reban Don, the Chief Stipulator for their zone, appeared on the stage. It was unusual to see him. He normally preferred to conduct his business far away from the huddled masses, spending most of his time in the distant tree houses of parliament. His face was permanently creased in a frown. It looked painful.

“Why can’t they do this some other way?” moaned Dell. “Why do we always have to come here? Why can’t they just send a message to wherever we are?”

“What, and waste paper?” Another precious commodity. The textbooks in their school were around thirty years old. The paper they used for tests was uneven and scratchy. It was hard to produce paper when there were virtually no trees left.

Electricity was rationed too. Technology was only for the use of the Stipulators and the scientists. It couldn’t be “wasted” on the general population.

“Citizens.” Reban Don’s voice boomed around the auditorium.

There was silence. People had learned quickly that the

sooner they heard the announcements, the sooner they could leave.

Reban Don glared into the crowd, his face magnified by the large viewing screen. The likelihood was that this announcement was being repeated in each of the four hundred zones across the continent. “As usual, finding space is virtually impossible. Our population and energy requirements continue to grow with no way to keep them under control. Our attempts to record how many people are living on the continent have not been” – he paused for a second – “entirely successful. Our introduction of a record of births has not been followed by all of the population. As a result, our numbers continue to grow, even though our space does not. Parliament has issued a new order to look into population control measures. The options are: compulsory registration of births to keep more accurate numbers; restricting families to only one child; measures of birth control for the whole population. We will make the final announcement in a few days.”

The crowd started murmuring, heads turning to one another. “What exactly does that mean?” asked Dell. “I thought the fact no one had health care was their idea of population control.”

Storm was still staring at the stage, which Reban Don was now leaving, the announcement over. “I think they’ll try and implement them all if things are really bad. Or maybe, instead of one child, they’ll say people can’t have any for a while. The Stipulators aren’t allowed to have kids.”

Dell rolled his eyes. “You mean they’re not *supposed* to have kids. I’ve seen one of them hanging around a settlement on our row – you know the guy with the really bright blond hair? The woman living there has three kids and guess what? All of them are blond.”

They started to file back out with the crowd. Storm raised her eyebrows. “I bet she didn’t put his name on their birth records. I bet she didn’t record the births at all.”

Dell shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t get it. What’s the big deal about Stipulators having kids?”

“You know what they say – being a Stipulator isn’t a job, it’s a way of life. They don’t want any distractions. They have to be focused at all times on finding ways of getting more food and more energy for the good of Earthasia.” Storm’s stomach gave a loud grumble at the mention of food.

“So what happens if the blond guy gets found out?”

“There was a rumour a few years ago about one of the Stipulators having a family hidden away somewhere. Didn’t they send him on the Trials? I don’t think anyone ever saw him again.”

As the crowd spilled out onto the long street, Storm tugged at Dell’s arm. “Come this way, I want to head back down to the loch for a few minutes.” She couldn’t face going back to her tiny bare room just yet.

He frowned. “You know I hate it there.”

“Oh come on, I won’t be long.”

The crowd around them started to thin out, most of the people heading into the entrances of the tightly packed

Blocks around them. There was virtually no land left in Ambulus City – the capital of Earthasia – that hadn't been built on. Most of the Blocks only had a hand's breadth between them and towered so high that the sun rarely reached the street below. Living here was claustrophobic. Only the dank and dingy caves were worse than the Blocks.

Food rations were gradually going down and tempers were frequently frayed. Every night, when fights broke out, the Stipulators arrived and transported the culprits off to the mines to try and salvage any useful minerals still left underground. Most of them never came back. The ancient mines were so dangerous now, going there was basically a death sentence.

The light was beginning to dim and Dell gave a shudder as they walked down the stone path towards the loch.

"Don't you ever worry about being down here, swimming in here?"

"No, why should I? I like it here, it's the only place where there's space."

"I wonder why that is?"

She waved her hand. "Don't start, Dell."

"People don't come down here because they're too scared! Who knows what could crawl out of the water? I mean, how did the plesiosaurs get in here – and how do they get out?"

She shrugged. "We're not that far from the ocean, there must be a connection. Maybe some weird kind of tunnel. Anyway, plesiosaurs don't eat people, they eat fish. They're

gentle creatures." She sat down at the edge of the shingle and pulled her knees up to her chest to scan the loch.

But Dell wasn't finished – and he didn't seem to want to make himself comfortable. "But what else is in there? And where's the guarantee that it won't want to eat us? There's a reason we don't fish out on the ocean any more, Storm."

She rolled her eyes. "What else could come through? Not the megalodon or the kronosaurus. They're too big. They're the ones that attacked the fishing boats." She pointed across the loch. "And people still fish on the loch sometimes. I've seen them."

Dell's stomach growled loudly and he pressed his hand against it. "Yeah, but only the Stipulators get to eat the fish. I can't even remember what it tastes like."

"Me neither." She stood up and walked to the edge of the loch, bending down to touch some of the reeds. "Do you think we could eat these?"

Storm picked a little piece off, put it in her mouth and chewed it. "Eurgh!" She spat it back into her hand. "That's disgusting."

Dell was watching the loch surface carefully. "What do you expect – it's a reed. But if they don't find something else for us to eat soon, that might become breakfast, lunch and dinner." He gave his head a shake. "It's getting late – let's go."

She waved her hand. "I'm not in a hurry to get back to the Shelter. You go on."

"Oh yeah, sure I will." His tone was mocking. "And the

announcement for tomorrow will be that they found a skeleton next to the loch.”

Storm shook her head. “I’ll be fine. There’s nothing in here to worry about.”

Dell threw up his hands in frustration. “You’re just biased because of your experience. How do you even know the plesiosaurs helped you? You were knocked out. Anything could have happened.”

Her back itched. It always did when she thought about her accident on the loch – or when Dell mentioned it. He was the only person she’d told.

She walked over to him and stood right under his nose. “It happened, Dell. I’m here because of them. I’m living proof that not all dinosaurs are man-eating beasts.”

“Tell that to all the creatures that live on Pistoria,” he shot back.

Storm held her breath for a second. “Okay, I’ll give you that.” One of the few things she’d learned in school was how terrifying and dangerous the dinosaurs of Pistoria were. The instructors put as much emphasis on this as they did on reading and writing. She’d always been taught that Earthasia was too cold for the dinosaurs to survive. As a kid it had taken a little time for her brain to wrap around the fact that a few degrees in temperature could determine whether or not a species could survive. She only hoped what they’d told her was true.

If it wasn’t, the one thing that saved them from the dinosaurs was distance.

She sighed and took a last glance at the loch. There was no sign of Milo.

She smiled to herself. A plesiosaur with a name. There was probably a law against it. She was pretty sure that some dinosaurs were as deadly and terrifying as she’d been taught. But the plesiosaurs in the loch? Not at all. She’d learned that from experience. The tiny head, tiny brain theory didn’t seem true to Storm. Milo had displayed characteristics that she was sure were more than just instinctual behaviour. But discussing that with anyone except Dell, arguing against what they were told, could get her in trouble. It was best to keep her ideas to herself. The last person she’d known who had speculated that the dinosaurs were anything other than ferocious, mindless beasts had disappeared without a trace.

She flung an arm around Dell’s shoulders. “Okay then, walk me back to the Shelter.”

She could hear his sigh of relief at the thought of going home. It made her stomach clench.

Dell had someone to go home to. He had his father.

Storm didn’t even know who her father was.

Or if he was dead or alive.

He nudged her. “We need to get some sleep. School tomorrow – I know you’ll want to get your brain in gear for that,” he teased.

This was why he was her friend. This was why she valued him. He knew how to distract her. How to keep things easy.

“Oh great. How about we try and get out of it?”

He smiled at her. “You get us out of it, I might even give you some of my rations.”

“You’re on.” They bumped fists and she laughed. “I guess wishful thinking never hurt anyone.”

THREE

STORMCHASER

Dell was waiting for her as she reached the front door of the school, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. The alarm had already sounded.

She shook her head as she walked the last few steps. “Why didn’t you go in, dummy? Now you’ll get the same late check as me.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “What can I say? Washing dishes is a pleasure. Anyway, I wasn’t even sure if you were going to turn up today.”

She pushed open the door and walked inside. “Neither was I.”

The school building was bland and uninteresting. As space was at such a premium, it wasn’t just used for school. The back end of the building housed some of the government laboratories. There were heavy doors with thick bolts between the labs and the school. But the students could still