

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL

# PIGGY

HUNT



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**T**here had once been an island called Lucella. Far past Doveport and somewhere south of the North Sea, its outer edges were sprinkled with long beaches and stretches of picturesque mountains that led to a salting of dense forests. In the middle of the island was a city, a sprawling metropolis bustling with life. On a normal day, thousands of people went about their daily lives—searching for the perfect avocado at the grocery store or reading the paper on the Metro to work. On a normal day, crossing guards waved children across the street to school, and neighbors greeted one another cheerily as they passed one another on the streets. On a normal day, the sun hung low over the island, casting a lazy glow across the city. The island of Lucella had not had a normal day in quite some time.

If you were to ask those who were in the know, they would tell you that it had started off just like any other sickness. They would tell you that one day your neighbor would have a snuffle, or that your friend would have a cough that didn't sound quite right. By the time the fevers started, it was too late. The people of Lucella were going to sleep and waking up as something . . .

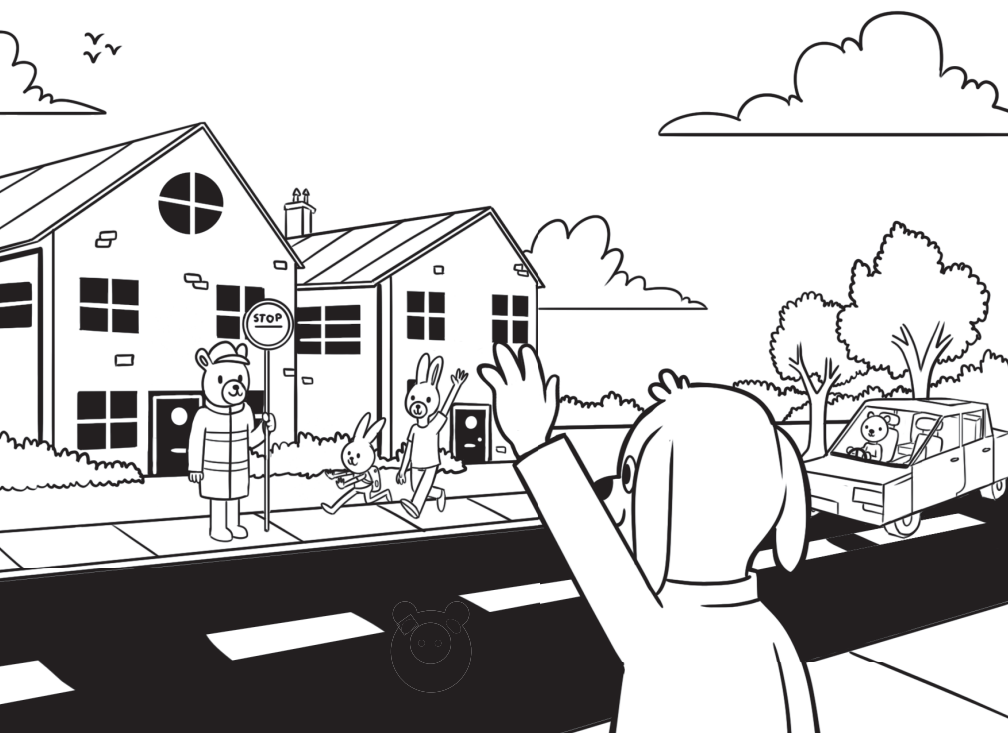




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not quite themselves. Their eyes were beginning to glow, their walks stiffened to a lumbering gait, and they were beginning to smell like the worst part of a hot summer day. Whatever the sickness was, it had turned normal, everyday people into grisly, gruesome, ghoulish shadows of their former selves.

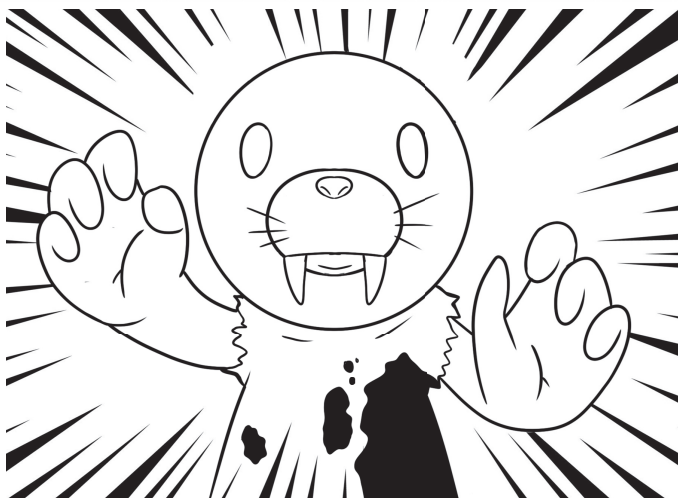
“Hold it down!” Ben shouted as loudly as he could muster, struggling to be heard over the loud, unpleasant, and prolonged sounds the infected creature was making. The thing thrashed wildly in Ben’s grasp, squealing loudly as it tried to break free. It may not



have looked like it—fist balled tightly around the creature’s tattered shirt, and a cure-loaded quick-release syringe poised to go in his outstretched hand—but Ben was trying to help. The creature wriggled its body once more, this time its haphazard movements accompanied by a terrifying scream. Ben held the creature in place as best he could, but coming in direct contact with the teeth or claws of the Infected was as good as asking for the Infection.

Ben narrowly dodged a swipe from the massive creature’s untrimmed cloven hoof; the syringe holding the cure was not lucky enough to share that same fate. The creature knocked the vial out of Ben’s hand, and Ben’s eyes followed it as it twisted in the air, end over end, before finally landing in the grass a few yards from where the two sat. The creature noticed as well, taking advantage of the momentary chaos and confusion to roughly tackle Ben to the ground. The two opposing forces tussled some more in the dirt, neither gaining the upper hand for longer than a couple of moments. In any given person’s life, there are three, maybe four moments that cause one to truly stop and reflect on the





choices that led them to said moment. Rolling around in the dirt, trying to restrain something nearly twice his size so that he could administer a glowing blue cure created by the military in a supersecret lab up North, was the first of those moments in Ben's young life.

These past several months had been both long and eventful, to say the least. Ben remembered how things used to be. He remembered when he would count down the days until summer vacation. Three whole months of no school, no bedtime, and all the online survival

horror-based video games that he could handle. This summer, Ben was simply grateful for the few extra hours of sunlight keeping at bay the sea of glowing red eyes that seemed to follow him and his friends wherever they went. It had been a crisp autumn day when Ben had left his home, not knowing then that he was taking the first steps in what would become the adventure of a lifetime. Back then, the dense, nearly solid layer of fog that enshrouded the city seemed almost seasonally appropriate, before it had become a seemingly permanent fixture of the landscape of Lucella.

Now, with Ben spending each day out in the elements, every day was either too hot or too cold. On the days that the sun managed to fight its way through the haze of cloud cover, Ben found it entirely too hot, salt constantly stinging his eyes as he wiped sweat from his brow. Most days, however, Ben and his friends were at the mercy of the almost supernatural chill that hung in the air over the island, no matter the actual temperature. Seasons had come and gone, days turning into weeks and weeks turning into months, but the chill lingered. It was little to no wonder that Ben still



clung so preciously to the hooded black leather jacket he had been wearing since the beginning of this adventure. Of course, the elements were not the only thing from which Ben was seeking protection.

Ben had been aware of the Infection from the beginning. At first, even if no one you knew had caught it, it was impossible to escape the specter that the news cast over Lucella—the hushed whispers on street corners, the three-minute bits on the early evening news, the news ticker that scrolled by beneath every television program. Awareness was all well and good, but nothing prepared you for seeing one of the things up close and in person.

The first time Ben had seen one of the creatures was at the home of his best friend, Ollie. One may not have been able to figure it out by looking at him, but the young man currently pinned to the ground by a quarter of a ton of breathing abomination had not set out to be some kind of postapocalyptic war hero. Before this had all begun—before the cure vials, before the police station, and long before the giant killer spiders—Ben had been on a simple mission to





find his friend. That one objective had been the driving force behind everything that had happened to Ben over the last several months.

Of course, Ollie was not to blame. It was hard enough to let your friends and family know where to find you these days, even more so if you weren't certain if there was anyone around to look for you. To his credit, in the time that Ben had been looking for his lost friend, Ollie had become quite adept at looking out for himself. All that time surviving alone among the elements had hardened his exterior, if not his personality.

If Ben had to take a guess, he would have wagered that Ollie had more experience fighting off the Infected than even Ben, and at this point, that was no small feat. Ben had been up against more than his fair share of the things. He shuddered as he remembered the mysterious Mr. P—a disembodied voice who seemed to exist only on the other side of his walkie-talkie. Ben had been flipping through the channels on his walkie-talkie one evening when he had heard the man's pleas for help. Ben had rescued the man's missing friend, Bunny, and she in turn had rescued him.

