

**Meteora Trilogy 3: I Am Hope**

**Copyright © September 2015 by Evelyn Shepherd**

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the original purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

Image/art disclaimer: Licensed material is being used for illustrative purposes only. Any person depicted in the licensed material is a model.

eISBN 9781623009793

Editor: Ann M. Curtis

Cover Artist: Valerie Tibbs

Published in the United States of America

Loose Id LLC

PO Box 170549

San Francisco CA 94117-0549

www.loose-id.com

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

**Warning**

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id LLC's e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

\* \* \* \*

DISCLAIMER: Please do not try any new sexual practice, especially those that might be found in our BDSM/fetish titles without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id LLC nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.

## Chapter One

"Damnation!" Jane shouted and slammed her hands down on the podium, causing it to rattle. Behind her loomed a crucifix, with a chipped Jesus staring down at us. I nervously glanced around me at some of the other congregants, then back at her. Strands of hair escaped her ponytail and fell in her face. She grabbed the top edge of the podium and leaned forward.

"This is what the Lord has brought down upon us," Jane thundered, conviction behind each word. "The end of days is here, and the sinners and unbelievers shall be punished. Zechariah 14:12, 'This shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all people that have fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth.'"

Jesse leaned close and hissed into my ear, "Is she fucking serious, Topher?"

"Be quiet. We don't want to be rude," I whispered back, though I'm with him. Sawyer gave me a quick look; I squeezed his knee to reassure him.

The whole total-damnation thing didn't work for me. I'd stopped believing in God the day my grandfather gave me a copy of *The Wondrous World of Science* for my tenth birthday. Somewhere between the bright, glossy pictures and the paragraphs of undisputed facts about the universe, I'd found truth—that life isn't predesigned by the Lord; it's a series of events and chances that all began with a single bang.

Life is beautiful. It's simplicity and complexity, wondrous and frightening. Life, and all its vastness, is evolving. In the beginning, existence was narrowed to a collection of atoms and strands of DNA. Then, over billions of years, we changed and grew.

Throughout history, life has always brought itself to the brink of disaster. Long before humans walked, Armageddon had always waited in the shadows.

But the awesome thing about evolution is that even on the edge of annihilation, life always finds a way to adapt and continue on. That's what gives me hope. Even when humans are on the verge of extinction, there is a chance that life can go on—that we could go on. A single anomaly is the key to our survival.

Reverend Jane doesn't see it that way, though. She sees everything as a sign that the end of days is here. Maybe it is, but I don't believe it's in the way she's expecting. She's scared, just like everyone else in this small backwoods church, and the only way she can explain why we're fighting for our lives against zombies is by blaming God.

But God didn't rain down meteorites, and he sure as hell didn't start bringing back the dead and transforming them into horrifying mutations.

Jesse rolled his eyes and turned back to the service. Jane continued by quoting Revelations, but I stopped paying attention. As of late, if I'm not focused on running for my life or going down on either Jesse or Sawyer, then my mind is filled with thoughts of finding a cure.

Six months ago the world went belly-up after a meteor shower, and the dead started to rise. With a small group of survivors, including my lovers, I headed south in search of someplace infection-free. Somewhere along the road from Ohio to South Carolina, my purpose had narrowed to only three points: surviving, fucking, and getting answers. In Beaufort I'd been on the verge of finally uncovering the truth—I could see the answer, distant and blurry like a mirage. But after the horde of Infected broke through Salvation's walls a few days ago, everything, all my research, had been lost. Now all I had was a garbled mess in my head and a ratty notebook filled with my chicken scratch.

I had the answers in front of me, in my mind. I could even make out a few of the words, but the rest might as well have been ancient hieroglyphics. And while I technically have an IQ level of 150, I couldn't read those hieroglyphics.

It's been a little over six months since the meteors fell and the Infected and Mutated surfaced. Until a week ago, no one had an answer as to what caused it. We still didn't. But I'm on the verge of a discovery. I found the anomaly that could save the human race; now I just needed to find somewhere to continue my research.

Remaining in this zealot survival camp was not going to allow me to do that.

Sawyer bounced his knee beside me. We sat in the back, our small group of seven taking up an entire pew. No one—even Sawyer, who still believed in God—had wanted to come. After two days in the camp, we had a pretty good idea of what kind of pastor Jane was. She leaned more toward fire and brimstone. Forgiveness and *love thy neighbor* weren't what she was pushing.

"You all will die!" Jane said, pointing at the group, and an audible gasp escaped the crowd. "And you will burn in a lake of fire, unless you repent and purge the sinners from your life. We must show God that we are believers and his servants. It's the only way to find the path to salvation."

The congregation waved their hands in the air and praised the Lord. I really hoped the service was almost over, because I didn't know how much longer I could sit there in the sweltering heat and listen to this bull crap. Jane let the congregation go on for a while, then raised her hands to silence them.

"Penance is the only way into heaven. We must all make the sacrifice if we wish to have our souls saved."

That didn't sound good, and it made my stomach do a reinterpretation of the mambo. I glanced sideways at Jesse. He glared at Jane and clenched his jaw. A bead of sweat rolled down the side of his face. I wanted to reach out and take Jesse's hand, but I had a feeling it would start a riot in the church.

Jane finished her service, and everyone was dismissed. People shuffled slowly down the aisle. The air buzzed with sharp whispers and jeers. I caught snippets of murmured comments, hastily exchanged.

"What did she mean by penance?" a woman asked.

"They need to pay," another man commented as he brusquely passed our row.

We all remained seated, letting the crowd flow out of the church and back to their tents. My back ached from the creaky pew. Under her breath, barely loud enough for me to hear, Rio said in her distinct British accent, "Crazy arseholes."

Soon, only Bruce and Jane remained in the church with us. Bruce was the reason we were here. He had been trapped with me, Chloe, and Jaden in the basement of a cannibalistic family. When Jesse and the others rescued us, they saved Bruce as well. As payment, he'd brought us back to his camp to rest and regroup. I almost wished we had kept on going, but we'd needed the break. Everyone had been beaten and was bone-deep exhausted.

Jane finished her conversation with Bruce and turned to us. She looked so wholesome. It almost didn't seem real for her to be the same person who had moments ago been preaching damnation. She approached our pew, Bruce in tow.

"How are you doing?"

The question was like a double-sided blade. Beneath the innocent query lay a silent: *are you going to cause problems among my flock?*

"Good," Jesse answered. "Everyone has gotten their strength back."

"That's wonderful to hear," Jane said. "I prayed you'd make a speedy recovery."

Jesse's eyebrow twitched, and I knew he was holding back an eye roll. I didn't believe in God, but I had a respect for those who did. Jesse, on the other hand, thought it was all horseshit and, for the most part, thought everyone who believed in God was horseshit.

"We appreciate your concern," I said before Jesse was forced to stick his foot in his mouth. "You've been very kind to allow us to stay here and rest, and we're grateful for everything your people have done."

Jane nodded, and her smile widened until her pale green eyes crinkled. "We're happy to have you. It warms my heart to know that we can save a few more from the

hell that is out there. Have you considered staying? As I told you before, you're more than welcome to remain here. I know we aren't much, but we get by, and there's plenty of room for you. We sure could use the extra hands."

"No," Jesse deadpanned.

Jane started, looking at Jesse with raised brows. "No?" she hedged carefully, her eyes slowly narrowing.

I patted Jesse's shoulder and quickly added, "What he means is, no, we haven't thought much about it yet. I think that's something we're all going to discuss tonight."

"Oh!" Jane was back to sugary smiles, but there was doubt in her eyes. "Well, I hope you decide to stay."

She left, but Bruce remained. He waited until the door closed behind Jane, and then said briskly, "Don't."

"Don't what?" Nash asked. He scratched at his beard and then stretched his arms high above his head. He was wedged between Chloe and Rio.

"Don't stay."

"Why not?" Chloe pressed. She stood, tugging her little brother, Jaden, to his feet. "It seems...nice...here."

No one believed that. None of us wanted to stay. But why didn't Bruce want us to stay?

"Just trust me, okay? Don't stay."

"If there's something going on, Bruce, you need to tell us. *Now.*" Jesse's tone brooked no room for argument.

Bruce glanced at the front doors, and then back at Jesse. He pushed his glasses up his nose. "I don't know, all right? It's...Jane. She seems different. Since I've returned. But trust me when I say, this isn't the place for you." He gestured to Jesse, me, and Sawyer. "I don't care what you three are. None of that really matters anymore. But to her? It matters."

I looked between Sawyer and Jesse. Most would find it hard to swallow a polyamorous relationship, let alone a homosexual one, but there was something darker in what Bruce implied. He dropped his hand with a shake of his head and said, "I thought it was best to warn you, but do what you want."

He walked out, leaving us alone in the run-down sanctuary. Silence prevailed, weighted and solemn. Each second was defined by a small breath or heartbeat. What was there to say about the warning? Bruce had all but written it out for us. Remaining at the camp was a death sentence.

"Well," I said, "that was awkward."

"Topher," Jesse said, exasperated.

I held my hands up and flashed him my best disarming smile. "You didn't think it was? Personally, I think he's a little jealous."

"What should we do, Jesse?" Sawyer asked, cutting off any retort Jesse had for me.

"Get our shit and get out of here," Rio said. I expected that answer. Rio was dark-skinned, British, and in many ways a very female version of Jesse. I wouldn't tell Jesse, but she was also a little more badass looking.

"This late?" Nash asked incredulously. "We'll be killed out there."

Rio scoffed but didn't argue. She knew he was right. We all knew he was right. Going out after sundown was as good as placing a neon sign above our heads that said EAT ME. Any number of Infected and Mutated could be out there, and while I didn't want to deal with a crazed religious mob, I *really* didn't want to deal with a Mutated at night.

A Mutated is the evolved form of an Infected—which are the traditional running zombies—and they're not something to play around with. Mutated, for lack of a better description, are what nightmares are made of. I'm not saying your childish nightmares, but real, deep-in-the-subconscious, dragged-up-from-the-pits-of-hell nightmares. Their DNA had been rewritten and twisted around so that everything that made them human was gone.

“We’ll leave in the morning,” Jesse said, putting to rest the problem. “At first light. Rio, you sleep out in the truck tonight.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

We left the church and retired to our RV, which was parked next to our truck near the church. A perimeter was set up around the camp, made up of plywood and scrap metal. It wouldn’t hold, not when push came to shove. A little over two dozen tents dotted the field that surrounded the Baptist Church of New Hope.

I stripped out of my shirt as soon as I was in the RV. Sweat slicked my back and face. I’d spent most of my life wanting to leave Ohio, but now that I was out of the state, I wanted to get back. North Carolina was as bad as South Carolina had been, sticky and humid and filled with far too many bugs.

I used a hair tie around my wrist to pull my long hair back. I should cut it, like Sawyer did. He had shaved his dark hair shortly after we had made it down to Beaufort, and while the stubble had grown since leaving Salvation, it was still a hell of a lot better than my shoulder-length locks.

“What do you want for dinner?” Chloe asked as she opened a cabinet. She had stored away what supplies we had, stacking cans on shelves as if we could regain some normalcy – we could play house, pretend that we weren’t running for our lives.

“Anything but SpaghettiOs,” Nash said. He collapsed on the couch that stretched along the left side of the RV.

Chloe pulled out two cans and held them up. “Black beans or creamed corn.”

“Creamed corn,” Sawyer said as he cracked open one of the windows and let in a dry breeze. Cicadas hummed in the distant sycamores.

I took a seat at the table on the right of the RV. Jesse sat across from me and stared pensively out the window, looking down on the tents. There were a few campfires going. We had for the most part kept distant from the group. It wasn’t like Salvation, where there had been a sense of community. In Salvation, we had opened our arms to strangers. Here, they wore smiles and said hello, but it was with a bite of vinegar.

“What are you thinking?” My question startled Jesse. He glanced at me, and I could see the darkness edging into his indigo eyes. My heart jumped. I hated that look—the lost gaze of a little boy. I wanted to take it away, but I hadn’t figured out yet how to reach him when he went into that zone.

Jesse was breaking. He had been for months. With each day, I could feel him slipping a little further away. I was terrified that one day I’d wake up and find him succumbed to the darkness.

“Maybe someone should stay up tonight, to keep an eye on things,” he said.

*You mean, you should stay up.*

“I’m sure we don’t have to worry. One night won’t make a difference.”

Jesse looked back out the window. Sawyer walked over and slid into Jesse’s lap and looped one of his arms around Jesse’s neck. An ugly bite scar marred Sawyer’s forearm—fresh, pearly scar tissue created by rows of jagged teeth. Jesse grabbed Sawyer’s hand and pressed a kiss to it.

“Topher’s right,” Sawyer said.

Rio passed the can of creamed corn to Sawyer, who took a bite and then gave it to Jesse. No one said anything else as we finished off dinner. When the last of the mashed-up corn had been scraped off the tin-can walls and the protein bars finished, Rio collected a blanket and pillow from the stack Jane had lent us and went out to the truck. Chloe set up a bed for Jaden and then arranged the pillows on the floor for her and Nash.

Jaden curled up on the couch with a stuffed bear Sawyer had found for him. The kid was out as soon as his head hit the pillow.

“Don’t stay up too late. We’ll be leaving early,” Jesse told Chloe.

She rested against Nash, their heads bumped together. I got the sense they wanted some alone time, so I steered Jesse and Sawyer into the single bedroom in the back. I

winked at Chloe before I shut the door, giving her about as much privacy as she was going to get in such a small space. Solitude was a luxury that no one had anymore.

I leaned on the door and watched Jesse and Sawyer. Jesse sat on the edge of the bed, removing his boots. Sawyer stripped out of his shirt, revealing rows of ribs as he stretched his arms high. We all had thinned out over the past few months. Jesse was the only one who had really kept any weight. His arms rippled with tightly corded muscle.

Chloe laughed gently on the other side of the door. There was a slight, breathless gasp, and then silence. I smiled. Those were things I longed to hear. Not the screams. Not the wails of agony. Not the groans of Infected, or the foghorn bellow of a Mutated. What I wanted to hear were the quick intakes of breaths, the airy sighs of bliss, and peals of uncontrolled giggles—when the neural pathways opened to the telencephalic and diencephalic centers, and we burst into laughter.

When we remembered to be human.

“What are you grinning about?” Sawyer asked, removing his shoes.

“Chloe seems happy.”

Sawyer paused, looking past me. A smile slipped across his lips, softening his features and morphing him into the carefree man I knew he would have been before the meteor shower.

“Yeah, she does.”

“It’s funny, when you think about it,” I said and walked over to the bed.

“What?” Jesse pulled his shirt off. I brushed a hand down the side of his face, scratching my fingers through his dark beard.

“This, everything.”

“You think the zombie apocalypse is funny?” Jesse raised an eyebrow. “I don’t see the humorous side of it.”

I shook my head. "No, not that part. But if the world hadn't decided to take a one-way trip to hell, Chloe never would have met Nash, and we never would have...well...become us. It's almost ironically cosmic."

Sawyer made a face and grabbed my hand, dragging me onto the bed. "That's not true."

*Maybe.* I sometimes wondered. What if the end of the world didn't happen? I'd have remained in Mansfield, Ohio, playing the role of Jesse's best friend. It would have been a long time before he ever introduced me to Sawyer, and by then, they would have been already deep into their relationship. I wouldn't have destroyed that—I couldn't.

I still regret how it all began, with me pushing Sawyer into a corner and betraying Jesse.

They had been happy, and then I'd forced my way in.

"Hey," Jesse said, his voice penetrating the swirl of morose thoughts inside my head. I shivered at the velvety stroke of his timbre. He had a voice like whiskey, and it always went down with a sweet burn. "This"—he waved between the three of us—"it was destined, one way or another."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," Jesse assured.

The ache that had been building in my chest eased, as if a fist had finally let go of my heart. I tugged my shirt off. "Then how about we celebrate with a little tickle the pickle?"

"You are so *not* romantic, Tofu." Sawyer shoved my shoulder.

I touched my chest in mock offense. "I'll have you know, I was considered a real Casanova in high school."

"Maybe among the frogs," Jesse taunted.

"Sir, you wound me. I challenge you to a duel!"

Jesse grinned and lunged for me. Sawyer jumped out of the way. I fell backward, and Jesse's lips crashed against mine. I grabbed the back of his head to hold him in place, kissing him deeply and fervently. He rose, breathing harshly, and brushed his nose against mine. His eyes were wild and so wondrously alive.

I smiled. He believed in the shadows. He saw the world for its flaws and cracks and jagged edges. I saw the heartbeats and fires and new stars. But in the moments when our lips met and our minds stopped reeling from the horrors of the outside, I could make him see the hope that existed.

Sawyer tugged my boots off. I craned my head around to look at him. He flashed me a grin, and I laughed. How could I doubt this? Doubt us?

Jesse was right. We had always been destined to be together. The three of us, we're one.

We stripped out of our remaining clothes, grabbed the unscented bottle of lotion we had been using as lubricant, and slid up the bed. Sawyer moved between us, with Jesse on his right and me on his left. Sawyer's single lip ring trembled as he drew in a shaky breath. I kissed him slowly, tasting him as if it were the first time.

"I love you," I whispered against his mouth.

"Love you too," Sawyer murmured with a tiny gasp.

I couldn't say it enough. I had to tell them, two or three times a day, when I felt the clawing fear that it might be the last time I saw them. If ever the end should come, I wanted them to know that they had been loved. That they would forever be remembered.

Sawyer arched up. Jesse had uncapped the lotion and coated his hand in the white cream. He stroked Sawyer, lightly running his fingers over Sawyer's erection until he mewled in our arms. My cock thickened and rose. Sawyer scrambled blindly for the lotion. I found the bottle and handed it to him.

He poured some lotion into his hand. I took the bottle and mimicked him, warming the lotion by squeezing my fingers closed. I set the bottle aside and reached

across Sawyer to take Jesse's erection. His eyes fluttered closed, and his hips rocked forward, bumping against Sawyer's hip.

Sawyer's hand found my member, and I bit back a moan. I could taste the metal from my double lip piercings. My hips shuddered forward. Sawyer's touch was firm and assuring, triggering a quake down my spine. I pressed my face into his temple, bent over his body like I could curve completely around him. I had to focus in order to keep up my own ministrations.

Every slip of his fingers was a flame that licked up my shaft. His thumb swooshed over my cockhead, and my vision blurred. My balls grew weighted and tightened. I picked up the speed of my own hand, pressing Jesse's dorsal vein and rubbing my thumb down. A wrecked sound escaped Jesse, and I laughed breathlessly.

Sawyer's hips rose off the bed, and his hold on me faltered. I sealed my mouth over his, swallowing his cry as he came. When his orgasm abated, Sawyer collapsed on the bed. I nudged his hand, urging him to continue.

"Sorry," Sawyer whispered groggily. He increased his pace, and it was all I could do to keep stroking Jesse.

"Fuck," Jesse groaned. He twisted his flushed face away, eyes squeezed shut as if he couldn't bear to see the world anymore. I tightened my grip at the base of his cock and pulled up, guiding his climax forward. Jesse threw his head back in a silent scream, and cum splashed across Sawyer's stomach.

My head spun, the last of my control crumbling. The pressure in my balls exploded, and with a groan I came, adding my cum to the mess on Sawyer's abdomen.

"Mmm," Sawyer hummed, stretching out. "That was nice."

I chuckled and pressed a kiss to his temple. "You fat, lazy cat. You look like you were just given a bowl of cream and a sunny spot to sleep in."

"Well, I did just receive a creamy treat." His lips quirked into a wry smile.

“Brat,” Jesse jested and got up. His cock swung between his legs, glistening with cum. Fading bruises littered his body. We all had some form of bruises or cuts. His chest was peppered with angry splotches of yellow and brown. My own side had a disgusting quilt of deep purple, which carried up to my face. Courtesy of the hillbilly cannibal who had wanted to eat me.

Jesse rooted around for a moment and then wiped himself with a rag. He tossed the old hand towel to me. “Clean up.”

I caught it and wiped myself down, then cleaned Sawyer up. I pinched his hip, earning a yelp. “Move so we can pull the sheets down.”

He swatted my hand away and grumbled under his breath, but then he shifted and let me tug the sheets down. Jesse opened the window before he returned to bed. We converged together, ignoring the sticky heat that settled over us, and fell asleep with our legs tangled.

## Chapter Two

A scream broke through my dream. I groggily rolled over and burrowed into Sawyer's chest. He mumbled something against the top of my head. Sleep lapped at my mind, holding me down. I dreamed of pleasant emptiness; I was in a void, where my brain could shut down. Warmth surrounded me, lulling me into a deeper slumber.

Another scream, louder. I opened my eyes, staring at Sawyer's chest. Why was there screaming? Something was wrong. Something was horribly wrong.

"Jesse!" Chloe banged on the bifold bedroom door. "Get out here!"

Jesse jolted out of bed. He grabbed his pants and hastily pulled them on. As he jammed his feet into his boots, he ordered, "Get dressed."

"What's going on?" Sawyer asked. He climbed over the bed and found his own clothes.

I knuckled the sleep from my eyes and hurriedly dressed. Jesse was out the door by the time I pulled my shirt on. I followed him into the main compartment, Sawyer behind me. Rio sat on the couch next to Jaden, who was curled up with his blanket. On the table was a camping lamp, which filled the RV with yellow light.

"What's going on?" I asked, straightening my shirt.

"Something is going down with Jane," Rio said. "I heard it out in the truck."

Nash pulled Chloe into his arms and drew her away from the window. Jesse walked over to the dinette table and looked outside, then let out a string of curses. I nudged him over and looked out myself.

"Sweet Jesus," I whispered. The blood chilled in my veins, turning into ice fractals that splintered through my mind. I gripped the table as I watched the genocide going on outside.

People were being dragged from their tents and herded together like sheep for slaughter. It was hard to see how many people had been gathered. Clouds shrouded the moon, and the fires had smoldered out, leaving the camp a battlefield of shadows.

*"And you will burn in a lake of fire, unless you repent and purge the sinners from your life. We must show God that we are believers and his servants. It's the only way to find the path to salvation."*

"That crazy bitch!" I pushed away from the table. *"Penance to save their wretched souls. They call that the answer to salvation?"*

The screams got louder. They pierced every part of my soul like rusted knives that slipped between the bones and twisted. My throat closed up. Sawyer grabbed my arm, and I realized I had begun to sway.

"What do we do?" Sawyer asked.

That was the million-dollar question. What did we do? Did we rush in to save the innocent? Or did we run and save ourselves?

Gunshots went off, and a woman wailed. I shut my eyes. Sawyer slid his hand down my arm and tangled his fingers with mine. I looked at him. His green eyes seemed to glow in the dim light.

"Going out there is suicide. With the amount of noise Jane is making, Infected won't be far off," Rio said.

She was right. The Infected would be drawn in by the screams and gunfire. The nightmare had only begun, and now was our chance to escape. But could we turn our backs on this kind of holocaust? Didn't that make us as bad as Jane? We could try to save some of the victims. We had the weapons; we had the men.

"Rio is right," Jesse said. "The risk is too high."

I sucked in a sharp breath. Jesse turned to me, and I could see it in his eyes; he had switched on the part of him that could shut out the world. The monster that slumbered inside him had woken and risen to the fight at hand. Jesse would walk away without any hesitation.

"There's nothing we can do?" I asked.

"Not without risking one of us," Jesse said. This was our life now. "Rio, can you make it to the truck?"

"Yeah," she said and stood.

The motor home door banged. I instinctively pulled Sawyer behind me. Jesse turned to the door, and a shadow passed over his face. He held out a hand, and Rio handed him the pistol she'd grabbed from the stock we kept in the RV. Jesse checked the cartridge, then clicked the safety off and leveled the gun at the door. He edged forward, not opening the door yet.

Rio handed pistols to both me and Nash, then selected a shotgun for herself. Chloe moved behind me with Jaden, and they hunkered down with Sawyer. The door banged again.

"Open up!" Jane shouted.

Jesse nodded to us. My heart pounded. Sweat slicked my palms. I clicked the safety off and rested my finger against the trigger. A tremble ran down my arm. I sucked in a breath, steadying my grip. Jesse opened the door and stepped back. Jane stood on the other side, two armed men with her. One carried a hunting rifle, but the other had an AK-47 at his hip. The man with the AK-47 was named Stu. We had met him the first night we arrived; he had brought us medical supplies to bandage our wounds. Now he was here to play our executioner.

\* \* \* \*

Want to know what happens next?

<http://www.loose-id.com/meteora-trilogy-3-i-am-hope.html>