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This document contains a partial archive entry
from The Fallout Kids by Jordan Weir.

THE FALLOUT KIDS

JORDAN WEIR

The Fallout Kids

A Novel

Jordan Weir

Live Big Press

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AUTHORIZED PREVIEW

The following pages contain a preview of
The Fallout Kids by Jordan Weir.

This sample includes the opening chapter of the novel.

Where endings give rise to new beginnings.

Part One: Project: Fallout Kids

Chapter One

The room was silent.

A red light illuminated above the camera lens.

A throat cleared, low and uncertain.

From overhead speakers, a voice drifted down, flat and routine: “I am recording. You may begin whenever.”

The silence deepened, filling every corner, heavy as stone.

Finally, it was broken. The faint rustle of fabric. A shift in the chair.

Still, no words. Only the pulse of the red light, steady, waiting.

A long, deliberate inhale, held until it almost hurt. Then a slow, shaky exhale that seemed to rattle in the air long after it ended.

#

The blue glow of the numbers above the door burns my eyes. I’m forced to squint, fighting back

the tears threatening to spill over. It's the most beautiful shade of blue I've ever seen—richer than the endless sky on a cloudless summer day. Yet, it's also the most terrifying thing. It's the spark that ignites the fear burning in my chest, fueling the tears edging closer, promising to fall.

3— My heart pounds, fast and hard, like it's desperate to break free, racing against the seconds slipping away.

2— The pressure in my chest is suffocating. I force each breath deep into my lungs, steadying my legs to keep from buckling beneath the weight of the moment.

1— The thought of what's on the other side of that door paralyzes me. Or… what isn't.

As the final second ticks away, a blaring horn cuts through the thudding heartbeat in my ears, its deafening sound making me flinch. The airlock door groans open, and I freeze. My body goes rigid, drowning in a silence so profound it feels like the world itself is holding its breath.

I step through the airlock and into the world I've been shut away from for so long. The heat is overwhelming. Sweat beads across my skin, heavy and immediate, as if the air itself is too much to bear. Sulfur slices at my windpipe like a thousand tiny razors, choking each breath. Smoke hangs low and heavy, clinging to the air. It scratches my eyes raw, as if my lids were made of sandpaper. I wipe at the stinging tears, struggling to face the reality I've feared for so long.

The world has been set ablaze.

Buildings are nothing more than shattered remnants, piles of rubble where once-thriving structures stood. Concrete and steel lie twisted, collapsed into heaps of unrecognizable debris. Cars, now rusted, hollow shells, stand forever frozen where they met their end.

Gone are the fields of green, the trees swaying with the breeze, their leaves vibrant and

alive. The sky is a lifeless, suffocating gray. No trace of blue, no birds soaring, nothing to break the oppressive stillness. There is no color left in this world.

Everything is ash. Everyone is ash.

Through the haze of smoke and smoldering ruins, I catch a glimpse of something—faint and distant. As I push forward, the shape becomes clearer, and my heart plummets.

A house on fire.

I move toward it. With every step, this crushing feeling starts to build. Finally, like a bolt of lightning through my chest, the realization hits.

I know this house—this is my house.

Panic surges as I race toward it. The flames grow more furious, their dance more erratic—flickering in and out of focus like they're toying with my mind. The heat presses down, slowing me, pushing at my resolve.

Each step is a battle. The flames lash at me, their crackling louder and louder. They taunt me, daring me to get closer.

But I won't stop. I can't stop.

Finally, I reach the front yard. Flames rage from every window and doorway, devouring everything inside. The house feels alive, consumed with a fury that turns every wall, every beam, every scrap of furniture into fuel for its wrath.

I stop short of the porch, heart hammering in my chest. My hands fly up to shield my face from the heat as my eyes squeeze shut.

And then, amidst the roar of the fire, a voice cuts through the chaos.

"JASE!"

"JASE!"

"HELP ME!"

I squint through my fingers, desperate to see past the flames. Through the smoke and heat, I catch a glimpse of something—someone—standing beyond the wall of fire. For a split second, the flames part, almost mocking me with a brief window of clarity.

There, in the inferno, is Eli. My brother.

He's standing there alone, screaming my name, begging for help. The terror in his eyes, the raw fear in his voice, sends a chill through my spine, freezing me in place.

But before panic can take hold, I don't think. I just react.

The searing heat, once terrifying, no longer matters. A primal urge surges inside me, driving me forward. Without hesitation, I leap for the steps with only one thought driving me—save my brother.

Just as my foot lands, our eyes lock again. In that instant, time seems to stop at what I see in his eyes.

The fear is gone. His eyes are hollow now—brimming with a profound sadness. His lips quiver, and then, with a pain so raw it breaks my heart, he whispers:

"Why did you leave me?"

The words slice through me like molten steel, cutting deeper than any flame. My breath catches. Guilt surges like a tidal wave, crushing every rational thought. My knees buckle, and I collapse under the weight of it. I search for words, I want to explain, to apologize. But, none exist. His eyes demand an answer I'll never have. There is no answer, no words to make it right.

The weight of regret pushes down on me. My body trembles, struggling to stay upright.

His words echoing through my mind.

But then, the heat bites my skin again, burning through the paralysis. Clarity strikes: I can be there for him now. I can save him. We can figure out the rest later—after we both make it out of this burning hellscape.

I shoot to my feet, driven by a desperate need to get to him. I leap for the step, muscles coiled with explosive force, ready to carry me into the fire. My boot slams into the step and then gives way. The wood splinters as the floorboard beneath me collapses, plunging me into the decaying structure.

And then—everything stops.

The flames vanish. The heat, the smoke, the suffocating air—they all dissolve. The house crumbles into ash, scattering and blowing away silently on the wind.

For a moment, the world is eerily still.

Then, faint but unmistakable, his words echo once more, carried on the gentle breeze, as I watch the ashes float away:

"Why did you leave me?"

"Why"

#

"That's when I wake up," he said, his voice tight. "The sterile white lights overhead burn my eyes, forcing me to squint. My body's drenched in sweat, the pillow and sheets soaked through. My heart pounding like it's about to tear free from my chest." He rubbed a hand down his face, fingers trembling. "And the fire… it still clings to me. I can feel it on my skin, even though there's nothing there. No scorch marks. No burns. Nothing."

He swallowed hard, his voice breaking. “My lungs ache. I can still taste the sulfur in the back of my throat. But the air down here is clean—thin, crisp, pure. It’s like the world I just left behind never existed.”

A shaky laugh escaped him, hollow. “I tell myself it wasn’t real. Just a nightmare.”

For a long moment he went quiet, then whispered, “But the weight’s still there. The guilt. It won’t let go. It sits heavy on my shoulders—the fear of what happened up there, the fear of what happened to my brother. It just keeps growing. Every day. And no matter how much I want to escape it…” He pressed his lips together, eyes closing. “There’s no blade sharp enough to cut it free.”

He paused for a moment, like the pain was hitting again.

Then he lifted his head and looked directly into the camera. “This is Alpha-One, day three hundred and fifty-eight. End recording.” He muttered.

“Recording ended. Thank you Alpha-One, your Echo Loop has been logged.” The same overhead voice responded.

#

With a hiss, the hydraulic doors to the Operations Command Center slid open, and Olivia stepped inside, tablet in hand.

“Good morning, Alpha-One!” she greeted, her voice laced with sarcasm, a mischievous grin tugging at her lips.

The moment she spoke, her smile cut through the weight of Jase’s words, dissolving some of the darkness that clung to him.

“Good morning, Beta-three!” Jase shot back, rolling his eyes—an intense blue that

concealed a mix of affection and challenge behind their sharpness.

Olivia, as she was known to everyone now, was one of six subjects in the facility—three males, three females. When the project began, their identities were stripped away and replaced with titles: “Alpha” followed by a number for the males, and “Beta” followed by a number for the females.

In the beginning, it made sense. It was a scientific study, and the formalities fit the sterile environment. But as time passed and the reality of their situation set in, the labels felt dehumanizing.

“Pretty early for your Echo Loop, isn’t it? Another sleepless night?” Olivia remarked, her eyes flicking down to her tablet as her fingers moved across the screen.

“Yeah, I guess it is,” Jase replied, his voice quieter than usual. “Just had a few things I needed to get out.”

As part of the study, subjects were required to record an Echo Loop—a weekly video log tracking their mental states, giving the Principal Investigators a window into their psyche without interference. The logs had continued long after the project shifted from clinical study to their grim reality. Despite being mandatory, the Echo Loops became almost therapeutic, an outlet when nothing else could be.

Without looking up, Olivia asked with a knowing expression, “Let me guess… you had the dream again?”

Jase exhaled slowly, brushing a hand through his tousled brown hair. “Yeah… same dream, same result.”

Jase shifted his weight, broad shoulders slumping as though the air itself pressed down on

him. At just over six feet, he was built for strength—his frame carried the kind of muscle earned through use, not vanity. He was undeniably good-looking, though it was clear he didn't put much effort into it. Sun-kissed skin, earned from long hours outdoors, gave him a rugged, earthy appeal.

There was a sharpness to his features, a focus that lingered even in quiet moments, as if his mind refused to rest. Despite that edge, something about him always drew attention—an unspoken confidence that didn't need polish or pretense to be noticed.

"So… smoke, fire, ash, full-blown panic attack," Olivia said, her voice a mix of teasing and concern.

Jase pressed his lips into a tight line and nodded, shame flickering in his eyes. This wasn't the first time they'd had this conversation, and it was wearing on him.

"And yet… still no me? I'm starting to get jealous, Jase!" she added, lifting a brow and throwing a playful glance over her shoulder.

A reluctant smile tugged at his lips. He scratched at his chin, trying to hide his embarrassment. "Guess I just never make it that far."

"Well, maybe you should dream smarter, not harder," Olivia teased, smirk returning as she refocused on her tablet.

The humor lingered a moment, but Jase's smile soon faltered. His shoulders sagged under the weight of something deeper. "It's always just him. Always just Eli. Alone." His voice heavy with pain that never seemed to leave him.

Olivia's playful tone softened into one of quiet sincerity, a tenderness that only she could offer. "Because you left him behind."

Olivia knew Jase better than anyone else in the facility. From the moment they met, there was an unspoken understanding—something that transcended circumstance. Even if the outside world had been intact, it felt like they would have been close. It was a natural connection.

Olivia turned toward him, brushing a few loose strands of blonde hair back that fell just below her chin. Most of it was tied into a short ponytail, with a few loose strands to frame her face. At 5'10", she carried herself with an easy confidence—lean, athletic, the kind of grace that made Jase once guess she'd been a soccer player. She laughed him off, of course, insisting she'd trip over the ball before she ever scored.

Her blue eyes fixed on him now, piercing, sharp enough to feel like they could read his thoughts if he let them linger too long. Yet beneath that intensity was a warmth she rarely showed, one that slipped through only in quiet moments like this. High cheekbones and pale skin gave her a striking look, but for Jase, none of that mattered as much as her smile.

Even down here, buried in steel and concrete, that smile felt like sunlight breaking through, filling the room with warmth. It had a way of making him forget, if only for a heartbeat, the weight pressing down on them all.

"Jase, you're overthinking it," Olivia said, her voice steady but gentle as she moved toward the wall panel of humming servers. She popped it open with practiced ease, revealing a web of wiring and circuits. With a quick pull she freed a cable, plugged it into her tablet, and typed in a string of commands. "We don't know what happened up there. Hell, for all we know, nothing happened at all. But whatever it was… we'll deal with it when the time comes. You don't have to carry it everyday."

Jase crossed his arms, jaw tight. He took a slow breath, unwilling to let go of the thoughts

gnawing at him. “I know that, Olivia. But something obviously happened. Something bad—or we wouldn’t be stuck down here. And it’s not just the uncertainty… it’s the guilt. Knowing I’m safe while he’s out there—alone. I should be out there, protecting him. Not down here, cut off from the world with all of you.”

Olivia glanced up from her tablet, her gaze locking with his. There was no pity in her eyes, only quiet understanding. “You think I don’t feel that every day?” she said softly, as if admitting a truth she rarely let out.

“I’d give anything to see my dad again. I’d do anything to hear his voice one more time. But I’ve learned something down here, Jase.” She paused, her expression sharpening. “We can’t change what happened up there. All we can do now is stay focused—and ready. Because when those doors finally open, we’ll find them. We’ll find Eli. But we have to make it that far.” Her words burned with defiance, like an anchor to cling to.

Jase’s shoulders sagged, the fight draining out of him as doubt clung like a shadow he couldn’t shake. “I want to believe that, Liv. God, I do.” His voice thinned, almost breaking. “But it’s not that simple.”

He raked a hand through his hair, jaw tightening. “Eli… he begged me not to do this. Said it didn’t feel right, that something about it was off. And I just—” his voice caught, “—I brushed him off. Like it didn’t matter. Like he didn’t matter.”

His chest hitched as the words slipped out, rawer than he meant. He looked away, unable to meet her eyes. “I left him behind, and now…” His throat closed around the thought, the silence heavier than anything he could say. Finally, the words dragged out, quiet and broken. “Now it feels like it was all for nothing.”

#

Just over 358 days ago, everything had been different. Back then, they were just regular young adults, the future wide open. Jase had wrapped up his junior year of college, standing at the edge of summer with equal parts relief and excitement—until the letter arrived.

It was from a government-funded study group, informing him he'd been specifically selected as a candidate for a highly lucrative program.

It was called Project Fallout Kids, and according to the packet, it would examine the physical and emotional effects of living in a state-of-the-art underground fallout shelter called The Ouroboros. The letter insisted Jase's physical health and college test scores made him the perfect candidate

At first, he scoffed. Three months in an underground bunker with strangers? No thanks.

Then he saw the line that changed everything: Compensation includes college credits, monetary reward, and forgiveness of all student loans.

That was the hook. That was all it took.

The rest of the material was half sales pitch, half history lesson. Jase remembered skimming it, barely paying attention at first.

During the Cold War, it said, fallout shelters were critical lifelines in the face of nuclear fear. In the 1950s, the U.S. built a network of underground facilities, but two stood apart in scope and purpose.

The Raven Rock Mountain Complex—Site R—tucked deep in the Pennsylvania forests. Built in the '50s to house top U.S. government officials if disaster struck. Underground chambers, command centers—a place where leadership could wait out the end of the world.

Then, in the ’60s, the Cheyenne Mountain Complex rose in Colorado. A hardened fortress, command-and-control for NORAD. Built to survive a direct nuclear strike. More advanced, more resilient than Site R. Capable of sustaining its inhabitants for years. It was designed for prolonged isolation, for a world that might not come back.

That was then. Technology had come a long way since.

The Ouroboros, the letter boasted, wasn’t just another bunker. It was automated. Self-sustaining. A facility designed to support life indefinitely. A monument to human ingenuity, able to outlast the civilization that built it. Compared to that, Site R and Cheyenne Mountain looked like caves. The Ouroboros was the future.

None of that had impressed Jase at the time.

It was the debt. Always the debt.

The catch was isolation. Total severance from the outside world. No contact for three months. Every detail of their physical and mental health, tracked and recorded daily by the facility’s computers and Echo Loops. Ninety days underground. That was the deal.

It sounded hard, but manageable. Endure three months, walk out debt-free.

He’d never imagined the doors wouldn’t open.

Olivia’s gaze softened, her blue eyes catching his and holding them. There was no pity there, only the kind of understanding that came from carrying her own weight of loss. “You did what you thought was right, Jase,” she said quietly. “We don’t know what’s waiting on the other side of those doors—but whatever it is, you won’t face it alone. Eli will understand. He loves you. That hasn’t changed.”

Jase’s throat worked as he tried to breathe past the knot there. He held her gaze, searching

for something steady, something to keep him from unraveling. “I hope you’re right,” he murmured, doubt fraying every word.

Olivia straightened, a spark of defiance cutting through her softness. “Then picture it. When those doors open and you see him again—what’s the first thing you’ll say?”

The question hit like a punch. Jase exhaled hard, his eyes dropping to the floor. His eyes burned as he whispered, “Every day.” He paused, and then locked back onto her gaze. “I’ll tell him I’m sorry.”

Olivia didn’t look away. She let the silence sit between them, not as judgment, but as a quiet vow to hold him up when he couldn’t hold himself.

Eli had never been as enthusiastic about the study as the others. He thought it was a terrible idea—and he made sure Jase knew it, right up until the day he left for the facility.

Maybe that was part of why it stung so much. Two years earlier, their dad had died of a sudden heart attack, and the loss had gutted the family. Eli carried it quietly, never talking much, but Jase could feel the shift. They’d always been close, but after their father’s death, something between them felt fragile, like it could splinter if pulled too hard.

Every summer, without fail, they had a tradition: a camping and fishing trip, just the three of them. No distractions. Just firelight, casting lines into the lake, and making memories that felt like they would last forever. After their dad was gone, they kept it going—not for the fish, but for him. To hold onto a piece of what they’d lost.

This time, though, Jase knew the tradition wouldn’t survive. By the time the study ended, summer would be over, and he’d be heading back for his final year of college. Graduation was around the corner, and with it, whatever came next.

Eli had never said it outright, but Jase could feel it—that fear that this trip, this bond, would slip away just like their father had. That once Jase stepped underground, the last thread holding them together would be gone.

"It's not your fault," Olivia said softly. "None of us knew it would turn out like this. We all have people we care about up there, and none of us know their fate. But until those doors open, until we see for ourselves, we have to hold onto hope."

Her fingers traced the edge of her tablet, restless, as her eyes clouded with unspoken doubts. She swallowed hard, forcing them back down, refusing to let them win.

Then she crossed the room and stopped in front of him. For a moment, she just stood there, close enough that he could see the tremor in her breath. When she spoke again, her voice was fragile but unwavering.

"If I let myself imagine the worst—believe the worst—I won't be able to keep doing this." Her hand pressed lightly against his arm, grounding herself as much as him. "I need to believe there's something left. Something worth fighting for. That my dad, your brother… they're still out there. That we all still have a chance."

Jase's heart sank as he listened, and guilt pressed harder on his chest. He hadn't meant to pull her into his darkness, not her of all people.

"I'm sorry, Liv," he said quietly, his voice thick with regret. "I didn't mean to weigh you down. You're the one who keeps me steady, and here I am dragging you into my mess." He ran a hand through his unruly hair, frustration clear. "You're right—it doesn't do me any good, and it sure doesn't do you any good either. I just… didn't sleep, and I let the guilt get the better of me."

He glanced at her, eyes soft. "You don't deserve that. I'm sorry."

Olivia's expression softened, the tension easing from her features. She let her hand rest a moment longer on his shoulder. "It's okay," she said, her voice low, threaded with compassion. "We all have our days down here. And I'm here whenever you need to talk—I mean it."

For a heartbeat, she simply held his gaze. His walls were down, and she saw him clearly—raw, uncertain, human. Something about that vulnerability pulled her in, more than any strength ever could.

Then, as if sensing he'd had enough heaviness for one morning, her lips curved into a grin. The sadness in her eyes flickered out, replaced by the spark he knew so well. "You know what your problem is?" she asked, her tone shifting to playful.

Jase raised an eyebrow. "What's that?"

"You need some breakfast!" she said with a mischievous grin. "What do you say I finish this up later and we head to the kitchen? Get your grumpy ass something to eat? That should put you in a better mood!" Her smile spread, infectious in its warmth.

Jase couldn't help it—he let out a laugh, the sound escaping before he could stop it. A genuine chuckle that felt like it had been trapped inside him for far too long. Maybe Olivia was right. Maybe a simple meal was the distraction he needed, just for a moment. Just to break the tension that always hung between them.

"You know me too well, Liv. That's exactly what I need," he said, the smile lingering as his shoulders finally eased. The weight didn't lift, not entirely, but for a moment it didn't press so hard.

Olivia smiled, clearly pleased with herself. "Alright, let's go get you fed." She turned to the ceiling. "Ouro, remind me to finish server maintenance later today, please."

A soft, female voice answered at once, smooth and without hesitation. “Copy that, Beta-Three. I will remind you this evening to complete rack server 2-3C maintenance in the OCC.”

Ouro. The AI that ran every system in the Ouroboros.

She was everywhere—doors, lights, water, air—woven so tightly into the walls it was impossible to tell where the machine ended and their lives began. Always listening. Always watching. Never seen.

Olivia, despite her easy smile and the way she rarely looked like the stereotypical tech wiz, was the one who kept that vast system from faltering. She spoke with Ouro more than anyone, and sometimes, in the silence of the shelter, it almost felt like talking to a seventh roommate—one who never slept, never blinked, and never truly left them alone.

Olivia crossed the room, unplugged her tablet with a swift motion, and snapped the panel shut, the servers humming on behind her. As she returned, Jase caught her hand, tugging gently as he guided her toward the door. Just before they stepped out of the OCC, he stopped and turned to her.

He held her gaze, his own eyes steady with a resolve he didn’t truly feel. “When those doors do open, we are going to find them, Liv. All of them.”

Her breath hitched, just barely, before a wide smile spread across her face. Warmth radiated from her like sunlight breaking through the underground gloom. She leaned into him, resting her head against his shoulder, letting the moment soak in.

Jase pressed his lips into a slight smile, and then continued on.

It was believable enough.

As the door sealed shut behind them, the monitor Jase had been sitting at flickered to life.

The hum of the servers seemed to grow louder. Across the screen, a single word pulsed:

Analyzing.

* * *

END OF AUTHORIZED PREVIEW

Additional file content locked.

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