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from The Fallout Kids by Jordan Weir.



THE

FALLOUT
KIDS

A POST-APOCALYPTIC SURVIVAL THRILLER

JORDAN WEIR

The Fallout Kids

A Post-Apocalyptic Survival Thriller

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 blinked to life above the camera lens.

Someone cleared their throat.

From the overhead speakers, a voice drifted down. Flat and precise.

"I am recording. You may begin whenever."

The camera adjusted slightly, focusing.

The silence deepened. It pressed against the walls, heavy and watchful beneath the sterile hum of the lights.

Fabric rustled. A chair shifted.

He leaned forward slightly, elbows resting on his knees.

Still, no words.

Only the steady pulse of the red light.

Waiting.

His heart began to pound harder the longer the silence stretched.

A long inhale filled the room, slow and deliberate. It stayed trapped in his lungs for a moment, held until it almost hurt.

A shaky breath escaped.

For a moment, it sounded like someone trying to remember how to speak.

Then—

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 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 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's pounding like it's about to tear free from my chest."

He dragged a hand down his face, his fingers trembling.

"And the fire... it still clings to me. I can feel it crawling across my skin, even though there's nothing there. No scorch marks. No burns. Nothing."

He swallowed hard.

"My lungs ache. I can still taste the sulfur in the back of my throat. But the air down here is clean. Crisp. Pure. It's like the world I just left behind never existed."

A hollow laugh slipped out. "I tell myself it wasn't real. Just a nightmare."

For a long moment he said nothing.

Then, quietly—

"But the weight's still there."

He rubbed the back of his neck, staring at the floor.

"The guilt. It won't let go. It just sits there on my shoulders... growing heavier every day."

His voice tightened. "The fear of what happened up there. The fear of what happened to my brother."

Silence stretched.

"And no matter how much I want to escape it..." His jaw clenched. "There's no blade sharp enough to cut it free."

He paused, breathing unevenly. Then he lifted his head and looked directly into the camera.

"This is Alpha-One. Day three hundred and fifty-eight." He hesitated a moment, like the words had become a ritual.

"End recording."

From the overhead speakers, the voice returned—unchanged, emotionless. "Recording ended. Thank you, Alpha-One. Your Echo Loop has been logged."

With a hiss, the hydraulic doors to the Operations Command Center slid open.

Olivia stepped inside, tablet in hand.

"Good morning, Alpha-One!" she greeted, her voice laced with sarcasm, a mischievous grin tugging at the corner of her mouth.

The moment she spoke, the tension in the room shifted. Her presence cut straight through the heaviness of Jase's recording, dissolving some of the darkness clinging to him.

"Good morning, Beta-Three," Jase shot back, rolling his eyes—an intense blue that barely hid the affection behind the challenge.

Olivia, as she was now known to everyone, was one of six subjects selected for the study.

Three men. Three women.

When the project began, their identities had been stripped down to designations: Alpha for the men, Beta for the women, each followed by a number.

At first, it had felt clinical. Appropriate for a scientific study. Now it just felt ridiculous.

The longer they lived inside the Ouroboros, the more the labels sounded like something meant for lab animals.

"Pretty early for your Echo Loop, isn't it? Another sleepless night?" Olivia said, 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."

Echo Loops were supposed to be simple. Weekly video logs for the Principal Investigators to monitor their mental state without personal interaction. Just another clinical requirement of the study.

But after everything changed, the recordings had taken on a different purpose. For most of them, they'd become something closer to therapy. A place to dump thoughts no one else wanted to say out loud.

Without looking up, Olivia asked, "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, a 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 something gentler, sincere. "Because you left him behind."

Olivia knew Jase better than anyone else in the facility. From the moment they met, there had been an unspoken understanding between them. Something that felt inevitable, as if their lives would have crossed paths even if the outside world had never fallen apart.

She turned toward him, brushing a few loose strands of blonde hair back from her face. Most of it was tied into a short ponytail, though stubborn pieces always slipped free to frame her jaw.

At five-ten she carried herself with an easy confidence—lean and athletic, the kind that made Jase suspect she'd once been a soccer player. She always laughed that off, insisting she'd trip over the ball before she ever scored.

Now her blue eyes fixed on him—sharp, perceptive, almost unsettling in how easily they seemed to read people. But beneath that intensity lived a warmth she rarely let anyone see.

It showed itself in moments like this.

High cheekbones and pale skin gave her a striking look, but none of that mattered to Jase as much as her smile.

Even down here, buried beneath steel and concrete, that smile felt like sunlight breaking through the clouds. For a heartbeat, it made him forget the weight pressing down on them all.

"Jase, you're overthinking it," Olivia said, her voice steady but gentle.

She moved toward the wall panel of humming servers, and popped it open, revealing a web of wiring and circuits. With a quick tug she freed a cable, plugged it into her tablet, and typed a string of commands.

"We don't know what happened up there. Hell, for all we know, nothing happened at all."

She glanced back at him.

"But whatever it was... we'll deal with it when the time comes. You don't have to carry it every day."

Jase crossed his arms, his jaw tightening. He took a slow breath, but the thoughts gnawing at him refused to loosen their grip.

"I know that, Olivia. But something obviously happened. Something bad, or we wouldn't be stuck down here."

He shook his head slightly. "And it's not just the uncertainty... it's the guilt. Knowing I'm safe while he's out there. Alone."

His voice dropped. "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 onto his. There was no pity in her eyes, only quiet understanding.

"You think I don't feel that every day?" she said softly. "I'd give anything to see my dad again. Anything just to hear his voice one more time."

She paused, the softness in her expression sharpening into something steadier. "But I've learned something down here, Jase."

Her eyes held his.

"We can't change what happened up there. All we can do is stay focused and ready. Because when those doors finally open, we'll find them."

Her voice hardened with resolve. "We'll find Eli."

She paused for a moment.

"But first," she said quietly, "we have to make it that far."

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, his jaw tightening.

"Eli... he begged me not to do this. Said it didn't feel right. Said something about the whole thing was off."

He shook his head.

"And I just..." His voice caught. "I brushed him off. Like it didn't matter. Like he didn't matter."

Olivia's fingers paused on the tablet. The words hung between them, rawer than he meant them to be.

Jase looked away, unable to meet her eyes. "I left him behind, and now..." His throat tightened around the thought.

Silence swallowed the rest.

When he finally spoke again, the words came out quiet and broken.

"Now it feels like it was all for nothing."

Just over three hundred and fifty-eight days ago, everything had been different. Back then, they were just regular young adults, the future wide open in front of them.

Jase had just finished his junior year of college, standing on the edge of summer with equal parts relief and excitement, until the letter arrived. It came from a government-funded research program, informing him he'd been selected as a candidate for a highly lucrative study.

The program was called Project: Fallout Kids.

According to the packet, the study would examine the physical and psychological effects of long-term confinement inside a state-of-the-art underground fallout shelter known as The Ouroboros.

The letter claimed Jase's physical health and academic scores made him an ideal 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 wasn't just another concrete bunker. It was automated. Self-sustaining. A facility engineered to support human life indefinitely. A monument to human ingenuity, designed to outlast the civilization that built it.

Compared to that, places like Site R and Cheyenne Mountain looked like caves.

The Ouroboros wasn't just a shelter. It 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 with anyone. Every detail of their physical and mental health tracked daily by the facility's systems and Echo Loops.

Ninety days underground. That was the deal.

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

He had 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 all did. We said yes to this because it was an opportunity—because it made sense at the time. None of us knew what was coming."

She held his gaze, steady, unflinching. "And now? It's not like we can just walk out those doors. We don't have a choice."

Her voice softened, but didn't waver. "Eli will understand. He loves you. That hasn't changed."

Jase swallowed, trying to breathe past the knot in his throat. He searched her eyes 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 the softness in her expression.

"Then picture it," she said. "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 gaze dropping to the floor. His vision burned as the words slipped out. "I imagine it every day."

He looked back up at her. "I'll tell him I'm sorry."

Olivia didn't look away. She let the silence settle between them—not as judgment, but as a quiet promise 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 fire-light, 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. "You didn't know it would turn out like this. None of us did."

She paused, her eyes drifting away.

"We all have people up there... people we care about. And we don't even know what happened to them. 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. Doubt flickered across her face, sharp and unguarded, before she forced it back down. She swallowed hard, then crossed the room and stopped in front of him.

For a moment she simply stood there, close enough that he could see the tremor in her breath.

"If I let myself imagine the worst... believe the worst..." She shook her head faintly. "I won't be able to keep going."

Her hand rested lightly on his arm, grounding herself as much as him.

"I need to believe there's something left. Something worth fighting for."

Her voice hardened. "That my dad—your brother... they're still out there."

A quiet breath escaped her. "That we still have a chance."

Jase's heart sank as he listened, guilt pressing harder against his chest.

He didn't answer right away.

Her words settled into him, heavy and unrelenting. The tremor in her voice, the way she held herself together—it all landed deeper than he expected.

"Liv..." His voice faltered, quieter now. "I'm sorry."

He swallowed hard, forcing the words out. "I didn't mean to weigh you down. You shouldn't have to carry that. Not because of me."

His gaze dropped for a moment before finding hers again. "You're the one who keeps me steady... and I hate that I'm making this harder for you."

He ran a hand through his unruly hair, frustration flickering across his face. "You're right. It doesn't do me any good—and it definitely doesn't do you any good either. I just... didn't sleep. I let the guilt get the better of me."

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

Olivia's expression eased, the tension slipping from her features. Her hand lingered on him a moment longer.

"It's okay," she said. "We all have our days down here."

Her voice was quiet, but steady. "That doesn't mean you're dragging me down." She held his gaze. "It just means we lean on each other when it gets too heavy."

A small breath escaped her. "That's all we've got down here, Jase... each other."

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, 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—so tightly woven 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 fact that she looked nothing like the stereotypical tech wiz—was the one who kept the vast system from faltering. She spoke with Ouro more than anyone.

And sometimes, in the quiet 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 hummed steadily behind her.

As she returned, Jase caught her hand and tugged gently, guiding 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 finally open," he said, "we're going to find them, Liv. All of them."

Her breath caught for just a moment 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 linger.

Jase managed a small smile.

It was convincing enough.

Then he guided her out into the hallway. The door sealed shut behind them with a soft hydraulic hiss.

Inside the OCC, the monitor Jase had been sitting at flickered to life.

The hum of the servers deepened.

Across the screen, a single word pulsed: *Analyzing*.