

Coming Soon...

# SCION OF CONQUERED EARTH

SCION: BOOK ONE

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Delirious  
Scribbles Ink

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# Flight

“Pain is gain!” The high pitch cry told him the aerobics instructors were about to eat him alive – literally.

*Lost more ground than I thought.* He cursed. *Got to move faster.*

Loose tile and smashed brick slid beneath his soles. He went down, catching himself on ruined buildings and shattered glass with an already bloody hand. He scrambled back to his feet and pushed another burst of speed from his body.

“Pilates are life!” another woman shrieked.

He didn't look back. He raced toward less cluttered streets. Blast craters in the roadway and the discarded belongings of a city's fleeing population forced him to dart this way and that. He jumped onto a hover taxi smashed into a new career as an accordion, scrambled across its hood and leapt to clear a bloated corpse.

“Let's go ladies! Feel that burn!”

The teen reached a relatively clear stretch and risked a backward glance. Too-long uncut brown hair obscured his vision and filled his mouth with bitter reminder of how filthy he was. Not even half a block behind him, five women pursued dressed in leotards and sweatpants shredded enough to give him an eyeful he might otherwise have enjoyed if they hadn't been trying to eat him.

A section of torn asphalt shifted under one foot as he glanced back.

Like lipstick applied in an earthquake, dried blood stained their mouths beneath wild eyes and haphazard pony tails.

He cursed and raced between a pair of destroyed cars, blackened by laser blasts from invasion fighters. The sortie left a dozen burned out vehicles in his way like a morbid obstacle course. He ducked into the back seat of one and over

half a child's skeleton too fused to the frame beneath it to be pried loose and gnawed on by feasters like the ones on his tail. He slammed the opposite door from his way and darted over the roof of the next car.

Road fell away several stories on its opposite side, revealing a vehicle graveyard hosting another feaster camp with a dozen crazed looking lawyers.

“Get your body bikini ready!”

“I object,” a lawyer yelled back.

“Me too,” the teen gasped.

He spun left. His shoulder clipped a side mirror, stealing his balance. He regained it in time to leap atop the next nearest car.

“Why don't you guys do lunch without me,” he jumped again, edging the crater in an attempt to escape from both groups. He gestured to his loose hanging golden jumpsuit. “See, not enough meat for the effort.”

“Carbs are the enemy!”

“Bailiff, restrain that man!”

He cleared the traffic jam and darted through a series of bomb-gutted storefronts. He dug into long exhausted reserves for a bit more speed. He knew he didn't have it, knew he couldn't keep up the pace.

Something had told him to avoid the bombed out gym, but he'd been desperate for something to eat or drink. He'd found food all right, some poor animal – he hoped it'd been an animal – roasted on a makeshift firepit surrounded by deranged aerobics instructors seated on half-flat exercise balls.

He cleared half the block and darted down a tight alley.

Tattered suits and shredded leotards pursued him, getting into each other's way and tearing into one another. It wasn't their fault they wanted to eat him. The invading aliens – Welorin – had done things to them. No one knew what went on in the re-education camps, but the terrifying byproduct craved a meal of anyone the camps didn't produce.

He'd been desperate. He'd been careless. Put simply, he'd been stupid and stupid led him into not one but two of the feaster camps in the same chase.

He tripped on something he'd rather not think about, sending him tumbling into an old trashcan. The can careened off brick, clanging like a dinner bell and bowling its way through a pile of rain melted boxes. The makeshift hiding place disintegrated. Its occupants, a woman and a small boy, shrieked.

He scrambled back to his feet and ran three steps before cursing and whipping back around. He snatched up the can. “Run, Go, now.”

He hurled the can back the way he'd come, snatching everything at hand and hurling it at other debris in a rushed attempt to clog the alley. He hurried in the pair's wake, knocking over anything that came within reach.

The debris-clogged alley and the feasters' amplified competitive natures tangled his pursuers into a clawing, dogma-spewing Black Friday mob. He made it to the other street and shot glances both ways. Buildings lay at wrong angles

everywhere. Reddish flames burned behind a putrid haze, ghost lights within diseased fog.

He caught a glance of the woman and child disappearing around a cluttered corner.

He probably should have followed and escaped pursuit ducking through broken buildings. With his luck he'd stumble into another feaster camp, or worse, lead his pursuers to the pair he'd sacrificed time removing from the lunch menu.

He ran the other direction, taking advantage of the clearest roadway to both gain whatever extra lead it would afford him and draw the feasters after him.

He made it almost a full block before they fought their way out of the alley. A frazzle-haired woman in a tiger striped leotard shoved her way to the front. "First!"

Her near twin shouted behind her. "Second!"

"Hearsay, I object!"

A patent leather briefcase hurdled out of the alley. It slammed the pony tail of the lead feaster, sending her sprawling. "Sustained!"

The other lawyers chuckled, and the melee resumed. A robe-bedecked woman broke from the fight and pointed after him, "The accused is *not* dismissed!"

They chased him down a street bracketed by wrecked buildings leaning like stubborn dominoes against one another. Varied degrees of ruin mimicked his pursuers – some in far better shape than others.

He cut across a parking lot and headed down another street, ignoring shrieked oaths of those already demented then tortured into madness. His pace slowed. He ordered his limbs to keep moving, but they resisted the haste he demanded.

His heart thundered in his ears, rising above the following mob. It got louder, resolving into explosions accompanied by a low whistle which pricked the back of his head.

He whipped a glance over his shoulder. The feasters – restrained by who knew what brainwashing from eating one another – fought their way up his wake, making better time than he, oblivious to the danger racing their way.

He stumbled to a stop in a debris-littered parking lot, his legs still feeling in motion.

Ash rained once more from a putrid looking sky. He stared, shielded eyes raised. Unhealthy swaths of green and yellow streaked ever-present thunderheads horizon to horizon. Metallic grey death cut through the putrid skyline toward them.

Three triangular fighters streaked up the street. Green lasers ripped up the city on a direct line to him. Some sort of energy bolt seized derelict vehicles and building chunks, wrapping them in a corona of sparks and lofting them upward.

Blasts cut into the feaster mob. Bolts hit them, launching several screaming toward heaven.

He gaped as their bodies curved a lazy arch through the air back toward the ground – and him.

He fled. “There has to be some universal law against lawyers raining from the sky!”

Several feasters fled for cover. Others charged in his wake before deciding easy meat was better than dinner fleeing through a fire zone. They fled toward cover as fast as they could drag their fallen comrades home for dinner.

A ruined gas station offered his first real cover in a hundred yards – other than the hover cars the Welorin used as Hacky sacks. The huge blown out crater on its far side suggested it'd already been a target. It shared a fallen-in storefront with some kind of hair boutique. Opposite a small alley another building had been demolished. A sign stood in the wrecked parking strip advertising a combined air force and star force recruiting office, a tattoo parlor and a sandwich shop crushed like a panini.

The fighter blasts strafed over him, exploding street and debris. Heat washed past him, singeing his hair and partially regrown eyebrows. A chunk the size of his head blew sideways, catching him in the midriff and knocking him into a smoking hole.

He scrambled from the mini-crater, hands burning on still hot concrete, and paused at its edge. The fighters turned a lazy bank in the far horizon.

“Yeah, come on back. You might have missed a mailbox or something.”

*<They're coming back to see if they missed you, little brother. Time for hide and seek.>*

He froze as the voice rolled through his thoughts. He didn't remember a brother, though he knew the nameless voice. It was right. He had to get out of sight if he wanted to survive the assault.

He checked his back path. No feasters barred his way, but there were at least two camps that direction. The horizon around him was a mass of jagged broken buildings and ripped up streets. Any could have provided shelter, but also a target.

*If they're even empty.*

He examined the little crater. It was hot enough still he might lie in its burning recesses and the Welorin would think him dead – or an easy target. The alley seemed the best cover. He'd have two avenues of escape even if it wasn't.

He bolted toward the gas station, running around the long way in hope it'd misdirect the fighters when they came back for him – assuming he survived the next strafing run.

Laser blasts and lofted debris rained down toward him. He counted the blasts as they raked the roadway, trying to sense their firing pattern. At the last possible moment he doubled back the way he came.

He fell.

A laser blast cut through where he should've been standing, sucking the air from his lungs and leaving his exposed skin sunburnt.

He didn't check the fighters.

He scrambled to his feet and limp-ran across the blasted front of the gas station.

The fighters streaked overhead, their blasts centered where he'd fallen.

He jumped behind a large plastic sign reading: Shella's B\*U\*Tique.

The fighters swept over head again without firing a shot.

He ducked out from under cover and rushed into the alleyway. Mounded debris clogged it, turning it into a v-shaped valley – not the cover he'd hoped to find.

He flopped down against the boutique wall and cursed.

Every decision seemed the wrong one. Even minor victories turned wrong. With his luck, his interference had left the mother and child he exposed roasted on a spit for some shark in a torn business suit.

He shuttered and his gut knotted. It gurgled at him, reminder that he hadn't eaten either.

*Not that there's much I can do about that.*

He wondered about the sandwich shop. After so many months, anything not crushed or spoiled had been looted. The recruiting place might have had some food. It was the places that didn't really sell food that he'd found the tidbits that kept him going.

Fighters swept the area again. A hover van lofted into the air and fell toward the ground – toward him. He scrambled over the hill of debris and down the alley. The van crashed down on his heels, crunching metal and crackling power drowned everything else in his ears. It rocked, nose on the building, then toppled off with a crash.

The teen eased toward it, careful not to touch the clinging energy field. It flickered away. He touched the side of the van, jerking back his hand.

It was cool to the touch.

Whatever power launched it airborne cracked the chassis like an egg. A reek of rotten flesh escaped its interior. Holding his breath, he eased into the gap for a look. Everything inside stank, scorched by laser and cooked in summer heat. An ice blue duffle bag lay wedged beneath the feet of a child's corpse and the seat in front.

He tugged at it.

He pulled.

He braced a hand on the seat back and yanked. It came free breaking the child's leg in its path.

Bile rose in his throat. "Sorry, I didn't mean to, well, you know."

The bag held a menagerie of small stuffed animals. Other than something to pillow his head or burn he didn't have much use for them. He eased them from the bag and set them in the child's lap.

An adult's skull dropped away from its neck.

He jerked in surprise. His breath froze.

Through the spider-webbed windshield a light gleamed.

He scrambled out of the van and up the debris pile to gaze through a dirty window at an electric light shining within the remains of Shella's.

He smashed the window open with a brick, taking care to clear the broken shards along the edges of the window. He slipped inside, assaulted at once by a palatable wall of perfumed hair products. He gagged and choked, poking his head out the window to catch a cleaner breath then turned back to the light.

It shown like a ray from heaven inside a small bathroom. He rushed across the shampoo slick floor, ignored the shattered sink and threw open the commode.

Thick black slime clung to the water's edge, spots of who knew what made up a galaxy of ick. He cupped two hands and lowered them into the bowl. The slime attached itself to his fingers, but he raised the water to his lips. Bitter, warm water quenched his thirst, the scent of weak chlorine tickling his nostrils.

He drank the bowl empty, relishing his slimy quench of heaven.

A blast shook the building.

A heavily laden hair product rack fell sidelong, slamming into the bathroom door and closing him in with a smash. It didn't worry him at first. Instead, he collected a wealth in paper towels, liquid soap and oh-so-precious toilet paper.

He struggled open the tank, arms weak with hunger. Chlorine scent to rival the perfumes reeked from the stagnant water. An army of thumb sized roaches ringed the water's edge. He snatched at the bugs, several fleeing through the water before he caught a slippery, flailing morsel and shoved it into his mouth. Still moving legs tickled his throat, but meat was meat and things were desperate. He tried for another, but they slipped out cracks he couldn't. He filled hands with heavily chlorinated water. It burned his throat, but he drank his fill. One of the shampoo bottles might serve as canteen for the rest.

He opened the door.

It didn't budge.

He cursed. *Of course, I should've known it was too good to be true.*

*<Poor little brother, always so put upon.>*

“Shut up.”

He shoved and strained until his breath fled. He drank more water and fought the door some more. He finally wrestled it open enough to slide out an arm. He reached through the gap, finding rack and myriad bottles against the door. He dug them away, eyes closed and seeing with his hands.

The door shifted more.

He dug.

The door opened enough for him to squeeze through. He took one last drink from the toilet tank, threw the duffel through the gap and crawled after it.



He'd have to remove the fallen rack before he could canteen the rest of the water and risk flushing to see if the pipes had more perhaps cleaner fare.

He turned toward the fallen rack.

“Holy heavens.”

The outline of a door, painted over and previously blocked by the shelf stood sentry in the wall between the boutique and the gas station's convenience store.

*Food.*

If the power was still on beyond the door, there might be a feast of foods awaiting him. If nothing else, with no other entry to the store, it'd be a place to hide, rest his ankle, and be safe for a while.

The door didn't budge.

He beat at it with a stool until he broke through its lower panel and crawled into the store. What remained above dangled dangerously from a twisted aluminum skeleton. Dead fluorescent lights hung from tenuous last threads of electrical wiring, illuminating the room with occasional sparks – that the building had power at all was something of a miracle. They swung back and forth slowly, pendulums of doom rocked by fighter craft barrages to spread seemingly infinite dust reserves. Cracks riddled the cavernous ceiling above the skeleton, chunks of concrete clung to rebar by their fingertips. Dust and shattered ceiling tile littered every surface. Shelves teetered drunkenly into their neighbors while others lay on the floor uncaught by their peers.

Food lay on their shelves and at their feet – a fortune in canned items of every description, crushed foil bags of chips, snacks and a few cans of powdered baby formula.

If Shella's or the store had working water, he'd rest. He'd feast like a king.

He glanced at the ceiling.

At least, he'd feast until the world crashed down on his head. The store had stood this long. Who knew how long it'd survive.

The sound of approaching fighters filled his ears.

“No!” He wailed. “No, no, no...”

He heard them fire.

The building rocked.

The ceiling fell.

He backpedaled, heel caught, toppled backward.

Everything went black.