

# Zombie Apocalypse: The Chad Halverson Series

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## CHAPTER ONE

When the plague hit, it hit hard.

That was what the president called it, anyway. *Plague*.

*Plague* was just a euphemism for *zombies*, Chad Halverson knew. The president could call it anything he wanted. Halverson knew a zombie when he saw one. These things, diseased creatures or whatever they were, may have been infected by plague, but the creatures themselves, not the plague, were the most imminent threat at this point. The creatures bore an insatiable lust for human flesh.

Thirty-six-year-old Halverson worked for the National Clandestine Service, otherwise known as the black ops division of the CIA. The Agency had been tracking these worldwide outbreaks of plague ever since they had originated in China several weeks ago. The outbreaks were spreading like wildfire.

The director of the CIA, the sixtyish and donnish Ivy League-educated Ernest Slocum, suspected terrorists of engineering the outbreaks of pox. In his mind, terrorists had concocted some kind of supergerm warfare. The question was, which terrorists?

The Agency, therefore, was treating these outbreaks as acts of war and was operating accordingly. As of yet, no outbreaks had been reported on American soil. Slocum, Halverson knew, figured it was only a matter of time.

At that moment, Halverson was flying on a 737 Boeing passenger jet bound for LAX. The jet was beginning its descent.

Seven hours earlier Halverson had received a call at Langley's CIA headquarters from the UCLA medical center. The receptionist had told him his younger brother by a year Dan had been involved in a car accident. As Chad had been listed as Dan's next of kin in Dan's wallet, she was notifying Chad.

Chad had not seen Dan in over three years and was looking forward to reuniting with him. Chad could only hope that Dan wasn't too seriously injured. Dan was Chad's one close relative left, now that his parents had both died in, ironically it seemed to Chad considering Dan's current predicament, a car accident.

As the jet descended, Halverson wondered if Dan's accident had anything to do with the plague. Halverson had no reason to believe this. It was just that he had plague on his mind after having been bombarded at Langley with myriad reports of the epidemic burgeoning all over the world.

The plague probably had nothing to do with Dan's accident, Halverson decided. The hospital receptionist would no doubt have told him if the plague was in any way involved with Dan's hospitalization. But, then again, how long could America go before being invaded by the plague?

As of this day the germ or virus or whatever it was that was causing the plague remained unidentified, Halverson knew. Without determining a source for the plague, scientists could not even begin to discover a cure or vaccination.

It looked even smoggier than usual over LA, noted Halverson, glancing out his port window. Impenetrable fuscous clouds of smog mantled the entire landscape below him. What landscape? he wondered. He could be flying over the ocean for all he knew.

The jet suddenly bucked wildly up and down. Halverson grabbed ahold of his armrests. Luckily, he had his seat belt fastened. He dug his fingers into the vinyl-covered metal supports.

The jet began jerking back and forth. The rocking motion threw Halverson's head against the fuselage near the window to his left. He blacked out with the impact of his head's collision with the fuselage. He had no idea how long he was out. The next thing he knew he heard a voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please keep your seat belts fastened as we continue our approach to LAX," announced the pilot over the loudspeaker with a Texas drawl. "We're running into a little turbulence here. It should be over momentarily. Thank you."

The jet bucked again. This time worse than before. Halverson felt his seat belt ripping into his hips. He couldn't wait to get this flight over with.

The flight had been smooth as silk for over five hours—up until now, that is. Go figure, decided Halverson.

He still could not see anything outside the window other than the brownish yellow haze of the smog. He had never seen smog this thick in LA. He could not even see the signature high white arches of the spaceship-shaped restaurant the Encounter at LAX. He could always see those arches whenever he landed here.

That was strange, he decided, feeling the movement of the plane. It felt like the plane was ascending again. Not SOP, that was for sure.

"Folks," said the pilot, "there'll be a slight delay due to wind shear. We're gonna circle around again and land. Please bear with us."

Halverson could see the Pacific Ocean coming into view as he felt the plane banking. The visibility was better here, but he still could not make out the coastline.

"Is this normal?" asked the twentysomething passenger sitting next to Halverson.

"It's a first for me," answered Halverson. "And I've flown here a lot."

An expression of worry crossed the young man's unlined face. Sighing, he squinted out the window beside Halverson. The young man cleaned his spectacles with a handkerchief.

“Don’t be alarmed,” the pilot’s voice boomed over the loudspeaker. “Our communication with the control tower is out. We’ll be landing using our radar, without the air traffic controllers’ help.”

Sweat was beading over the young man’s upper lip.

Halverson could not blame him.

“This doesn’t sound normal,” said the young man.

“I can land this baby in my sleep,” the pilot assured the passengers as if reading their minds. “Just keep your seat belts buckled, sit back, and relax.”

Halverson did not like the looks of this. One aborted landing and communication with the control tower down. Still, the pilot had assured them everything was under control.

As one of the flight attendants walked by, the young man buttonholed her. “Maybe we should land somewhere else. At John Wayne Airport or somewhere.”

The Hispanic stewardess leaned toward him. She unleashed a wide smile at him. “No need for concern. You heard what our pilot said. Just sit back and relax.”

She had big liquid black eyes that were radiant with her smile, Halverson couldn’t help but notice.

The young man withdrew a cell phone from his trouser pocket.

The stewardess shook her head. “No. You can’t use your cell till after we land.”

“Why not?”

“It’ll interfere with the plane’s radar. We’re flying blind. All we can count on to guide us now when we land is our radar.”

“I need to call my girlfriend and tell her we’ll be late.”

“You need to put that away, sir.”

Halverson heard rumblings among the other passengers voicing their concerns.

The stewardess addressed the passengers. “Please be patient. We’ll be landing shortly. Thank you.”

The young man massaged his forehead.

“This is insane,” he muttered. “We can’t even see where we’re going. How can we fucking land?”

“That’s why we have radar,” the stewardess told him.

Halverson glanced out the window. His neighbor followed suit.

“What’s with all the smog?” asked the young man. “I’ve never seen it this bad.”

The stewardess peeked out the window over their heads. “The Santa Anas must be blowing.”

He gave her a look.

“They’re hot dry foehn winds that blow down from mountains into Los Angeles from the east—” she said.

“I know what they are,” he chimed in. “But I’ve never seen smog like this in all the years I’ve lived here.”

“Well, excuse me,” she huffed.

She proceeded down the aisle, inspecting the overhead storage bin doors to make certain they were secure.

“You get the feeling they’re not telling us something?” the young man asked Halverson.

Halverson said nothing.

He gazed out the window again. There was no sign of the city below. Smog was the order of the day. Miles and miles of a hazy blanket of dun smog.

“By the way, my name’s Tom,” said the young man. He held out his hand.

Halverson shook it. “I’m Chad.”

“I wish we could have met under more pleasant circumstances.”

Halverson nodded.

“What brings you to LA?” asked Tom.

“I’m meeting my brother.”

“I’m a wine salesman.”

“Oh.”

Halverson did not want to say too much. In his line of work with the Agency, it was best to keep one’s own counsel.

Just then the jet bumped about a foot up and down.

Tom gasped. “Jeez!”

Halverson peered out the window. He could not tell if they were descending or not. All he could see was the dusky smog below. He had no means to calculate his bearings. There were no landmarks visible that he could use to determine whether they were descending.

“Did we hit the tarmac?” asked Tom, wide-eyed. “Did we land?”

“I don’t think so. Not yet.”

Halverson could not see the tarmac. The omnipresent smog was thicker than a dense fog.

“Are you sure?” asked Tom.

“It doesn’t feel like we’re braking.”

“Our pilot must be the worst pilot in the country. I’ve never felt so many bumps in a flight.”

“I don’t think that’s smog,” said Halverson, still peering out the window, ignoring Tom’s words.

“What else could it be?”

“It looks more like smoke.”

“I hope not.”

“I’ve never seen smog that thick. I don’t look forward to breathing it.”

“The problem is, where there’s smoke there’s fire.”

“Prepare for landing,” came the pilot’s voice over the loudspeaker.

The flight attendants bustled to their assigned landing stations.

“I still can’t see a thing out there,” said Halverson, straining his eyes to penetrate the shrouds of grey haze consuming the jet.

“We should land at another airport, like I said before,” said Tom. “This is flat-out insane.”

Sitting up front, the amiable Hispanic stewardess caught Tom’s eye. She held her forefinger to her full lips trying to shush him.

“Insane,” he repeated, just to irritate her.

## CHAPTER TWO

The Boeing 737 slammed down onto the tarmac.

Halverson felt the shock of the landing all the way up his spine. He winced in pain. He heard Tom groan beside him.

Several of the doors for the overhead bins snapped open. Luggage of various shapes and sizes toppled out of the storage compartments, crashing onto passengers' heads and laps.

Passengers screamed.

An expression of petrified horror swept over the genial stewardess's face.

"Keep your seat belts fastened for your own safety," admonished the pilot's voice over the loudspeaker. "Do not leave your seats till the seat belt sign turns off."

The jet abruptly veered to starboard as it taxied down the runway. In a matter of seconds the jet crashed onto its port side. Halverson could feel the port wing snapping off the fuselage as the jet flipped onto its side.

Overhead sign or no overhead sign, Halverson pried open his seat belt. He wasn't about to sit strapped into his seat while the upended plane caught fire. Tom took Halverson's cue and flipped open his seat belt.

The flight attendants, including the Hispanic stewardess, were busy opening the emergency exit door on the starboard side of the fuselage. She wasn't smiling anymore, Halverson noted. The flight crew deployed the plastic slide outside of the exit for the passengers to disembark.

"One at a time," she was saying to the passengers that congregated around the exit.

"No running. Stay calm."

The distraught passengers began sliding down the blue, tarpaulin-like slide to the tarmac.

Halverson gazed out the open door. "Where are the airport emergency personnel?"

"There ought to be fire engines and foam trucks all over this place by now," said Tom with misgivings. "What's going on here?"

A woman pushing thirty with short brown hair in the back of the plane started screaming.

Halverson thought he could smell smoke. If this plane caught fire, it would blow up fast, he knew, what with the presence of the avgas. The only thing in their favor was the fact that the fuel tanks should be just about empty after their long trip from back east.

“Everybody, please keep moving,” said the stewardess. “Don’t get your luggage from the bins now. You’re holding up traffic. We’ll get your luggage later. We need to get out of the plane in an orderly fashion at once.”

Tom leapt out of the emergency exit onto the plastic slide and slid down to the tarmac.

“Do you need any help?” Halverson asked the stewardess.

“No, I’m fine.” She smiled tightly at him. She addressed the rest of the passengers. “If anyone needs help getting out of their seat, please let us know and a flight attendant will come to your aid.”

Halverson heard a woman sobbing behind him. He jumped out the door onto the slide. Once he reached the tarmac he stood up.

He scanned the airstrip. No sign of fire engines or ambulances speeding toward the crash site. He could not understand it. Of course, he could not see very far thanks to the heavy smog. He was lucky if he could see five feet ahead of him. He smelled smoke. Their plane might be burning or the smoke might be coming from somewhere else.

Tom walked up to him out of the smog. “This is screwy. How come no one’s here to help us deplane? Don’t they know there’s been an accident?”

A middle-aged woman with henna hair approached them. “How could they know? It’s impossible to see anything in this smog.”

Passengers milled around the tarmac after they got off the plane. They didn’t know where to go.

“Where are the terminals?” asked Tom, surveying the smog-shrouded area.

“How do we know in which direction to go?” asked the woman.

A fortyish potbellied man in a black-and-white plaid two-button wool-and-cashmere Ascot Chang suit joined their group. He was gripping a black attaché case. “I would submit to you that we’re screwed.”

He had a pale white face and a double chin. His courtly bearing radiated authority, Halverson noticed.

“You’re not helping matters any,” the woman said, scowling at Potbelly.

“Don’t blame me for this fiasco,” said Potbelly. “I’m not the pilot.”

“Your negative words are not welcome.”

“I’m just calling a spade a spade.” Potbelly looked indignant.

“There’s no sense in arguing about it,” said Tom. “We’ve got to figure out what to do next.”

“I wish I could come up with bright ideas like that.”

It was obvious to Halverson that Tom didn’t appreciate Potbelly’s sarcasm. However, Tom said nothing.

“Where’s the pilot?” said Potbelly. “He should know where the terminals are located.” He made a show of scanning the vicinity in search of the pilot.

“I wish someone would tell me what happened,” said the woman.

“It’s quite simple. We crashed.”

The woman’s face registered her annoyance. “But why? And why is all this smog here?”

“In answer to your first question, our pilot is a numskull. In answer to your second”—Potbelly paused—“I don’t know.”

“What’s your name?”

“Gary.”

“Gary, you have a swelled head. If I ever see you again it will be too soon.”

“What’s *your* name?”

“Mildred.”

“Mildred, the feeling is mutual.”

“You’re an offensive man. You know that?”

“But you’d love to have me represent you in a court of law. I know.”

“Can we save this for later?” said Halverson. “We need to move away from the plane. It might explode any minute.”

As the last of the passengers emerged from the plane followed by the flight crew, the restive crowd retreated from the plane.

“Where’s our fearless leader, the pilot?” asked Gary. His chubby cheeks, as well as his double chin, quivered as he spoke.

“Maybe he got hurt in the crash,” said Tom.

Halverson cast around the crowd. “Here he comes.”

A fiftysomething man wearing a navy blue pilot’s hat with an emblem of wings on it and a short-sleeve button-down white shirt approached them. He wore a white plastic pen shield in his shirt pocket.

“Is everyone safe?” he asked, surveying the crowd.

“If we are, it’s no thanks to you,” said Gary.

The pilot glared at him with icy grey eyes. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Your landing left something to be desired.”

“Any landing you can walk away from is a good one,” the pilot said humorlessly.

“Whose name should I put on my lawsuit?” Gary sniffed.

“Burt Rogers. What are you? A lawyer?”

“I’ve been called worse.”

“Mr. Rogers,” said Mildred, “where are the terminals located?”

“To our left,” said Rogers.

“How do you know?” asked Gary. “You can’t see a thing in this pea soup.”

“I took a compass fix in the cockpit. Is that OK with you, counselor?”

An explosion ripped through the air to Halverson’s right. Halverson flinched, as did everybody else in the crowd. Reacting as he had been trained to in black ops, Halverson hit the ground.

Rogers followed suit, yelling, “Everybody down!”

Their plane was exploding. Metal chunks from its fuselage hurled through the air, whistling above the passengers. Twenty-foot jagged tongues of yellow and orange flames flicked skyward behind the scrim of smog.

“Where’s the airport emergency crew?” Tom asked in consternation, flat on his stomach on the tarmac.

Rogers shook his head. “I don’t know. I couldn’t raise anyone in the control tower. Communications are out. We’ve got to find out what’s happening here.”

“It’s like this place is deserted.”

“It makes no sense,” said Halverson, still prostrate on the tarmac with the rest of the passengers. “Unless—”

“Unless what?” asked Tom.

Halverson said nothing. He didn’t want to panic anyone. In any case, it would have been speculation on his part. When all was said and done he had no clue as to what was happening here. It was best not to say anything, he decided.

“Maybe my girlfriend knows,” said Tom.

He withdrew his cell phone from his trouser pocket. He punched out her number. He looked frustrated.

“What’s wrong?” asked Halverson.

“I can’t get through.”

Halverson pulled out his cell phone. He attempted to call his brother. No soap. The call would not go through.

“What about you?” asked Tom, watching Halverson. “Any luck?”

Halverson shook his head.

“What’s wrong with this place?” asked Tom. “Doesn’t anything work around here?”

The rumbling from the blast was dying down.

Groaning, Rogers got to his feet. “My knees aren’t what they used to be.” With the back of his hands he brushed the dirt off the front of his shirt and the thighs of his black pant legs. He faced the passengers. “We need to be moving out. Let’s head for the terminals.”

The passengers grumbled. Anxiously, they stood up, wiping themselves off.

“Does anybody have any idea what’s going on here?” asked Tom in exasperation.

Nobody answered.

Instead, in the back of the crowd somebody screamed.

### CHAPTER THREE

Halverson squinted through the smog to see who had screamed. He could not make out anyone who appeared to be in pain. Of the few nearby faces that he could distinguish, the expressions ranged from bewilderment to outright fear.

“Who screamed?” he asked nobody in particular.

“I don’t know,” said Tom. “I can’t see a thing through this smog junk. It sounded like somebody way in the back.”

“Are you sure it was a person?” asked Gary.

“What else would it be?” asked Tom.

“It could’ve been a gull calling. They cry out pretty loud. We’re near the coast, where they hang out.”

“I don’t see any gulls,” said Tom, looking up. “For that matter, I don’t see anything.”

“It sounded like a person to me,” said Halverson.

“It wasn’t any gull,” said Mildred. “I know a human voice when I hear it. What kind of gull would be flying in this stuff? They couldn’t see where they’re going.”

“Is everybody OK?” called out Rogers to the crowd.

“Yeah,” said somebody in the back.

Halverson could not make out who was speaking.

“Were you the one who screamed?” Rogers asked the man.

“No.”

“Did you see who it was?”

“No.”

“He’s a big help whoever he is,” Mildred told Rogers.

“Well, the screaming’s stopped,” said Rogers.

“Why not do a roll call and find out if anyone’s missing?”

“I don’t know everybody’s name. Besides, we don’t have the time.” Rogers raised his voice so the rest of the crowd could hear him. “Let’s shake a leg. I don’t want to stand out here all day.”

“Works for me,” said Tom.

Rogers set out for the terminals.

Halverson heard another ear-piercing shriek. And another. And another.

Halverson wheeled around at the screams, seeking their sources. He could not make out any kind of disturbance through the smog.

Halverson caught Rogers looking in the same direction.

“What’s going on back there?” Rogers yelled.

The only answer he got was another hair-raising scream.

“Let’s get the hell out of here,” said Gary. “There’s no point in lollygagging here. We have no idea what’s happening back there. I, for one, don’t want to stand here and wait to find out.”

Rogers nodded. “Let’s get over to the terminals. Maybe the air is clearer there and we can see what’s happening.”

The crowd followed Rogers.

Fitful screams punctuated the passengers’ trek to the terminals.

“Those screams are getting on my nerves,” said Tom.

“Join the club,” said Mildred.

“Let’s get the lead out,” said Rogers, overhearing their conversation, as was Halverson. Rogers quickened his pace.

The passengers bustled after him.

Not wanting to lose sight of Rogers, Halverson strode after him.

The passengers bunched together so they would not get left behind, Halverson could see. They knew if they lost sight of the person next to them they would become disoriented and straggle behind in the smog. And willy-nilly they would no doubt find out what that screaming was all about. They were all on the same page, decided Halverson.

At last they reached a location where the visibility was marginally better.

Halverson could make out the air traffic control tower looming up ahead, it looked like. His probing eyes were greeted by a disturbing sight.

A middle-aged man crashed out the plate-glass window girdling the top floor of the twenty-two-story round building and plummeted to the tarmac, shrieking in agony. The man slammed into the tarmac. His glasses shattered against the pavement. Blood spilled out of his head and pooled beneath him.

At Halverson’s side, Mildred screamed and held her hands over her eyes.

“What in the hell?” muttered Rogers, taken aback.

“Is that an air traffic controller?” asked Tom, his face contorted with anxiety.

“Probably. That’s the control tower.”

“It looked like he ran through the plate-glass window,” said Halverson. He still could not believe his eyes.

“What in the name of all that’s holy would cause a man to run through a plate-glass window to certain death?” said Rogers.

Rooted to the spot, he gawked at the bleeding air traffic controller whose body sprawled at impossible angles on the tarmac.

“Maybe it’s the same thing that’s causing all those screams behind us,” said Mildred.

“I don’t want to find out,” said Gary. “Let’s beat it.”

“I thought you said nobody was in the control tower,” Tom told Rogers.

“No,” said Rogers. “That’s not what I said. I said we couldn’t raise them on the radio.”

“What difference does it make?” said Gary.

“There might be more people in there,” said Tom.

“So what? I don’t know about you, but I have no desire at all to find out what’s going on in that place.”

At that moment, a woman wearing her red hair in a bun and clad in a kelly green dress, crashed screaming through the control tower’s plate-glass window and plunged to the ground. Her back thudded against the tarmac not ten feet from where her presumed coworker lay. Blood spilled out of her broken skull, her mouth a rictus of horror.

“We need to go in there,” Halverson told Rogers. “This may be a terrorist attack of some kind.”

“Then let’s get out of here,” said Gary. “How can we fight terrorists? That’s the job of the police. We’re not a bunch of gun-slinging SWAT cops here.”

Halverson watched Rogers weighing his options. Rogers looked undecided.

Just then a sonorous explosion rocked the tarmac.

Halverson winced. The loudness of the blast deafened him. He could not hear. He shook his head, trying to clear it. He could see mouths moving. He read Gary’s lips.

“Now what?” said Gary’s mouth, it looked like to Halverson.

Halverson felt his hearing coming back. It felt like wads of balled-up cotton falling out of his ear canals, followed by a sucking sound.

He heard Rogers say, “I’m afraid to say this, but it might have been another plane crashing. That’s what I’ve been worrying about ever since we landed.”

“If it’s another plane crash, why aren’t the airport emergency personnel heading out there this very minute?” asked Tom.

Rogers gazed up at the control tower. “They may be busy doing something else.”

“You think they’re in the control tower?”

“We’re gonna find out.”

“You’re out of your mind!” cried Gary. “You’ll get us all killed.”

“We’re gonna need weapons,” said Rogers. “That’s for sure.”

“Where’s the sky marshal?” asked Halverson.

Rogers scanned the crowd. “Ray?” he called out. “Ray Purdy, where are you?”

A burly, dark-haired man with long wavy hair that trailed over his ears wended his way forward through the crowd. To Halverson, Ray Purdy looked to be in his thirties. Too, he looked like he could handle himself.

“Over here, Burt,” said Ray, approaching.

“You got a gun?” asked Rogers, knowing the answer in advance.

Ray nodded.

“We’ll need you up front then,” said Rogers.

“What’s this all about?”

“The control tower is under attack,” said Halverson. “Maybe terrorists.”

Ray looked at Rogers. “Is that right?”

“Something ugly is going on inside there,” answered Rogers. “We’re going inside to check it out. We’re gonna need firepower, though. How many guns you got?”

“Just one.”

Ray lifted the bottom of his jacket to display a pistol in a Velcro holster on his hip.

Rogers shook his head. “I have a feeling we’ll need a lot more than that.”

“Looks like a Sig Sauer P226,” said Halverson with admiration.

Ray nodded. “A lot of stopping power.”

“You sound like you’ve been around guns,” Rogers told Halverson.

“A little,” said Halverson.

“That’ll come in handy. We can use you. What’s your name?” Rogers held out his big paw.

It looked to Halverson big enough to be a quarterback’s hand.

“Chad,” said Halverson. He shook Rogers’s meaty hand. “Is there some place we can get guns at this airport?”

Rogers thought about it.

“What about the airport security personnel’s office?” suggested Ray. “They ought to have arms there.”

“Let’s go there first thing,” said Rogers.

“And there must an office for Homeland Security,” said Halverson. “Do you know where that’s located?”

“Yeah. We’ll hit both offices.”

“Hold your horses,” said Gary. “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Rogers gave Gary a look.

“We’re not a bunch of commandos,” Gary explained. “We’re civilians. Most of us here probably haven’t ever fired a gun in our entire life.”

“Then it’s high time you learned.”

Rogers headed toward the nearest terminal.

“Maybe all of us don’t want to charge into that control tower with guns blazing!” yelled Gary after him.

Rogers pulled up. He turned toward Gary. “What if those terrorists or whoever they are decide to attack us? I’ll bet you learn how to fire a gun real fast when somebody comes at you trying to kill you.”

Grudgingly, Gary followed the rest of the passengers as they banded behind Rogers.

Mildred jogged up to Rogers’s side. “If that was a plane crashing behind us, shouldn’t we go over there and try to help the passengers?”

“If we don’t take back that control tower on the double, there could be a lot more plane crashes,” said Rogers. “First things first. We secure the tower. Then we help any injured passengers we can find.”

Detaching himself from her, Rogers strode at a brisk clip forward.

Gary came up to Mildred. “He’s going to get us all killed. We’re dead meat with him leading us.”

Mildred rolled her eyes at him. She hurried after Rogers.

“You’ll see,” said Gary. “Don’t tell me I didn’t warn you. We’re dead men walking.”