

TRANSCRIPT - CHRONICLES: FATIMA

FAITH

Hello, listeners, it's Faith, but hopefully you know that by now. You are about to listen to Chronicles, a miniseries set in the world of Apollyon. In each episode is an account of someone who experienced the first wave of AVS. Please be aware that each of these episodes deals with sickness and death on various levels.

If this is your first episode of Napoleon, you'll be okay listening, but the experience will be enhanced if you've heard the first two seasons as well as our other miniseries, Patient Zero.

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Speaking of ads, there will be a few before this episode starts. We absolutely appreciate you. Thank you for being a listener.

FATIMA

I can't remember the name for it. I read it in an old book... preppers! Preppers. That's it. My parents could have been called preppers. That's not what people called them, though. It was much worse than that. Me and my brothers and sisters weren't much better. We thought they were a bit out of their minds. In the end, it turns out they weren't.

[synth strings swell]

NARRATOR

Fatima Yesufu, age 42. Interview.

FATIMA

I should probably start from the beginning, right? Dad always said I got ahead of myself.

I have a big family. There are five of us. Marie, Zara, Mazi, Isaac and me. Plus Mom and Dad. I guess that really isn't big by today's standards. But believe me, back then five kids was a lot. When Dad got his promotion, we moved into a bigger house with a beautiful, big backyard. We actually all got our own room. Well, Isaac got the basement, but still a room, right?

Mom and Dad built the shelter a year after we moved into the new house. They both said, We have to be ready for anything and everything. They both grew up in Nigeria

during the extremist uprising, so they know how it is to live the turmoil... I mean, a different kind of turmoil.

At first, us kids thought it was going to be a guest house because we still have family in Nigeria. It was mostly underground, so I don't know why we thought that. When we asked, they didn't want to talk about it. I never got the secrecy then, but I get a little bit now. They didn't want people to judge, and kids like to tell their friends about everything.

Once it was finished, we all got to see it. [in a Nigerian accent mimicking] "It's not for playing." Mom said as soon as she opened the door. "This is for emergencies only." It was when she said that we all started asking questions. But Dad just shushed us and said again, "We have to be ready for anything and everything."

So we heard about the Destroyer the first time when it was still in Central America. My parents started stocking the shelter, not just with the necessary things like food and clothes and medicine, but they also bought more books and games and art supplies. They told friends or family to do the same, but no one listened. Instead, they whispered behind their backs, or even worse, said things I will not repeat to their faces.

Everyone kept saying that it was a Central America problem. Isn't it interesting how people forget their history? The Bubonic Plague, AIDS, cholera, something like six flu pandemics and multiple coronaviruses that all started small and rapidly became pandemics.

We are— [a huff] where. We were a mobile and social society. Even with the incredible advancements in medicine, one new strain, one new bug... It will spread as soon as someone goes to a concert, gets on a train, flies across the country, across the ocean. My parents weren't scientists, but they remembered history and made sure we did too.

The first case in the States was when I was in fifth grade. I'm the youngest, so I was the only one in my family still in middle school. Marie and Mazi were in high school and Isaac and Sara were in college by this time.

The first case was heard about in our town was at a retirement home. I'm sure there were cases before that, but it's the first one that people thought was definitely the thing in Central America. That retirement home wasn't too far from my mom's office, and that's when they started packing things into the shelter instead of simply stocking up.

Dad also demanded Isaac and Zahra returned home, which they reluctantly did. No, I don't think it actually mattered where the retirement home was that I think about it. It just mattered that it was in our town. So my parents escalated their efforts. "It's no longer

coming. It's already here." That's what my mom said when we all complained about spending our evenings packing.

[A long pause. Sniffing. A nose wipe.]

FATIMA

I'm sorry. She died last year, so...uh...talking about her... [sniff] Yeah. [a deep breath] It's a lot still.

Grief is a fickle bitch, right? Mom would be so mad at me for saying that she didn't like for me to swear. [soft laugh] I'm in my forties and still concerned about disappointing my mother.

[a long pause]

Marie, Mazi, and I were pulled out of school by the time the fifth case was announced. I didn't even get to tell my friends I was just all of a sudden learning from home. And, yes, I definitely got teased. I don't know about my brothers and sisters, but middle schoolers are a bit more harsh than high schoolers. Well, so I've heard. I didn't go to high school and my kids are young. So, yeah.

We moved into the shelter when lockdown happened. Why not stay in the house? I don't know. Maybe my parents thought AVS would leak through the cracks like water did into our garage on rainy days. I know, I know, AVS wasn't in the water, but my parents didn't know that and weren't about to risk it. Maybe it was about the shelter being off the grid. It had its own electrical and water systems.

We lived in that shelter for two years. Two whole years of being way too close to my entire family. When the ordinance for walling off the city was approved, we were finally allowed to go back to the house. I'm surprised it was still standing. Honestly, I wonder if my mom and dad paid someone to look after it because everything was so crazy for a while there. We didn't experience it firsthand, of course, being in the shelter and all, but we weren't completely cut off in the world. We still had internet. We saw all the riots and looting. I remember being so scared someone was going to break into my bedroom and steal my toys. Of all of the things to be worried about, right? I was 11, though. It's expected.

That fear didn't last. I'm not saying I stopped being afraid. God, no. I was afraid for years. I was just afraid of different things. Afraid that we'd come out of that shelter and the world would look like a barren wasteland. Afraid of dying. Afraid of my family dying. Afraid everyone I knew was gone.

It's hard to find out your friend's parents didn't make it. It's even harder to find out your friends didn't make it. What are you, 20, 25? You weren't even alive during the first wave. You don't know that kind of loss. Or maybe you do. I shouldn't have assumed. I'm sorry.

[She takes a drink of water.]

When I was ten years old, I had a huge birthday party. With five of us, we didn't get big birthday parties every year—only on the milestone ones. And ten is your first double digit year, so it's a big one. All my friends were there. We had holo laser tag and all my favorite foods that I never got to eat. The cake was lemon with strawberries (another favorite). Anyway, all the candles were lit and everyone sang Happy Birthday. And I blew out the candles. I wish that I would get to be in that moment forever with all my friends and family and favorite things.

The next birthday party I got to have was when I was 18. Two of my friends from middle school were there, and it wasn't because they all died. I mean, a lot of them did, but it was because they didn't want to be around me anymore. My entire family had survived and years hadn't.

I understand how blessed I am. I really do. But the survivor's guilt is real. Even now.

[Synth strings begin to swell and play under the credits]

NARRATOR

This episode of Chronicles was written and directed by Faith McQuinn, featuring the voice of Marion Toro. Produced by Faith McQuinn. Editing by Faith McQuinn. Sound Mix by Joshua Suhy. Credits by Matthew Boudreau. Theme Music by Alice in Winter.

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