

Cover



FLYNN'S LOG 4,

Offline

By

STONE MARSHALL

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Dedication

To my readers and fans. Thank you for your kind words and reviews.

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LOG ENTRY 1

Flynn

Flynn, I hope you get this message. Your body is missing!

I refuse to think that you are gone, deleted. You, your thoughts, your voice, and your brain activity must be out there. You are in the digital domain, in the game, living as a digital intelligence. You have to be!

This is Elle. I'm writing this message to you. If the digital connection opens, this data will automatically upload to your log. Flynn, brace yourself; I have upsetting news.

First, I'll catch you up on everything that has happened. Your body was sitting still, as if sleeping, in the same chair you sat in when you first sent your brain activity into the game.

When Zana, the digital character, jumped into the game exit portal in the digital world, your *real* body, here in the *real* world, awoke.

What happened next was the most awkward moment ever. I was holding the hand of your sleeping body, when your eyes opened and your hand tightened around mine. Your head turned slowly, your eyes blinking as you took in the scene. You looked from me to Enzo and then back to me. Enzo

and I looked at your body and then at your character in the game. Flynn, your intelligence was in the game as your character, but your body was moving out here. The whole thing was unreal.

It's so difficult to write this. I was watching you—your body—but it wasn't you. Your hand was squeezing my hand. You hurt me, Flynn; your hand nearly crushed mine. I pulled away crying in pain. Your eyes were smiling as I cried. Your body started moving clumsily. Arms, legs, moving too fast, you fell from the chair to the floor. Then you screamed in pain!

A moment later you quieted, and then said your first words. "What is this sensation?" It sounded like you, Flynn—your voice. You must have been talking about the pain of falling, or maybe it was the pain of life. Your arms moved quickly, pushing, slamming into the floor, as if you had no idea how to control your movements.

Do you remember when we programmed the robot, Logic On Treads, LOT? We built it with Enzo. LOT would move too quickly or too slowly. It wouldn't adjust its speed or power as needed. It was just another dumb robot. But then we developed the learning algorithm and LOT learned and improved. LOT could adjust its speed and strength based on needs.

Flynn, your body did exactly what LOT did. Your body learned. It slowed its movements, stopped flopping around, and then it stood up! In less than a minute, your body was moving perfectly. That is when it became clear that someone or something else was controlling your body.

The Brain Activity Digitizer cap stayed on your head through all the

falling and thrashing. The BAD cap connects to the game world through a wireless device that I installed while you were in the game; it no longer needs a wired connection. I still think the acronym BAD cap fits this invention. It is a bad idea; we should have never used it.

The BAD cap is responsible for all this. If we hadn't invented it, you would have never digitized your brain activity to enter the game. You would still be here, with Enzo and me. Sure, the world would be at a halt due to the digital crisis, but we'd be together.

You closed your laptop and picked it up. Flynn, it was perfectly orchestrated, as if you knew exactly what you were doing. You stuffed your computer into your backpack and then started toward the door.

Up to this point, Enzo and I were reacting differently to this activity. I was crying on your bed in the corner of your room, holding my hurt hand. I was as far away from you as I could be without leaving your room. Enzo sat in his chair, watching you, unmoving as if he was watching a ghost.

After you stuffed your backpack full of a few more things, you turned toward the door and started walking out, very fast.

I shouted at Enzo, who chased after you. He caught up with you at the front door. You move so quickly. You had already moved out of your bedroom, down the hall and through your front room. Your right hand was turning the doorknob to leave the house, when from behind Enzo put his hand on your shoulder.

That is when it was clear that you were not you. As you opened the door with your right hand, your left hand pulled Enzo's grip from your shoulder. You half-turned toward Enzo, twisting his hand and arm in one motion. Without breaking stride, you threw Enzo to the hard floor with some kind of ninja move! His head violently hit the floor. Flynn, that was not you, but it was your body that walked out the open doorway.

I fell to Enzo's side, crying harder. I tried to wake him up, but he was unresponsive, Flynn. I ran outside to see where your body was, but it was gone!

I ran back to Enzo and called for help. He is in an ambulance now, unconscious with a broken arm.

I've never seen your body move so smoothly, so powerfully. It's like whatever is controlling your body has more control over your abilities than any normal human could. I think the digital intelligence that is controlling your body has control over more of your brain than you ever had.

I believe that the devastating digital creature from inside the game, the one who captured our characters and sent Sage into the abyss, is responsible for all of this. Zana is using your body, Flynn, and I have learned what she is up to.

Before I tell you what Zana is doing, let me update the log with a few things. Your laptop, which Zana took, contains the files for all the stuff we've created as the Hackers. Some stuff is not too important, such as the

last couple of YouTube videos you were editing and our banner logo. But the laptop has seriously important files too—plans for our inventions! Not only does Zana have the plans for LOT, but she also has the design files to make the BAD cap. She has the connection software to digitize brain activity and port it into the digital domain. Do you know what this means? Zana has control of our invention. I have no idea what she intends to do with it.

As bad as all that is, there is something worse. When Zana first tried controlling your body, and it fell to the floor, your body was still connected to the BAD cap. Zana is digital. She knows how digital communications work. It's second nature to her. She was able to learn how to control your body very quickly. Zana's digital intelligence must have accessed the files on your laptop through the BAD cap connection.

She accessed and then used our learning algorithm to learn to control your physical body, the same way LOT used it to learn to control its robotic movements.

Putting the power of that algorithm in the wrong hands is more than I can wrap my mind around. What we created is more than artificial intelligence. It's almost like digital life. And that algorithm is now in the hands of Zana, the only true digital intelligence I've ever met.

I don't know how much of you remains in your body. Before all this happened (while you were in the game, but before Zana exited the game), I downloaded your memories through the BAD cap. Enzo told me about

his time with you in the game, and how you were lost without your memories. I haven't yet figured out how to get them to you, but I have them ready. Once we find an opening in the digital crisis, your memories will automatically upload, I hope.

Your body is basically a blank shell of a human. It has brain function—controlling your breathing, your heartbeat, and all your physiological needs. But it's not you. It has no intelligence or personality. It's not really a person without that. I don't know how to think what your body is with Zana's intelligence in it. Is your body now Zana?

It's so confusing, Flynn. I think of you as the person I see and the person I talk to. Now that those things are separated, I don't know what to think.

I'm worried about the safety of your body. What if Zana does something crazy? She could walk in front of a bus, and your body might be killed. What would that mean, Flynn?

After sending Enzo to the hospital, I returned to my computer to tell you what is happening. The screen was on the login page; I was disconnected. All multiplayer connections were offline. I tried Enzo's computer—same result. I turned to social media to see what was going on, but I couldn't connect. It seems like all Internet connections are offline.

My phone is offline. The TV has no signal. All channels are blank. Nothing is working. I can use my computer to type this, but I can't send it anywhere. It's as if all forms of communications are experiencing a total denial of service attack. We are experiencing the kind of worst-case

scenario we used to talk about.

This sounds ridiculous, but knowing that I'm not connected makes me afraid to go outside. Perhaps my fear is irrational, but I don't know what's out there. I'm not going home. No one is at my house. No one is at your house either. Well, that's not totally true, LOT is here.

It's late, and I'm tired. Good night, Flynn.



LOG ENTRY 2

Offline

I woke up this morning to an eerie feeling. Communications are still not working. I'm not going to school, Flynn. I woke up and looked outside. Life looks crazy out there. The world has become crazy in one day. Ava, from our class, stopped by after trying to go to school. She told me what she heard. The school is completely offline. Many of the students left early.

Ava told me something about the outside world. Many things that help us live together as a society aren't working. Everything is connected with digital communications. Did you know that traffic lights are controlled by computers that are interconnected? They work together to move traffic efficiently throughout the city. Not all of the lights are like that, but the ones at busy intersections are. Many intersections are smart and communicate with one another. Those intersections are not working at all. It's mass hysteria: People are getting angry, honking and shouting. Some people have left their cars in the middle of the road and walked away. Not that walking is any safer.

The police are no help. They are trying to coordinate all the intersections, like traffic cops, but it's not working very well. There have been accidents,

but the hospitals are offline. Nothing works. It's crazy! People can't get into the hospitals, because the admitting computers are offline, and hospitals can't take patients until they can log them in. Can you believe that injured people are lying in hospital lobbies, because the hospital won't admit them? All because the computers are unable to communicate with medical insurance companies. It's infuriating to me! You'd be going ballistic right now.

Some of this strangeness began when the ambulance arrived to pick up Enzo yesterday. The medical technicians seemed agitated by something, like they were suddenly unable to contact their dispatcher. I can't check on Enzo. I have no idea how he's doing or if he made it to the hospital. I just hope he can survive without medication, because deliveries are not being made to hospitals—or anywhere—nothing, no prescriptions, not even food.

The power is completely unreliable. You know how we had blackouts years ago, because the grid couldn't keep up with demand? The power company fixed that by upgrading to a smart grid. Well, the smart grid depends on digital communications. Without that, it's unable to maintain itself. I'm glad I have a laptop with a battery, or I couldn't write this message. I'm not sure that it matters, though, because this message might never reach you.

I can't help but think that Zana's possession of your body is connected to this intensification of the digital crisis. There is a complete disruption in the real world. Zana, a being that is definitely not real, is controlling your

body, which is definitely real. Ahhh, thinking about this makes my brain hurt!

I wish I could talk with you now. I want to ask you what you know about Zana and her plans. You gave her your body, Flynn. You said that you could make all humankind live forever. *You* caused the digital crisis to reach an apex! Before Zana entered the real world, the crisis was bad, but life was able to continue. We couldn't reliably connect to the digital domain, and there were plenty of digital communications problems, but we could usually hack our way around problems. Now we have no connection at all, and you are unreachable. This is worse!

We developed the in-game character, Sage, to help us keep a digital port open into the digital world. Having Sage on the inside allows *us* access to the game world, even when no one else in the world could get into the game. The game world was causing problems beyond the digital domain, which is why we had to find the source of the digital crisis. Now we are in a total blackout. By searching for the source, we actually caused the digital crisis to become much worse. And that means the world is facing a major crisis!

Someone knocked on the door today. It was a woman with a baby. She needed milk for her child. Because of the standstill in traffic, she walked to the store. The store wasn't able to take credit cards, and the woman didn't have cash. The credit card machines are all offline. She said the scene was confusing. Shoppers and employees were starting to get hysterical. The shoppers just wanted to buy for their basic needs, but the

registers weren't working properly. Shoppers were angry, and employees were scared. The woman left without her milk. She was afraid for her safety and the well-being of her child.

I gave her all the milk you had here in the house. I don't know what to expect, Flynn. The world I woke up to is totally different than it was yesterday. It's been one day since Zana entered this world, and it feels like the world has entered chaos.

I can't imagine what work is like for the people who can make it to their jobs. No communications. What will they do? There are so many things that don't work anymore. People are needed to keep society working, but so is technology. I'm afraid of what happens when more technology stops.

Basic supplies needed by society, such as food and transportation, are already broken. Where do I get water when the water supply stops? Flynn, I wish you were here. Maybe I'm wrong; maybe I should wish that I were with you.

Are you safe in there?

Guess what! The radio works! I don't often listen to the radio. Sometimes I stream a radio station, or I might listen in the car. Radio is low tech, but I found an old-school iPod with a built-in radio. I hit the "seek" button and something came in. It was kind of strange. It sounded like something raw, like voice memos on my phone. No production value, just raw voice.

The voice was a real DJ. It was so strange. The DJ was talking with a

normal voice, no yelling or over-the-top background sound effects. Her voice was somber, low—real.

Her name is Gina, and she is afraid to leave the studio. She is asking people to call in, but no one is. I'm sure they can't, because the phone system is down. Somehow, she is able to broadcast. She says the power is out, but the station has a generator, so she'll keep talking until the generator runs out of fuel, whenever that might be.

Gina's station is about a mile from downtown. Her broadcast booth has a window view of the city. She is a few floors up and has a bird's-eye view of social chaos. She is describing something that I can't imagine. It's evening, and the city is blanketed in twilight. Cars are abandoned everywhere in the streets. It's a crazy thought, but once a few people abandon cars, it makes it impossible for others to go anywhere, causing a chain reaction of more abandoned cars. There are even vehicles abandoned on sidewalks and in alleys.

As soon as a few people started trying to drive around stalled traffic, trouble began. Cars became battering rams, pushing cars in front and to the sides—crashing, honking, and yelling. Some cars ran out of gas just sitting in gridlock running their engine and moving nowhere. Tow trucks aren't even an option. Where do you start to clean up this kind of mess? It's not just traffic lights that are out; accidents have caused traffic jams and they can't be reached. Cars can't move out of the way to let emergency vehicles through.

Many people have left their cars and are trying to find food in the city. Gina can hear people shouting outside the restaurant, across the street from her radio station. Restaurants are unable to open. Many rely on fresh food deliveries every day. With ordering systems down and transportation not an option, they are out of food. The few that are open don't have the ability to compute charges, and, if they can go back to paper orders, they can only accept cash payment. Anyone without cash can't buy food.

Listening to the radio made me think about the box of old gadgets and tech stuff in your closet. There are things in there that were invented before I was born. Maybe I'll try some of it to see if it works. Though old tech has such limited features, what's the point?

It's nice hearing a voice in the house, even though the voice is describing the eve of mayhem. Gina is my only human connection right now. The more I hear from her, the more afraid I am to leave the house. Soon people will get really hungry. Without the systems that once connected and protected our society, what will happen?

I've locked myself in and I'm hiding in your room, typing this entry for your log. Maybe I'm doing it for you; maybe it's to keep me from going crazy. Either way, I think this log is important.

Good night, my friend. I hope we will see each other again, someday.



LOG ENTRY 3

Darkness

I tried to sleep last night, but I couldn't. I'm afraid; there are sounds outside that I don't recognize. I think people are rummaging through trash cans in the neighborhood, looking for life's basic needs. The basic things that seemed abundant just a few days ago are now precious. Recently expired food is better than no food at all. I need to look at this logically if I ever plan to fall asleep again. Rummaging is the most logical source of the strange sounds. Now is no time to ignore logic.

I'm alone, Flynn. I'm too afraid to go home, so I'm staying at your house. Besides, your house is the only place where I feel safe. It's the last place I saw you or Enzo and feels like the place I need to be if I'm going to see you again.

Sleepless nights are usually exhausting, but lying all night in a state of fear made me edgy, not tired. I'm not sleepy yet, but I jump at every tiny sound.

I haven't eaten anything. I'm a logical person; I know that I should eat something to keep up my energy. I'm already rationing food, at least in my mind. If I reduce my activity level, I can also reduce my calorie intake

requirements, which will make the food stored in the house last longer. But if I reduce my activity too much, my muscles will become weak. While facing the unknown, I should keep myself in peak physical condition. It's a paradox.

I just realized that I haven't told you my plan to deal with my anxiety. I need to know what's going on, or I become anxious. Because I don't know what's going on with Enzo, and the digital crisis is impacting everything, I have become a bundle of neuroses. To keep myself sane, I will continue to enter my thoughts into your log. It might never reach you, and then none of it will really matter. One thing is certain—typing this one-way conversation makes me a little less edgy. And sometimes I hear your voice in my head, replying to me. Does that sound crazy to you? *Yes*, your voice replies in my head.

I am undeniably a little crazy.

My plan is the kind of plan you'd love, Flynn. It's very logical (that's all me) but a little pragmatic (that's all you). Here is my logic flow. Usually when I face a problem, you and I talk about it and come up with a solution together. If I'm going to solve this problem, I need your help. I need to reconnect with you. Don't get cocky; you'd say the same thing about me. I don't have you to help me, and Enzo is in the hospital (I hope he made it there safely). I'm going to turn to the next best thing, something that thinks like you—something that is a creation of your mind. I'm going to ask LOT to help me.

I know what you're thinking: *LOT is a robot, Logic On Treads, not a person*. Exactly! The logic part of LOT is based on the intelligence algorithm that you and I created. There is some of you in that algorithm, Flynn, and I'm going to ask it to do what I'd ask you to do.

LOT is a quick learner. I'm going to give it the task of analyzing the communications problems caused by the digital crisis. It seems there must be something big as the root cause, like what we noticed with the digital chatter around the game world. What I want to know is what is going on at the edge of the noise. Maybe LOT can use game theory to solve this puzzle.

I'm going to ask LOT's intelligence to enter my computer and to discover why it isn't communicating with other computers and devices. This might help me to discover what is wrong with the digital data connections in the world. Then, I need to try to fix the connections. If I can get technology communicating again, maybe I'll be able to hack my way back into the digital domain to save you.

I don't know what *save you* means now, without your body. With your body gone, what will you be? I'm not sure you can ever reenter the real world.

The next part of my plan is to look for Zana—in your body—while LOT hacks its way into solving the digital crisis. Together, LOT and I will find a way to reunite your intelligence with your body!

My battery is about to die, Flynn. We haven't had power for hours. I'm

frightened. The only light I have comes from my laptop screen. Writing to you keeps me from becoming too afraid. As crazy as that sounds, I know I'm only writing to myself. You are not reading this now, but I have hope that one day...



Flynn, so much has happened in the past couple of days. After days of a major power outage, the power is back! Lights are on, and I can recharge my laptop. Some parts of life are back to normal. Life was very scary, Flynn.

In the past few days, I had only LOT as my companion. Its solar power supply recharged by sitting near a window during the daylight. But I was afraid to leave the windows uncovered. I closed the blinds enough to keep anyone from looking in, leaving just an opening to get a sliver of sunlight to charge LOT. LOT's power supply was able to keep the radio going. Gina managed to broadcast through the power outage.

She described the changes in society, from her perspective high up in her building, looking down on the chaos. I'm so afraid of what I heard her say. I refuse to believe that people act so aggressively when things get tough. I don't want to believe that people are like that, Flynn. I want to believe that we work together as a society.

The return of power is very strange; it's only available to certain devices. LOT searched my laptop for the digital noise causing the crisis and, just before the power failed, found something interesting.

LOT describes what is going on this way: there are plenty of communications happening among digital devices. Strange, right? It seems that all communications are offline, but that's not the case. Any communications with a distinct encryption key get through. My laptop has that key; your computer has it. Every device LOT has searched has that encryption key. But we can't *use* the key. We'd have to break the encryption to use that key, but we can't because it morphs over time. It's as if that key is related to the source of the digital crisis. Nothing else can communicate without that encryption key, and it behaves like a virus, stopping any communications without the right key.

Now LOT is studying those communications in my laptop, trying to determine the source of the encryption key.

The way LOT describes the problem makes me think about the way mobs have been behaving at night in the game world. Good communication is like players in the game: they can try to travel at night, but mobs will hear them and attack. In this scenario, the mobs outnumber the players by a million to one. Right now all communications are happening in the dark. Any "good" communication is immediately attacked by millions of mobs. LOT is looking for a way to solve this by bringing daylight back to digital communications to force the mobs to hide.

I know that sounds crazy; there is no way mobs from the game can be everywhere in all digital communications, can they? I don't know how else to look at it. The game gives me reference. After what I saw in the game, after seeing your body taken by Zana, after all that, Flynn, I think anything is possible in the digital domain.

Gina is hungry but still afraid to go out. She thinks her radio station is probably secure, like a mini-fortress, and she feels safe in there, alone. She is living on snacks from the break room. The only things keeping me sane are Gina's voice and LOT's companionship. I'm not a person who likes to be alone, Flynn. I like people, but the shouting and fighting I've heard from outside have made me afraid to let anyone know I'm here. I think of the woman who came by the other day in need of milk, and I hope she doesn't tell anyone I'm here, alone.

Now that the power has returned, Gina has tried all forms of communications. Phones are not working, but data works, sort of. All devices that can connect to the Internet only open one website. What I mean is that all browsers open the same page. She's describing the site. I need to see it myself, Flynn. What she is describing is unbelievable.

AHHH! Flynn, I opened my browser. I can't believe what I see! Flynn, all browsers go to one page, and what I see on that page is shocking: YOU!



PREVIEW- THANKS FOR READING!

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Find out! Read the rest of Flynn's Log 4! Get your copy

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Thank you,

Stone Marshall

BOOKS BY STONE MARSHALL

Flynn's Log



In the near future, video games begin to change and evolve. Virtual intelligence takes over the digital world and creates a digital crisis, bringing the real world to a halt. The only person who can save the world is Flynn, but he needs help from his friends, the Hackers.

StoneMarshall.com/Flynns_Log

Legends & Heroes



Inside the cube, a secret war is waged as Legends battle Heroes for control. Legends seek to darken the entire cube world while Heroes defend it, keeping it safe for players. If Legends win, the game will never be safe for players again.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STONE MARSHALL likes comics, games, running, the Ramones, and travel.

Stone reads stories with his son at bedtime. Sometimes, when they finish a book before falling asleep, Stone fills the time by creating great stories starring his son, Nabru. It is a wonderful time to share lessons about life and relationships.

In turn, Nabru becomes involved in the incredible adventures, adding his thoughts and perspectives. The ideas and stories of Nabru are the seeds of the amazing books that have become this series.

Other books by Stone Marshall:

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