

PART FIVE
A RAP UPON
HEAVEN'S GATE.

ARTIFACTS OF THE OLD WORLD.



FIG.5 AQUATIC CONVEYANCE.

Sand.

hugh howey

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About the Book

Every generation thinks that it is special, that the great fall will occur before their time is up. Every generation is wrong. Until now.

About the Author

Hugh Howey spent eight years living on boats and working as a yacht captain for the rich and famous. It wasn't until the love of his life carried him away from these vagabond ways that he began to pursue literary adventures, rather than literal ones.

Hugh wrote and self-published his first adult novel, *Wool*, which won rave reviews and praise from readers. *Shift* is its prequel.

Hugh lives in Jupiter, Florida, with his wife Amber and their dog Bella.

Also by Hugh Howey

Wool
Shift
Dust

Sand

Part 5:

A Rap Upon Heaven's Gate

by Hugh Howey

1 • A Quiet Dawn

There was a distant thrum. The sound of drums, of bootfalls, of God's mighty pulse. Conner knew that sound. It reminded him of the thunder far east. It was the muffled roar of rebel bombs, a noise that came before chaos and death and red dunes and a mother's wails. Conner dropped his spoon into his bowl of stew, pushed away from the beer-soaked table in the Honey Hole, and ran toward the stairs to warn his mom.

He took the steps two at a time. His brother Rob chased after him. There were more of the muffled blasts in the distance as they raced down the balcony. Danger outside. Violence. Or maybe it was nothing. Maybe it was cannon fire to celebrate the discovery of Danvar. Conner almost felt silly for running to his mother, a child doing what boys did in a panic, turning to a parent to save them, to tell them what to do.

He threw open her door, knew there were no clients inside, just his half-sister Violet who had emerged from No Man's Land. And as he stepped into the room, Conner felt a rumble in the earth, felt it through his father's boots, and he knew what was happening. He knew that this was more than the usual bombs. That great roar and that impossibly loud hiss meant the sands were coming for them all.

And in the brief flutter between two beats of his heart, as the din grew and grew, as his mother yelled for the boys to run, to hold their breath, to *move*, Conner thought only of diving onto the bed, of protecting the girl he'd spent the last two days looking after. He bolted across the room, Rob on his heels, got halfway there, when the wall of sand slammed into the Honey Hole.

The floor beneath Conner's feet lurched sideways—a god snatching a rug out from under him. He tumbled. There was

a crash of wood and tin, an explosion of glass, a sudden blindness as all light was extinguished by a press of solid dune, a splintering sound, and then the desert sands pouring in around Conner and his family.

He barely heard his mother scream for them to hold their breaths before he was smothered. Sand was in his nose and against his lips. He was frozen, pinned to the floor in a sprawl, the weight of ten bullies on his back, a sense, nearby, right beside him, of his brother Rob. Just a memory of where his brother had been—where his mother had been—before the sand had claimed them.

Pitch black. A residual warmth in the sand from having been outside in the sun. Complete silence. Just his pulse, which he could feel in his neck as it was squeezed by the drift. The pulse in his temples. No room to expand his chest. Couldn't swallow. Hands around his throat. His brother nearby. And not enough room even to cry. Just a coffin to be terrified in. A place for dying. For panic. For muscles and tendons raging and flexing but not budging an inch—what a paralyzed person must feel. What everyone who has ever been buried alive must feel. *This is how they go. This is how they go. This is how they go.* Conner couldn't stop thinking it. The dead had been bodies in the sand before. But now he could feel what they had felt. They had felt just like this, frozen and terrified and not able to move their jaws even to sob for their mothers.

He prayed and listened for the sound of digging—but heard nothing. His pulse. His pulse. Maybe the sand wasn't so deep. Maybe his mother was okay, pressed there against the wall. Maybe Violet—his half-sister—maybe she would live and her story would be known. He might have a minute of air left. They could dig him out. But that rumble—that rumble—too much sand. It had gone black in the room. The sand had swamped the second story of the Honey Hole. The great wall must've gone. Collapsed. Blown up. And the sand on Conner's back grew deeper and heavier with this