

JENNA RECKTENWALD

# **The Overlap: Free Teaser**

## **Chapter 1: The Alone**

“You know the worst part about this? I told you! I told you what would happen if you did this!” I found myself pacing in an attempt to stretch out the deep pit of anxiety in my stomach. “I thought we knew what we were, and we had a boundary...” My hand felt heavy. The weight of my weapon drew away what little strength I had.

Food had run out two days ago. I kept making excuses, telling myself I would find a bag of rice I had forgotten in a cabinet and continue on as before. No new food materialized, and I was reaching my limit. Something big had to change, but I wasn't ready, not yet.

“You were my last friend here, you know.” I rested my weapon against the nearby counter top, giving my silent companion a brief respite as he sat on the floor. “I guess... it's nature itself telling me to move on, that I can't stay here, even though it's comforting and familiar.”

I had been holed up in my house for near four months. That's how long it had been since ‘The Overlap’. I thought my dubbed name of the cataclysmic event quite clever, but I had no way of knowing what people outside in the thick of it were calling it. I could embarrass myself if I found out they had a whole other name and I was the only idiot calling it something else.

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I turned back to gaze at my house companion. “I can’t do this. Not if I’m going to leave anyway. It can be a clean break, and you can have the house.” I put the rolled up magazine on the counter before showing my disarmed hands to the spider. He had kept me company the last month, and I told him as long as he stayed near the ceiling I wouldn’t squish him. Maybe he hadn’t eaten in days too, and that’s why he broke our treaty and came down today. I can’t very well blame him anymore.

Talking to bugs and writing in my journal kept me somewhat sane over the last months. If I was packing up to leave, I had to at least take my journal. A proper survivalist could scoff and tell me how useless the weighty paper would be, but I needed one familiar thing to cling to.

I rummaged around the kitchen drawers for my next items to pack. I had a small paring knife, a folding spork my dad used to take camping with me and my brothers, a single serving size skillet, and matches. I tested the weight of my backpack after each addition to see how hard I was making this for myself. It wasn’t too bad yet.

The bedroom was next. I found myself procrastinating there. My jewelry collection hung from a wire-twisted tree on top of my dresser. It wasn’t large, mostly a few bracelets gifted by friends, old costume jewelry given by my grandmother, and a locket my mom used to wear. I knew it would be beyond foolish to fill my pack with sentimental items.

What good was it to look at the past if the weight of it got me killed? Gosh that sounded poetic. Too poetic for me. I liked to think of myself as a practical woman. I had to be to keep going. This wasn’t my only time starting over, and I was sure it wouldn’t be the last.

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I grabbed the locket and fastened it around my neck. If it didn't go in my pack, it didn't count towards the weight. The dresser drawers were next. They were easier, as I wasn't particularly attached to any of my clothes. I liked to dress cheap so I could spend my limited money on other things. Most of these were from big box or discount stores. I grabbed two shirts and two pants that looked the most weather proof.

My eyes scanned the rest of the bedroom, looking over my puppy-themed calendar hung on the far wall, messy bed coverings, stacks of fiction books near the nightstand, and shoes hung from the back of the closet door. Nothing else here seemed high enough in priority to go in the pack.

As I walked down the hall into the bathroom I grimaced with the realization that this could be my last time, at least for a while, with running water. I was surprised it lasted this long. The power was immediately out when everything happened, and it never came back. In the following days I took as many notes as I could in my journal. I described the event in great detail, the earthquake that started first, the gust of wind that shot my one lawn chair clear across the yard, the bright flashes as transformers blew, and the scene out my window afterward.

Half of my neighborhood had been... vanished. I used to be able to see a row of houses about a quarter mile down, but somewhere around house number five the land was changed. The green Kentucky grass abruptly stopped, and a dusty plain started. It was like someone was playing a world building game and they dragged and dropped another biome right on top.

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I grabbed a tube of topical antibiotic, a handful of bandages, and a hair tie. I took a moment to look in the mirror as I tied my hair up. My bad purple dye job had grown out a good several inches, leaving my natural dark brunette at the roots. It would be good if I didn't stand out when I got outside. I remembered I had a black ballcap in my car, and I made a mental note to grab it before I left the area. I filled up a large water bottle and again checked the weight of my pack. It was hefty, but I should be able to run with it.

My nerves prickled my arms and shoulders as I walked towards the front door. I barricaded it on the first night after the screams started. It had stayed like that for four long months till today. I hesitated as my hand hovered above the first piece of stacked up furniture. I wished I had more time to hide and take notes. I knew hoofbeats preceded the screaming, but with the electricity and streetlights out I had no real view into who was doing what on dark nights. I never dared to turn on my only flashlight at night for fear that I'd make myself a target.

Unfortunately it seemed several of my neighbors had made the mistake of calling attention towards themselves. The middle-aged man and his wife that lived across the street and two houses down had taken a more flashy approach. They worked during the day and had put up homemade spikes out of two-by-fours across their front yard. They didn't seem to serve any physical purpose, as one could easily walk between them, but the next things that went up told me all I needed to know. They hung a painted black flag with skull and crossbones. It had been made out of a sheet, but the message was clear: "We're tough. We fight. I dare you."

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And someone took them up on that dare. The next night, the screams and gunshots were concentrated from their house. I don't know where the wife was or if she was alive, but I watched the man's body decompose in the front yard over the next weeks. It was an important lesson, stay quiet and stay alive. I took it to heart.

I hadn't needed to risk life and limb defending my house. I had rules to keep myself safe. Never use a candle or flashlight after dusk. Don't cook anything that could spread smell or smoke. Be quiet and stay inside as long as possible.

I steadied my hands and moved the first piece of furniture off the pile and set it aside. I would do okay. I always did. I worked hard and used my head. I repeated these to myself until the large table against the door was also fully moved. I gave myself three breaths before I had to open the door. It helped if I gave myself a countdown. Then at zero I had to do it, no matter if my hands started shaking again or not.

At zero I swung the door open. I knew from my limited view out the slats in the window the changes that occurred in the neighborhood. But seeing it without slats, without dust clinging to a window, it was a waking nightmare. It was real. The smell drifting on the breeze was death. I stood still, taking it in and trying to remember my goals.

I had to travel by day only and hide by night. I couldn't camp in obvious places. I had to find food first and then water since I had a large bottle already. After I had some pace, some confidence in how I could travel and find food, I could decide next steps. For all I knew, not everywhere was affected like here. Maybe a city or state over was

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normal. I could check on my brothers and get a new job and place to stay elsewhere.

I swallowed against the nauseating smell and left my porch. My black sedan was parked in the driveway, driver's side window smashed. Another neighbor had come by, looking for spare keys and trying to start every car on day three. Whatever had knocked the power out affected other electronics as well. The closest thing I knew to call it was an EMP, but I didn't know enough. I had notes about the events, the things I saw, the things I felt, but I had no real evidence of the root cause. It could be alien, mother nature, God, or science. I didn't want to assume anything because none of this was predictable.

I grabbed my cap through the broken window and left the car. The original exit to the main road was down the left, and that was where the land changed. I had no reason to think the land itself was dangerous. I had seen some people enter the neighborhood from that direction during the day. It was as good of a direction as any.

CONTINUED IN BOOK ONE: THE OVERLAP SERIES

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### **THE OVERLAP**

Life in the 2020s has been hard worldwide due to climate changes, rising food prices, and political unrest. To Jas, a mid-20s woman living in the Midwest, this is daily life and nothing more.

Her life of work and more work is interrupted by a cataclysmic event dubbed later as ‘The Overlap’. Her city is turned into a war zone as half of the land is unrecognizably changed. As she struggles to survive the latest ‘once in a lifetime’ disaster in her Millennial existence, she meets him, an Overlapper man.

Going against her xenophobic neighbors, she makes friends instead of enemies. Together they find understanding and begin to uncover the real danger in this world.

The Overlap is book one of the Overlap series, slated for early 2025 release!

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A suspenseful horror novel following Mara, an 11-year-old girl, as she navigates a difficult childhood and a sinister game. The Red god serves as an allegory of abuse consequences avalanching across a family and generations.

The matriarch of the Rockner family holds strangle-tight control over their public appearance, as did her mother before her. This is nothing new to the family's daughter, Mara. But when they are invited to their cousin's lavish wedding at a ski resort in Austria, something begins to expose their cracks and crawl inside.

A must-read for anyone who has their own family monsters. The consequences can stop at YOUR generation.

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