

Year of the Zombie

A SURVIVORS GUIDE TO RISEN AMERICA ISSUE 3

LUBBOCK GRAND PRIX

TIM WILLARD & JOHN PICOT

INCLUDES WINTERS TALE
VOLUME 1



YEAR OF THE ZOMBIE

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO RISEN AMERICA

VOLUME FOUR: LUBBOCK GRAND PRIX

I took a moment to cough into my handkerchief while I looked over the street in front of the auto parts store. There was the cop car, smeared with blood from where that scumbag went down, but I didn't trust it. I needed something that Winter could drive, and that I knew the wimmin-folk could quickly and easily get into.

Back a ways, before I'd butted heads with the two scumbags, I'd passed an abandoned Army checkpoint, and the vehicles didn't look too damaged, more like abandoned in the fighting. Hell, maybe I could even find some stuff for the wimmen-folk to defend themselves with.

I pushed past a dead older woman who was trying to touch my face with her cold fingers, and started walking down the road. It was only a couple of blocks, but it was dark, and I was tired. I had been up for too long, and I could feel Ol' Scratch's claws in my lungs as I walked.

After about twenty minutes of walking I found it again. The lights for the huge movie theater were on, and music was playing, attracting the dead. They all pushed against one another, trying to get inside. Irony of irony, the political film: "Without a Brain" was supposed to be playing. I chuckled to

myself as I looked inside the first of those big ass trucks. Humpers or something like that.

Covered bed, rear hatch, four doors, hard body, and what looked like a gunner's mount in the roof. I leaned in, took a moment to examine the dashboard, and turned the vehicle's juice on. Nothing. Not even a flicker with the gauges. I sighed, and checked out the other two trucks. Both of them had open beds, and that just wouldn't do at all.

It took me a minute to figure out how to pop the hood, and that's when I found out these wagons pack two car batteries, not one. Still,



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it didn't take me long to swap batteries around until the armored wagon had juice.

Once that was done, I made a quick circular search of the area, like a good ol' boy, a Texas Ranger (when he wasn't drinking with me), had told me about. I managed to gather up about a dozen of them rifles, and lots of ammunition in some boxes that weren't opened. I was about to leave, but then I remembered how them wimmen were dressed, so I dug through some bags and found some Army clothes. I gathered them duds and some food and water up, and went back to the wagon, loaded it into the back, and opened the driver's door.

I checked out the seat, but the blood was all dried, so I sat down on it, pumped the gas, and hit the starter. It ground for a second, then the engine caught with a roar. The radio came to life, stuttering with static until I figured out how to shut it off. The lever for the lights looked odd, but the first setting I tried gave me little tiny lights that barely illuminated the ground in front of me. Still, the moon was full, so I could see pretty good as I threw the old boy into drive; and headed back to the parts store.

The noise of the engine drew a crowd, and the first few were pretty aggressive fellows. A guy ran right at me, leapt up on the hood, and smashed his fist into the glass, only succeeding in splitting open the dead skin covering his knuckles. Dozens of others slammed into the vehicle and began shoving it, trying to flip it over. I kept going, dozens being plowed into by the brush-guard and winch combo to be crushed underneath.

I went a little further than the auto parts store, and then threw the wagon in reverse, until I was about twenty feet from that big ol' glass window. There

must have been fifty of them around the truck, along with the fool still beating on the glass. Too damn dumb to know that them Army boys put bulletproof glass in their wagons to go to war. Wouldn't make much sense to go to war with normal glass, now would it?

I pushed open the door, and their dead hands reached for me, then stopped. The ones directly in front of me moaned softly and turned away, sounding disappointed that I was there. I tell you, it gives a man the shivers to know his mortal coil, his meat, is tainted beyond the desires of some dead cannibal.

The moron one on the hood stood up, and beat his chest like a big-ol' gorilla, then turned toward me, the streetlight making his eyes flash completely white. He opened his mouth and hissed at me, crouching low, his leg muscles bunching.

I shot him between the eyes and re-holstered the pistol before he was done falling to the hood of the Humper. Rude ol' cuss. I drew my knife, and began moving around the vehicle, grabbing them by the hair or neck, pulling them backwards, and pushing the knife either into



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their eye, or into their ear.

By the time I was done, I was plumb tuckered out, and coughing up gobs of black blood. My vision was doubled and my head was spinning, but there was still work to do. Them little ladies were depending on me, so however I felt, I needed to be a man and get it done. Us Texans, we don't quit.

I climbed back into the vehicle, started it again, threw it into reverse, and rammed it through the windows. The vehicle roared as it crested the low wall section remaining, but them Army boys had good stuff. I careened off of a shelf of transmissions, and brought the vehicle to a stop just in front of the door, then leapt out, leaving it running.

"Rents due, ladies, time to go!" I hollered out. The door slid aside and I saw Winter waving to me. She opened the hatch and slithered into it. I could hear her shirt tear, but I was more worried about them dead guys who were starting to show interest in the sound of the engine.

One came running at us, jumping over the buggered up wall. I fired the pistol, but only grazed him. He dropped to the ground, going into a bad case of the shakes, like one of them epileptic people. I ignored him and holstered the pistol, swinging the rifle around and bringing it up to my shoulder. The scope was one of them hot shit daylight ones, since the picture through it was clear and bright as any day. Two more sprinted at us, and I dropped them too. However, it looked like the noise had attracted some of them who had been

waiting to get into the disco.

"We're in!" Winter called out, honking twice on the horn to get my attention. I gave her a thumbs up, and when she moved the vehicle out to the street, I quickly grabbed Pancho and followed her.

Whatever she did before the dead began to rise driving Army trucks wasn't it. She'd rev the engine too high, and kept rubbing the side of the vehicle against parked cars. You know, looking back at it, what she was doing was probably purposeful. Every time she did that, them dead guys hanging on the side would be crushed and left behind.

The engine howled as she climbed up the side of the highway and crashed through the guardrail. Pancho nickered and tried to balk at following the foul smelling contraption, but I put my heels into him and he followed the ladies anyway.

One of the women popped out of that hole in the roof and cupped her hands to her mouth, her hair blowing in the wind. She yelled some-



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thing I couldn't understand, and I tapped my ear and shrugged.

"Winter... almost... minutes!" she hollered again. We were almost there, only a few more minutes. I nodded and waved, and kept following.

It felt too easy.

The truck showed its mettle on the trip, climbing over the collapsed buildings with the roar of its engine and debris spewing from the tires. Them dead guys kept showing up, the running ones slamming against it and trying to find handholds. The woman in the hole kept hitting them in the hands and head with a tire iron when she could reach them, keeping them from climbing on the vehicle.

Still, the worst moment we had was when I had to shoot some dead guy who was on the hood. I clucked Pancho into a canter, moved up, drew my shooting iron, and blew him off the hood.

Finally we stopped in front of a building, and I could see Winter looking at the building worriedly. There must have been about a thousand of them dead people surrounding the building. I motioned to her, and she squinted as I pointed at the extended fire escape and the top of the vehicle.

She nodded and pulled the vehicle into the alley, maneuvering so the hole in the roof was just below the ladder. First one woman, then the next, climbed out of the hole and up the fire escape, until it was Winter's turn. She had a bunch of rifles across her back, and paused.

"Come on, Mr. Lafferts!" she called out. I shook my head.

"Thanks, but I don't do well with people, Little Miss." I told her. Her face hardened, but she nodded. "Take care of them ladies, Winter as in Discontent." I told her.

"Good luck, Marion Lafferts." She replied, and then scampered up the ladder, the rifles banging on the metal as she did so. I sighed, realizing she had left the boxes of ammunition behind. They probably needed it in a powerful way.

I slid off Pancho's back, and opened the back hatch of the truck so I could remove the four boxes of ammunition. Then I closed the back,

tossed the boxes onto the roof of the truck, and climbed up after them. I used the wire that bound the boxes to wire them to the rungs of the ladder, and looked up.

Winter was staring down at me. She nodded, and pulled the ladder up, away from the vehicle, away from me. I waved and jumped down, walking over to Pancho. Two young men were helping her get the boxes off of the ladder. They didn't have any need of a dying old man; I'd just get in their way.

I climbed up on the old horses back, and turned him around. Together we pushed through the crowd, heading toward the other building, where them boys dressed like old Jap swordsmen were. I could see two on the roof, one with binoculars, and knew he was staring at me as Pancho pushed through the dead people.

One, grabbed Pancho's reins, pulling the horse sideways, but I reached down and slapped him with the barrel of the Army shooting iron. When he looked at me, I jammed it in his mouth and pulled the trigger. Brains and blood sprayed out in a silent explosion, the dead guy falling to the ground. I wiped off the pistol on my thigh as we drew nearer.

Swords made sense. They ain't gonna run out of ammo, and even if'n they break, they can still be used as a weapon. They're easy to make, and easy to learn if'n you have the desire. I wondered if they'd be willing to give a traveling stranger one, then laughed off the idea when an image of myself popped into my mind. Old horse, old duster, old hat, old man, shiny sword. I'd stick with my own guns and the shootin' irons, thank you very much.

I moved up to the boarded up window, pushing aside a few of the dead, then banged on it with one fist. I waited a minute, and then hammered out shave and a hair cut on the board. Inside, someone hammered back two bits! And I knew I had someone living on the other side of the plywood.

"Is there anything ya'll be needin?" I called out.

"Less zombies!" came the call from inside. I chuckled at that, looking around at the huge amount of dead people around me. Pancho

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and I, were an island of life in a sea of death.

"Anything else?" I asked. A muscular dead man with a tattoo around his neck snarled at me, but a good slap in the puss shut him up.

"Just a minute!" the voice replied. I looked around at the street. The two buildings had attracted a lot of dead, several thousand by my best estimate. The voice was right they needed less zombies. The building wasn't big enough for them to build a colony, and it was as barren as the moon with all the dead around us. Even if I brought them food, all it would do is put off the inevitable.

"Hello?" It was an older man's voice, calm, collected, and full of natural authority.

"Howdy. Name's Marion Lafferts, I was wonderin' if you were needin' anything I could help with." I replied. "Ya'll got water and food in there?"

"What we have, sir, is barely enough for us, and we shall defend it if need be." The voice said. He was cautious, and I don't blame him. Looking up, I could see about eight people staring at me in the middle of the tide of dead flesh.

"I've got my own vittles, sir." I could play respectful too. It was comfortable. "I was wondering if there is something I could do for you." I started coughing again, and missed his answer. I spit out a gob of blood that hit the pavement. Before you could count to five, four of the dead were down on the ground trying to lick it up. The one that did got a disgusted look on her face to replace her blank stare.

"Are you OK, Mr. Lafferts?" the voice asked.

"I'm good, still kicking." I told him, shakily sucking in air.

"Do you know if there are plans to rescue people inside the city, sir?"

"Everyone outside is dead as well, sir." I answered. "I reckon the only person a man can depend on is hisself. If'n your waiting for rescue, it ain't comin." There was silence for a few minutes.

"Any thing you could suggest, sir?" the voice asked. I started to tell the man he was out of luck, when my eye caught an open manhole. A plan began percolating in my brainpan, and I realized that I did have a suggestion.

It was dangerous, and there was a chance that not everyone would make it.

"It depends, sir." I answered.

"On what?" the voice answered.

"On just how desperate you are." I smiled up at the kids on the roof. "I'll need to get some rest, but in a few hours, we'll see if'n my plan works."

"Do you want us to lower a rope for you?"

"No." I answered, turning Pancho around. "They know I'm already dead."

--In God's Grace;

Mr. Samuel Lefferts

Lubbock Havens

The City of Lubbock has several havens, some of which collapsed under the weight of dead flesh, others that were able to keep going for quite some time. While the refugee stations collapsed within the first 72 hours, the military and law enforcement personnel managed to keep several areas intact until nearly a week had gone by.

Most of the soldiers manning checkpoints, blockades, and other unfortified positions were forced to either retreat outside the city, or get to a fortified area. Those that didn't make it, died. (Military and police vehicles found inside the city limits will have 1d8-2 1/8ths worth the fuel in the tank)

The Civic Center

The Civic Center was a large refugee center that quickly ran out of food, water, and bathroom facilities within the first 48 hours. What made things worse was starting about 2 ½ days after the Rising began, those who had been bitten by the Risers began going into comas, and dying. This meant that the Civic Center was lost to the living before dawn on the fourth day.

Currently inside the Civic Center is packed with hundreds of zombies, with over five thousand zombies surrounding the Civic Center from the outside. There are seven buses in usable condition outside the main entrance, as well as over 45 vehicles in the parking lot. Also in the parking lot are five soft-bodied hummvees that were abandoned.

American State Bank

From T+12 Hours till Day Five a refugee station existed inside the American State Bank. On Day Five the remaining refugees and the handful of soldiers that had survived that far were evac'd out by helicopter. The location would still be of interest to explorers, as the soldiers had to dump their heavy weapons due to the helicopter being nearly overloaded. On the roof are three M2A2 .50 cal machineguns, 3500 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition, 6 M-249 SAWs, and 9 boxes of ammunition for them.

There is a box of fragmentation grenades in the lobby of the bank, along with 3 field medical kits and half a dozen Claymore land mines. In the street outside are 3 hard-shell hummvees, one of which is out of gas, but the other is fully fueled.

Federal Building

The Federal Building was evacuated on Day Three, and but the building was held all the way to Day 11 by police and military personnel. On Day 11 the building was breached by a group of people who demanded entry and managed to fight their way past the guards. Unfortunately for both sides, the Risers gained entry during the fighting, and swarmed the place. From Day 11 to Day 17 there is a constant fight, with the living losing ground to the dead. By Day 21 the place is full of nothing but Risen.

Courthouse

The courthouse was abandoned by defenders on Day Three, and no longer listed as a safe refugee center on television and radio updates.

County Jail

The County Jail actually lasted nearly 6 weeks. Unfortunately the people inside were neither good, nor friendly. A small group of people, let into the jail by the guards when the jail was listed as a refugee center, killed the guards and the half dozen soldiers guarding the jail. They then massacred the majority of the prisoners, and kept accepting refugees. Males were killed; females were locked in cells.

These people were evil and cruel, and on Day 60, they loaded everyone they could in the prisoner transport buses and left Lubbock with their slaves in tow.

Metro Tower

This building caught fire on Day Four, and collapsed by noon.

Bus Station

The bus station may be of interest to characters searching for large vehicles. There

are 9 full sized buses located in the garage, as well as fuel pumps containing 2,000 gallons of fuel. There is also a maintenance shop within the Bus Station that allows mechanics to service the buses.

The bus station has very few of the Risen inside of it. Mostly wanderers.

Winter's Group

Holed up in an anonymous building, Winter's Group consists of 19 children, 16 females and 12 males who managed to make the building a safe haven by barricading the doors and windows. Most of the people are sleeping on the floors in little "nests" of blankets and rags. They use the fire escape to make it to the street and from there go out in search of food. They have managed to stockpile two months worth the food and water, as well as medicine, but the amount of Risen has gotten thick enough that going out on the street is suicide.

Winter, the defacto leader, has convinced everyone that sooner or later, they are going to have to leave, as literally hundreds of zombies have surrounded the building, and is trying to figure out a way to break out of the building without a horrendous death toll.

The building is two stories, with some small offices scattered around inside, but for the most part the inside of the building is wide-open space, where boxes and crates have been stacked.

Called & Random Shots Revisited

Everyone wants to do called shots. Head, hand, neck, kneecaps. Kneecaps slow down foes, arm shots prevent them from wielding heavy weapons, and headshots are instant kills. Called shots are what make sniping so deadly. However, the following rules add a few extra rolls to combat, and increase the amount of paperwork required.

Zombies and living opponents both are affected by called shots, and as characters improve in skill, called shots will not be the difficulty they are in the beginning. Still, even the most untrained characters will want to try for a called shot in order to dispose of a zombie or living foe as quickly as possible.

Table 1: Hit Location for Zombies

Location	Damage	Modifier	Random Hit (d20)**
Head	Death	-8	20
Neck	No damage	-12	19
Arm	-2 to attack, grapple, skills	-4	16-18
Hand	-1 to grapple	-6	15
Chest	No Damage	0	9-14
Abdomen	No Damage	0	5-8
Groin	No Damage	-2	4
Leg	-5' to speed	-4	2-3
Foot	-5' to speed	-6	1

**The additional damage modifiers listed are cumulative. Someone hit in both arms and one hand suffers a -5 to attack, grapple and skill checks.

**Using a random hit location is suggested for using automatic or burst settings without the appropriate feat, using a firearm that the character is not proficient in, panicked fire, or automatic fire into an area. The GM can decide upon right or left, depending on how the zombie is standing or facing in relation to the direction of fire.

Of course, people like to strike for specific locations against their foes also.

Table 2: Hit Location for Living Humans

Location	Damage	Modifier	Random Hit (2d12)**
Head	Double Damage, Massive Damage Check Required	-8	23-24
Neck	Double Damage, Massive Damage Check Required	-12	22
Arm*	-2 to attack, grapple, skills	-4	19-21
Hand*	-1 to attack, grapple, skills	-6	18
Chest	No additional Effect	0	12-17
Abdomen	Carrying Capacity reduced by 8 strength points, -5 to speed	0	8-11
Groin	Massive Damage Check Required	-2	7
Leg*	-10' to speed	-4	3-6
Foot*	-5' to speed	-6	2

*The additional damage modifiers listed are cumulative. Someone hit in both arms and one hand suffers a -5 to attack, grapple and skill checks.

When autofire is used, a good idea; with which to increase the lethality/realism/We're so fucked feeling of the chaos of combat is to have any of the people hit by the autofire take the bullet in a random place.

Example: Daria is spraying down the area where a wolf-pack has taken cover, and one of the members is hit. Rather than just assigning 2d8 points of damage to the wolf-pack member, the GM rolls 2d12, resulting in a 10. The wolf pack kid is hit in the arm, laying down a -2 penalty on attacks and grappling.

When the Hit By Location rules are used, a GM can be particularly cruel and any time a weapon scores a critical strike, and/or does maximum damage, the character has to succeed in a Fortitude save, DC 10+1 per hit point of damage, or have the limb blown off. Deciding where the hit took place can make a

huge difference in whether or not the wound is incapacitating or deadly.

A quick and dirty rule of thumb is: Roll a die six, 1 the limb is amputated at the torso joint, 2-4 it's amputated mid-upper range (thigh, biceps), 5 it's amputated at the mid-joint (knee, elbow), 6-8 it's amputated lower range (calf, forearm), 9 it's amputated at the lower joint (wrist, ankle), and on a 10, a digit is amputated (toes, fingers).

Amputation requires an immediate Treat Injury, or the character will die of blood loss within a few minutes. A good rule of thumb is that the character loses 1 Con point due to blood loss per round, until the wound has a tourniquet applied.

A tourniquet requires a successful Treat Injury Check (DC: 13) to stop the bleeding.

In addition, any time a weapon does maximum damage to zombie and strikes anywhere but the head, a zombie could require the same or lose a limb, be blown in half at the waist, or have its head severed.

For a blunt object to sever a limb through compression, it must be at least 2 size categories larger than the person. Piercing weapons will not sever a limb unless they are a firearm or are 3 size categories larger than the target. Slashing weapons and firearms can sever a limb providing they do the above damage.

Option

Swinging at an arm and missing, a person still has a chance to hit the target's torso, and shooting at an opponent means usually hitting center mass despite missing the targeted area.

A quick way of handling "miss hits" is to allow any shot/swing that misses the called area, if the roll is still higher than the target's normal Defense, the shot/swing has hit center mass on the target, doing normal damage.

Example: Marion is shooting at some low-life whose tried to jack him for his horse. He draws and fires, aiming for the head, and misses. (Target Defense: 22, head Defense 30, Roll was 25) The bullet still strikes the target in the torso. (The roll is still higher than the normal Defense)

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SURVIVOR'S TALES

OF RISEN AMERICA

VOLUME ONE: WINTER'S STORY

Publisher's Note: Writings from the point in time known to laymen, as "The Rising" are scarce at best. There are the well-known Diaries of Becka, which most students are required to read in secondary school, but little attention is paid to secondary writings.

Of those, the Survivor's Guide is an invaluable resource in seeing how this nation fared after the cataclysm, and the little known "Survivor's Tales" is another. Encouraged by would-be historians, Survivor's Tales makes for an interesting look at post cataclysm life.

Of course, the constant insistence that the dead returned to life, as some kind of cannibal monster is ridiculous, but the various "historical" records are an insight into mass hysteria on a global level.

I met Marion in Lubbock, when a bunch of zombies had me trapped on a fire escape. I'd been making a scavenging run, and got sloppy, and if it weren't for the short bandy-legged little man, I'd probably be zombie food by now. Anyhow, he encouraged me to write down my life story, or at least what happened after the dead began to walk, and before I met him. Unlike most autobiographies you'll probably read, mine isn't full of self-aggrandization and I'm not going to lie to make myself look better.

My name is Winter, as in Of Discontent, and until I'd moved to Lubbock, I was a scumbag. Dopeslinger and banger, I'd killed people and beaten others with a bat. I'd run away from a good home to be a banger, and left Dallas to stop being one. I'd dropped out of high school, hooked for a bit, then was jumped into a small time gang. I wasn't anyone good, and probably would have wound up dead if it hadn't been for Marion. But that's later; I need to talk about what happened in the beginning first.

I'd moved to Lubbock after the gang I'd run with since I was thirteen came out on the losing side of a turf war with another gang. I'd gone from slinging dope to slinging burgers, but for some reason, I liked myself. I had a job at a burger shack, and a small apartment full of nice things.

That morning was pretty much like any other, there had been a few aggressive panhandlers, too drunk to even really vocalize a begging speech, but I just ignored them and rode by on my little motorized scooter.

Three of the people on my shift were out sick, and some fucking tweakers had mugged my manager the night before. One of them had bitten him pretty badly on the hand, and when he went to the ER, the place was packed full of people that had been in fights and bitten.

I spent the morning flipping breakfast sandwiches, pouring coffee, and serving up pre-made hash browns. Everyone seemed to be talking about how someone had tried to mug them, how there were ambulance's everywhere, and how there were a lot of scuffles on the street, and cops everywhere. A police car that came through the drive through had two tweakers in the back that kept throwing them selves against the back cage, snarling and chewing at it.

Finally, I got off shift, and hit up the liquor store. I wandered through the shelves, found a bottle of Jagermeister, and went to the counter. I waited, but nobody showed up. I rang the bell about a half-dozen times, and still nothing. Finally, I got sick of waiting, and just left. If the owner wasn't gonna' watch it, I'll take the

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fucking thing.

I ran back in and grabbed a pack of smokes.

Riding home on my little scooter, I saw more than one wreck. I passed two firefighters trying to calm a hysterical woman who was hitting at them, her teeth snapping to keep them back as they tried to belt her to some kind of board.

Once I got home, I tossed in my D-12 CD and started drinking, kicking it on my sofa and playing X-Box Live. There weren't too many players online, and everyone who was; were all talking about the fact that so many people were throwing fists. One guy bitched that he got jumped by a couple of dudes who seemed more interested in biting him than actually fighting like a man.

Eventually I crashed out, sleeping on my futon.

The banging on my door woke me up, a steady hammering, and the guy outside was making weird noises. Wearing my Hello Kitty pajamas, with a baseball bat in one hand, I crept up to the door and peaked through the peephole. Outside my door, hammering on it was Jose from down the hall, drunk as usual, with a bloody mouth. His wife probably got tired of him

beating on her and now he needed an ambulance.

I opened the door, opening my mouth to say: "Sit down, I'll call 911." When he lunged at me, mouth open, hands pulling on my pajamas. The flannel gave with a soft whisper as I flung myself backwards, raising up the bat.

"Back the fuck off, esse, or I'll cave in your skull, puta!" I warned him. I'd beaten plenty of homeboys down with my slugger, and was pretty well known in Dallas for taking a bat to people.

He hissed and lunged forward again, trying to grab another handful of my torn blouse, and I swung for fences. Nobody, and I

mean nobody lays their hands on me without my permission. I'd worked too hard to be some slut on demand.

The bat hit Jose in the side of the head with a crunch, and I cursed myself for being careless. It had happened before, and I knew he was dead as he crashed to the floor. Shaking, I backed away and took the phone off the hook, dialing 911 and bringing the receiver up to my ear.

"...circuits are busy. If this is an emergency, please stay on the line. We apologize, but all circuits are busy..." I pinched the phone between my shoulder and ear and leaned on the bat, waiting for several moments. I could hear footsteps in the hallway, and Mr. Torres, my neighbor, came stumbling into my doorway.

"Mr. Torres! Mr. Torres!" I needed help, I needed a witness that Jose had tried to attack me and I'd accidentally killed him. Mr. Torres stopped for a moment, and I felt a sudden chill go up my spine. He slowly shuffled through a turn to face me, and I could see that his mouth was covered with blood, he had a hole in his cheek, and he had a huge hole in his neck.

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His shirt was covered in blood, way too much blood for him to have survived it all pouring out of the hole in his neck.

Mr. Torres snarled at me, and began stumbling toward me, his hands outstretched and his eyes covered with a white cataract. I dropped the phone and backed up, almost tripping over the spilled bottle of Jagermeister. He kept coming forward, a jerky, druggie step, but I knew he wasn't high.

He was dead, but he walked.

I screamed, stepped forward, raised the bat over my head, and brought it crashing down on top of his head. His skull made a loud crunching noise, and he dropped. Half crying with panic/relief, I lunged forward and slammed my door shut, shooting the dead bolt and turning around, putting my back against the wood.

He was dead, I know he was dead, but he had still come at me anyway. It had taken a headshot to drop him. He was still lying on the floor, one foot twitching steadily. Jose was down too, but not even twitching. Neither one of them had very much blood pooling around them, which was weird.

Jose had needed a head shot too. My brain whispered to me, in that cold, sick tone that my mind used when I was in trouble, the same voice that had warned me that there was probably a witness to my B&E in Dallas. A woman with a bar code tattooed below her eyes wasn't exactly unheard of, but not as common as lost pennies either.

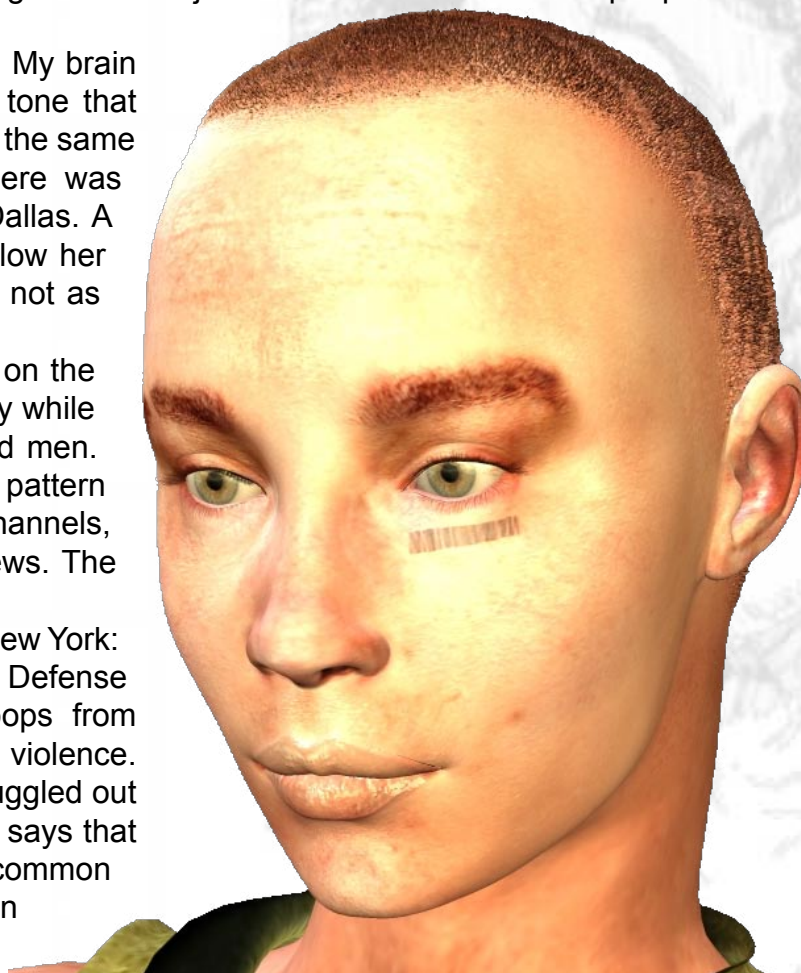
Curious, I moved over and turned on the TV to give me some kind of normalcy while I sat in the front room with two dead men. Cartoon Network was showing test pattern bars, and I began switching through channels, finally settling on World Network News. The WNN anchor looked pretty harried.

API: Violence increasing globally. New York: Rioters attacking people in the street. Defense Department considers recalling troops from overseas to help quell domestic violence. CDC states bioweapon possibly smuggled out of former Soviet Union states. WHO says that aggressiveness and trancelike state common among bioweapon victims. The bar on the bottom of the screen was full

of reports of violence, Chinese troops firing on unarmed civilians, violence in Iraq, Dallas and Seattle rioting.

I watched, my mouth open, and was suddenly aware I was sitting in my front room with two bioweapon victims. God knew what kind of crap I'd breathed in already. There was a beeping noise, and another bar swept across the top of the screen, listing refugee stations in the Lubbock area. The civic center, the schools, a couple of gyms.

"The White House has reiterated the statement that any vigilante acts that result in the deaths of bioweapon affected citizens will be considered murder. Authorities request that anyone driving render aid to any wounded on the roadside, and to stay away from auto accidents or other accidents, to make way for emergency services" The report chilled me for some reason. Not for what they said, but for what they didn't say. There are victims of a bioweapon they had no information on, yet they were encouraging people to give aid to injured people on the



roadside. I had a mental image of someone stopping to help someone and getting attacked, getting the bioweapon, and going on to affect others.

I've got to get out of there... I was sure of it. Damn it, I'd been a good girl and not bothered to get a gat. All I had was my baseball bat, but hey, it had been working so far, right? I quickly changed out of my torn PJ's, pulling on cargo pants and a flannel shirt. I grabbed my wallet, stepped over Jose and Mr. Torres, and unlocked my door.

I peeked right and left to make sure that the hallway was clear, and headed for the back stairs. I could feel my old gang instincts coming to life again. It wasn't the popo this time though, it was people infected with some shit that eggheads in a lab had cooked up to kill everyone.

I got to the stairwell and opened the door. I could hear screams echoing in the stairwell, coming from above and below. People were being attacked, but they weren't me, and I wasn't going down for any murders either. I quickly moved down the stairs and out the back door, into the alley.

Jogging to the street, I looked around and could see a few people wandering around, looking stoned out of their gourds. There weren't any cars on the street, and the only bus I could see was parked in the middle of the street, with the door open and several people moving around inside.

There was one of those refugee stations close by, and having only a baseball bat meant I was severely under armed. I turned away from the bus and began jogging through the street. A woman was screaming, held down in the alleyway as several men and a woman were biting at her. I put my forearm against my mouth to hold back the vomit that threatened to spew out.

I coughed, spit, and started jogging again, my bat held ready in case any more of these sick people tried to jump me. The few I did see just reached for me, but I was able to dodge out of the way and keep moving. All of them were badly injured, maybe that had something to do with how slow they were.

Several blocks later, and I could see the refugee station. There were cars surrounding it, completely filling up the street, parked on the sidewalks or left in the middle of the street. There were soldiers piling up sandbags, while more soldiers kept a lookout with their weapons. A man saw me and raised a bullhorn.

"IF YOU CAN UNDERSTAND ME, WAVE THE BAT OVER YOUR HEAD!" his voice boomed. I could see two soldiers pointing their rifles at me, and I quickly began waving the bat over my head.

I sure as shit didn't want to get shot.

"HURRY UP, LADY!" one of them shouted, "RUN!" I followed his orders, jumping onto the trunk of a Beemer and running across the tops of the cars. I almost slipped on the hood of a Honda Civic, but kept my balance and managed to tumble over the top of the sandbags.

Two of the soldiers began shooting, and I felt a cold hand hit my leg. I looked back to see a woman with most of her head blown away laying across the sandbags I'd fell over, her hand on my leg. I screamed and kicked, scrambling away, kicking her several times.

"It's OK, she's dead." One of the soldiers told me, reaching down and helping me to my feet. "Are you injured?" I shook my head, and he pointed into the small office building they were sandbagging off. "Go inside, you'll be safe in there."

"What's happening?" I asked, standing up and brushing myself off. Instead of doing what he told me, I grabbed a sandbag off the pile and tossed it to one of the soldiers who had just laid his down.

"We don't know. Some kind of bioweapon attack, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility this morning, and it fits their M.O." the soldier told me, smiling at me joining the sandbag chain. "Thanks, lady, anyone willing to help is more than welcome too, right now." I nodded and kept tossing sandbags. I wasn't in as good of shape as I'd thought I was; I could already feel my shoulders start to protest.

"How bad is it?" I asked, grunting as I tossed another.

"It wasn't too bad three days ago, but it's getting worse and worse as more people

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get infected, and they're bastard hard to put down." He told me. "Just a second." He raised the bullhorn and shouted: "WAVE YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR HEAD IF YOU CAN UNDERSTAND ME!" there

was a pause, the silence only broken by the sounds of gunfire in the distance and the faint sound of screaming. "SECOND WARNING! WAVE YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR HEAD!"

I grunted and grabbed another sandbag.

"Dust 'em." The soldier said, and the two others began firing. One began cussing, yanking at his weapon, and I looked around, spotting some rifles stacked up. I grabbed one and held it out.

"Here, use this one!" I shouted over the gunfire from the other guy. The one whowasyanking on a slide on the weapon, s w a p p e d weapons, and I tossed it on top of a stack of cardboard boxes, and then turned back to the quickly melting pile of sandbags.

Beside me, the rifle fire suddenly

stopped.

"Harker, go inside and get the bayonets. Lewis, show Ms. Sandbags how to clear a jam from a weapon and get her a Leatherman tool." The guy with the bullhorn offered as I tossed the last sandbag to one of the soldiers. The other two moved over to a big coil of wire and grabbed heavy looking gloves. While I waited, they strung the wire across the sandbags, and then grabbed three sandbags to make a hole in the middle of the wire.

"Hey, lady, come here." One of the soldiers told me. Opposite of US ARMY on his chest was a strip that read "LEWIS, B." on it. He showed me how to clear a jam, even use the pliers to pull any bullets that got jammed in there.

"She get a weapon, Sergeant?" Lewis asked.

"Why not? Half our unit didn't make recall. Can you shoot, lady?" I nodded. "Ever killed?" I nodded again, and he nodded back. Lewis showed me how to switch between single shot and burst, as well as how to hold and fire it.

The guy with HARKER on his top came out with several knives, and while I watched he attached one to the front of my rifle. Lewis waited until his was added, then he turned back to me.

"Don't point the weapon at any other people who are alive. You aren't used to this kind of hardware, and I don't want anyone to get killed." He told me. I nodded, listening closely. Unlike a lot of my fellow gangers, I knew when to listen and what to ignore. "Hand to hand with a rifle is difficult, and we don't have time to train you." I nodded again, and he continued: "Just slam the bayonet into them, abdomen or chest, then pull the trigger, that will blow them off of it." He demonstrated, and I repeated it, sans trigger pulling, and he nodded in satisfaction.

"Your choice, lady, you can stay inside, you can man a window on the second or third floor, or you can stay out here with us." The guy with the bullhorn told me. "Go inside, and look for the guy with a black bar on his helmet, that's Lieutenant Barston, tell him you've been drafted, he'll give you ammunition."

I nodded again.

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"You say 'Yes, Sergeant' or 'No, Sergeant' when you answer, soldier." His voice was gruff, and I recognized authority when I heard it. Well shit, I'd gone from banger to productive citizen to draftee. I'd seen the advertisements at night, I'd even thought about joining, but got told I had a felony drug bust on my record, and they'd turned me down.

Irony of irony, they'd accepted me now.

Inside there were dozens of people, many injured. I could see four soldiers with canvas bags treating people, and a half dozen soldiers applying bandages. There were two men toward the back, one with a series of inverted V's on his helmet, the other with a single black bar that went up and down.

"Mister?" I asked. The man with the bar looked at me.

"What? I'm a little busy, lady." He said, his voice mellow.

"Sergeant outside told me to tell you that I'm drafted." I told him. He looked me over, his eyes hard looking and a little scary. I'd known a lot of guys who thought they were bad motherfuckers, but this guy scared me.

"Raise your right hand." I complied, and he led me through an oath. When it was done, he clapped me on the shoulder and smiled. "Welcome to the US Army, private. Grab an armored vest, a helmet, and an LCE. PARKS!" He shouted the last part, and a man applying a bandage to another man's arm looked up.

"Yes, sir?" he asked.

"Get this new private her gear, show her how to handle her M-16, and get her on the line." He told the other soldier. The other one hurried over, and pulled me to the back of the building, where there were several piles of gear.

"The Ell-Tee, he made us bring extra stuff." He went through several helmets before settling on one. He adjusted the band inside and set it on my head, then snapped the strap. "That's your ballistic helmet." He tried several vests before finally putting one on me. It was heavier than I thought they'd be. The soldiers acted like they weren't very heavy, but it was more than I was used to carrying.

"That's your Interceptor Vest, it'll stop bullets too." He told me, and then began clipping gear

to me. "These are ammo pouches. Just drop your empties. Here's your canteen. Here's your first aid bandage, use it on you, not on other people. Here's your gas mask." He shook his head. "We don't have time to fit it. We'll do that later."

"How bad is it?" I asked him.

"Pretty damn bad. Our unit got recalled about ten this morning, and less than half of us reported in. The Ell-Tee gave us shoot to kill orders after... well, never mind. Just shoot to kill. It looks like headshots put them down." He told me, adjusting the straps on the gear I was now wearing. "We'll get you dressed properly later, for right now, you look fine."

I nodded, and he explained to me how to answer people, to address people by their ranks, and to obey quickly. He assured me that the orders weren't from people tripping, but rather from people who were used to being obeyed instantly.

Before I headed back out to the sandbagged area, he grabbed my arm and told me one last thing: "The LT, he led us through more than a couple ambushes in Iraq, you can trust him."

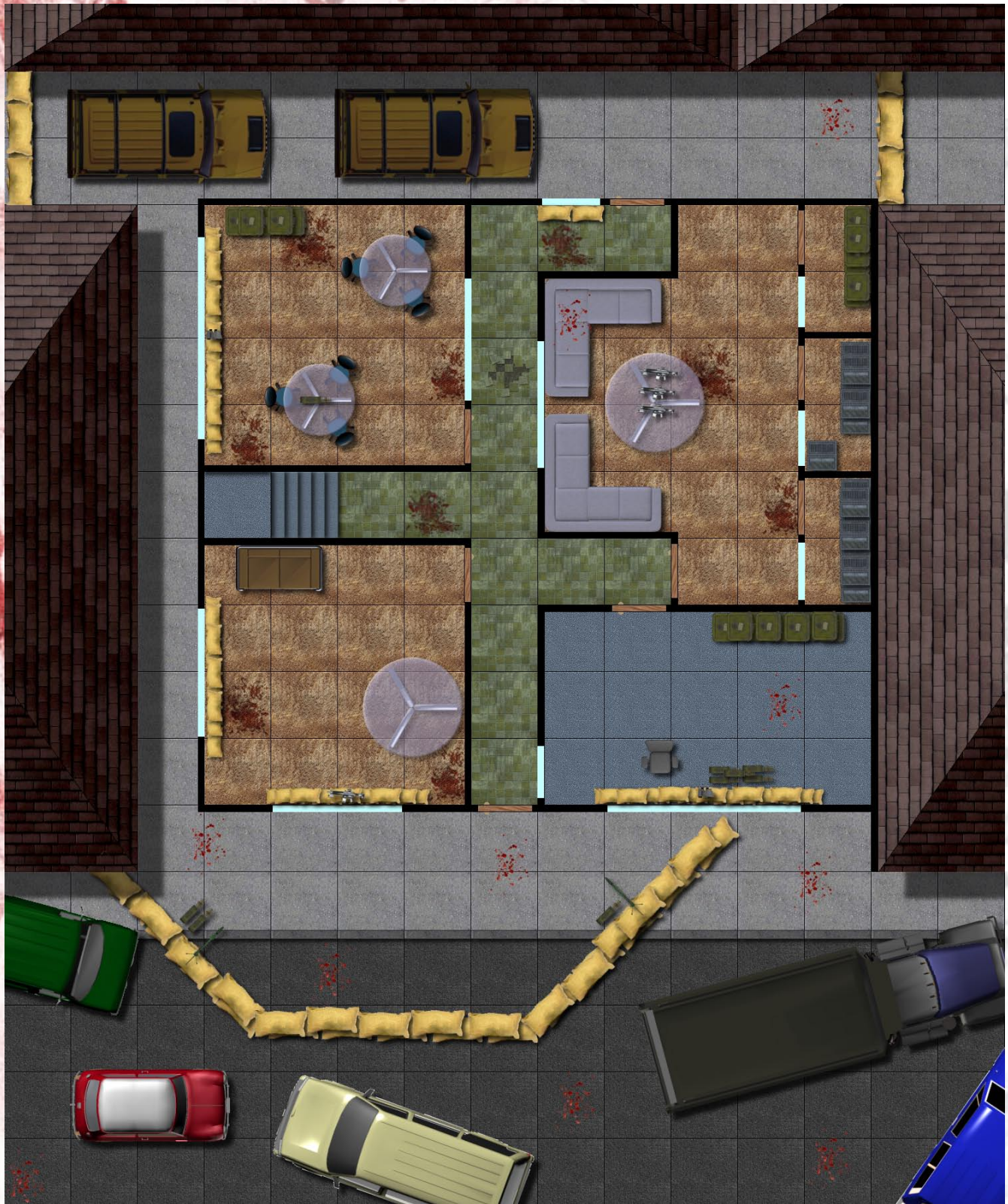
For some reason, it made me feel better.

Outside, the rifles were firing again.

--Autobiography of Winter Discontent

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