

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO RISEN AMERICA

VOLUME FIVE: HEROIC REMAINS

The twittering of birds and the shining of the sun woke me from where I was curled up, sleeping, on the floor of the gas station. I got up, coughed for a bit until I could breathe proper, and then slowly dressed.

Outside the day was clean and clear, just the blue Texas sky, not a hint of clouds anywhere out there. For a moment, as I dressed, I was able to pretend that the dead had not returned to life, and was able to ignore the corpses outside. The moment shattered, however, when I began examining the Army pig-iron I'd picked up, making sure it was still in serviceable condition.

Pancho was snoring into his feedbag, swaying gently back and forth on his feet. I used the time to check his fetlocks, making sure that he hadn't sustained any injuries on his little jaunt through the city. He woke up, farted thunderously, and leaned against me, pushing me from my crouch to an undignified sprawl on the oily concrete of the mechanics shack.

"Blasted ol' cuss." I laughed, stretching and feeling my joints pop. I stifled a groan as my spine popped in a couple of places, then began throwing Pancho's tack and fixin's on him. He tried the old trick of expanding his belly when I went to cinch the saddle, so I kneed him one, and he exhaled and I tightened it down before he could pull the trick again.

The ugly ol' brute was in a good mood. That boded well.

The sound the garage door made, when I cranked it up, seemed to echo in the morning stillness, and I checked carefully for any of those rotting morons, but didn't see anything but a thrush pounding a snail on the gas pump.

Whistling "Amazing Grace" I swung into the

saddle and kicked Pancho into a walk, steering him onto the freeway median. I didn't feel up to winding between the stalled cars, with their occupants pounding on the glass and smearing blood and pus all over the windows in their confusion. I'd seen enough dead children to last me a lifetime, and the memory of those two chillun I'd shot in the darkness the night before still bothered me.

Then the image of the kid, a feral snarl on her face, and her middle finger extended toward me as she scrabbled away, a knife clutched tightly in her other hand, rose up, and I found myself chuckling.

By noon the sun was hammering down, and the sweatband of my hat was surely earning its keep. I'd seen a few houses, but they'd been badly damaged, and more than a few had burnt to the ground. Something bad had happened out here, but that goes without saying, ya know?

A bit into the afternoon, I found where them Army boys must have tried to keep the city cordoned off. There was that sharp as hell barbed wire scattered about, piles of rotting corpses, literally thousands of glittering shells, blood stains, lines of sandbags, piles of garbage in holes, and holes in the ground I knew were foxholes dug by young men and women who fought from those holes in hopes of stemming the flood of the walking dead; that must have emerged from Lubbock.

Pancho's steps filled with blood with each step, and a small part of me cringed at the thought of how many people must have died while them soldier boys had tried desperately to hold their line.

I could see piles of blackened bones in the middle of the scorched tarmac; large patches

of burnt grass, and probably more dead people than I'd seen in my entire life. It reminded me of what my pappy had told me about the Second World War when he came back after ol' Hitler gnoshed on the barrel of his pistol.

We were silent, Pancho and I, as we wove between the strands of wire and continued south. The place seemed like it should remain silent, and we both felt like intruders; the sun had dimmed, and the warm afternoon had quickly chilled, but then, I'm a superstitious old cuss, so it could have just been the fears of an old man close to dying.

We were glad to put that behind us at a canter.

Long about an hour or so later, the glint of sunlight off of glass caught my attention, and I stopped, looking at what it might have been. I uncased the binoculars and brought it in to focus.

Vehicles, barbed wire, sandbags, and a literal wall of the dead surrounding the wire, I couldn't hear no gunfire, but still, I had to know. I turned Pancho and rode toward the crowd, the cacophony of their groaning starting as a murmuring, and rising to a full-throated demon's howl by the time I reached them.

Teenagers with college shirts, them soccer moms with their trendy fashions and jewelry, homeless buggers, and people from all walks of life quickly surrounded me, their dead hands reaching toward me; then falling away as their owners realized that I wasn't what they wanted.

One child was stumbling along next to Pancho, reaching out with one cold hand to clumsily pet his flank, her face lit up with dimwitted happiness. I was content to let her move next to Pancho until she suddenly snarled and grabbed my boot, her mouth open to try to bite me through my boot and the stirrup.

I shot her through the top of her head.

Finally I reached the edge of where the soldiers had held up. At a rough guess, the dead were at least thirty thick around the soldier boys' perimeter, which was a low dirt mound, about waist high, with barbed wire covering it. Dead folk were hanging in the wire, some moving feebly, others covered with a thick layer of

black flies. I nudged Pancho to a stop, and climbed down into the crowd.

Pancho followed me somewhat lacksidassically as I climbed up the side of the dirt mound and skootched past the wires. Inside the perimeter I could see another perimeter, and beyond that, another and another. Between the first and second dirt mounds, I could see machinegun nests, abandoned vehicles, lots and lots of twinkling shells, craters, and piles of exterminated walking dead.

I moved down the other side carefully, and then climbed back up to get Pancho loose from where he got hung up on that nasty barbed wire. Pancho bit at me in thanks, then followed me into the first area.

Walking around the entire perimeter took me nearly an hour. I had to push mah way through crowds of the dead where they'd clustered up near the vehicles, or found something to catch their interest. There were foxholes, craters' from explosives, thousands of expended rounds of ammunition, and abandoned vehicles of all types, from ambulances to four by four pickup trucks. I found a good-sized pen full of nothing but the walking dead. The pen was full of men, women, and children of all skin colors and ages, all with a big orange circle painted on their front and backs.

Whatever they were planning on doing with them all, I don't know.

I checked each of the vehicles, and they all had several things in common: Each was out of fuel or the batteries were dead; all of them were missing their radios and guns; they all showed mute evidence of hard use in a dangerous area. Many of them had caved in grills, or damaged bulletproof glass, and some had been partially stripped for parts.

Still, I discovered no functional weaponry or vehicles in the outside ring, so I climbed over the barrier to the next ring.

It was smaller, but much like the other one. This one had a smattering of zombies in military uniforms, but not many. The amount of zombies in the area was thicker, and instead of circling it, I just pushed on through the zombies, climbed the dirt mound, and crossed the smaller perimeter.

The final one was fairly small in area, only about the size of a football field. There were vehicles scattered about, boxes on pallets, tents, and weapons abandoned everywhere. I took the time to scavenge the area, picking up shells for the Army pig-iron I'd adopted.

I found a hospital tent, where someone had walked through and shot everyone in the head; there was a command tent full of radios that someone had taken the time to shoot up, maps on boards that had been marked on with pens and pins and string; there was a tent full of weapons on locked racks and crates of ammunition boxes, most of them open and empty; and tents full of backpacks and duffle bags. I looked at the map board, but couldn't decipher them. I saw circles around Dallas, Lubbock, Abilene, Forth Worth, Austin, Houston, and quite a few other places. Someone had precisely circled five overlapping spots around Corpus Christi and drawn lines through each. There was a succession of numbers, along with several dotted lines extending outward from the city; but what it meant, I had no idea. I poked around a little longer, but didn't find anything I really understood.

The soldiers had left, but there weren't enough dead soldiers around to account for the amount of manpower that had to have been required to hold even the small area in the center of the area. I'd found the bulldozers they'd used to build the dirt mounds, heavy weapons that had been abandoned with ammunition still hooked up to them, and even boxes of medical supplies.

Still, the place was completely abandoned, and had been for some time. The coffee cups were bone dry, stained from where the coffee had evaporated away, and the few corpses I found were pretty nasty. I didn't find any rucksacks, just duffle bags, and in one radio tent, someone had shot up the radios.

I picked up some food in plastic bags and put them in Pancho's saddlebags. A couple dozen bottles of water followed them, along with magazines of ammunition and a few grenades with yellow stripes around the middle.

It was interesting, but the Army had left a long time ago.

Pancho didn't protest too hard as I led him out of the rings of dirt. There were two gaps in each ring, covered by large vehicles, and I'd climb in and move each one back so I could just go out the opening; I threw a leg back over Pancho and headed south again.

About two hours later, off the highway, I discovered a crashed helicopter. There weren't any zombies around, and I was honestly curious. There were about half a dozen corpses present, all of them dead, their heads smashed open or a single bullet hole through the forehead. On the side of the helicopter was painted a yellow shield with a black stripe diagonally across it and a horse's head on one side. I wasn't familiar with the marking, but knew it had to have been some kind of cavalry unit.

I ignored the smell as I searched the dead soldiers. None of them had dog tags, so I figured there had to be some survivors of the crash. While some of them still had weapons, all of their ammunition pouches were open and usually empty. Two of them had bloody bandages on their forearms, and one of them had a fairly large bandage on the spot where the shoulder meets the neck. They were too rotted for me to really get an idea of how bad they'd been injured, and the animals had been at parts of them, but I was pretty sure they weren't more than a week old.

Satisfied there wasn't anything I was interested in, I left the helicopter, climbed back in the saddle, and headed south again. I figured I'd follow the highway until I eventually reached Fort Hood. Them Texas samurai had said it was gone, but there was gone, and there was Gone, and I was willing to bet that Fort Hood was just gone. Once I hit Fort Hood, I'd probably head to Waco, then Austin. Waco was pretty heavily armed, and Austin should have been protected with everything that the military had; lots of politicians and rich folk there.

Twilight was about an hour off, as I passed by a highway intersection, where Highway 400 met with Highway 87. According to the road signs, the city of Tahoka was only a couple of miles away. I'd never heard of Tahoka, but if it was good enough to warrant a highway marker, it was probably big enough to check out. I

kicked Pancho into a bit faster walk, hoping to make the city before nightfall.

Soon, I could hear rifle fire, and that meant living people. I passed several houses, and could see a church steeple in the distance. I stopped and checked with the binoculars, and could see a figure in the steeple with a rifle. He'd fire off a couple rounds, then duck back. Something about the sight of the figure made me more than a little nervous. Not as nervous as the sign that proudly proclaimed that Tahoka was home to almost 3,000 souls.

The highway dropped down so that the city streets could intersect it, and speed limit signs warned me not to do more than 30 miles per hour; yeah, like Pancho would ever run that fast unless he was chasing a mare.

I'd checked mah map, there was a County Courthouse in Tahoka, and I figured that would be a good place to check. These small towns in Texas didn't believe in shiny glass and steel, those places would be fortresses, built in memory of the old fortresses that had once been sprawled out across Texas.

I looked left and right at every street, and mah blood ran cold when I saw the amount of dead littering the streets and still walking around. A big old armored US Army hog had run into a building on the Western section of 7th Street, and the building had collapsed around it. The back door was open, and a zombie was sitting there, mournfully examining an Army helmet. The Army had been here, but it didn't look like it did any good.

At Fourth Street, I headed west, and saw that many people were staggering through the street, men, women, and children. It was the children that chilled me the most, staggering about with horrible injuries on their little bodies. One was sitting there, rolling a ball back and forth against a curb; several of the zombies turned and looked at Pancho and me, the noise of his hooves against the pavement drawing their attention. One little kid ran up and touched Pancho, trying to keep next to us so he could pet the old horse's flanks. I let him follow me for about a block, then shot him once through the top of the head, dropping his little body on the yellow lines.

A couple blocks later, and I could hear the occasional gunshot. The dead were thicker here, and quite a few of the younger men and women who were staggering about with blue faces were wearing sweatshirts or T-shirts with that college up in Lubbock's insignia. I'd passed a few soldiers, too. All of them were badly torn up, and most of them had taken bullets to the face that hadn't penetrated their brainpans.

I stopped for a second in the gathering twilight and took off mah hat to fan mah face. I bent forward to cough, and a bullet smashed into the face of a young woman who had just touched mah boot and begun to turn away. I crushed mah hat back onto mah head and reared Pancho, as another zombie was shot in the chest, and put mah spurs to the old boy.

His muscles bunched, and we sprang forward as a bullet smashed into the window of car that was slewed crazily in the street. The bullets were coming from the direction of that church, apparently the work of that sniper I'd seen earlier. I was coughing up blood, riding pressed against Pancho's back, Pancho was racing down the street, knocking over zombies, and I saw the sparks of another miss come off the road.

I raced past a high school track field, and could see the courthouse up ahead. There were military trucks around it, barbed wire, a sandbag perimeter, and a crowd of zombies. I plowed Pancho into the crowd of dead people that surrounded the place, the horse's weight throwing them to the ground. Pancho leapt over the hood of a car, and his shoes struck sparks on the stones of the walkway. I reigned him up as he hit the steps to keep the durn fool from breaking his legs on the stone.

I swung off Pancho and lunged up to the door, grabbing some good ol' boy by his overalls and slinging him back away from the door. I hammered on the wood, hard, and called out.

"HELLO IN THERE!" I called out. "HELLO INSIDE!"

The sniper had obviously lost sight of me as I reached the courtyard, but I still needed to get inside. I needed to know if anyone had survived here. Over the moaning of the dead, who were starting to show a little more active

interest in the building, I could hear the sound of voices.

"IN THE LORD'S NAME, LET ME IN!" I hollered out, turning around and drawing the Army heater. I kicked against the door, mah spur getting lodged for a moment, and shot a man who was running up the walkway in the face. Panchito was rearing, trying to pull the reins out of mah hand, and I could see a bullet wound in his flank.

"Dammit, you black devil, hold still!" I hollered. A bullet bounced off the column next to mah head, and I ducked instinctively. I kicked the door again.

"OPEN UP!" I shot twice more, dropping a child and a woman who was dressed in a police uniform. More and more zombies were arriving, attracted by the sound of mah voice. Where there had only been a fair sized crowd, now it was beginning to look like a full-blown mob. The faster, more aggressive ones were pushing past their slow and clumsy brethren, and the sound of them had hit the point where I couldn't hear the voices behind me again.

Things were starting to look a bit bad.

--In God's Grace;

M. Samuel Lefferts

BIG JIM'S ALMANAC

(Excerpt From Issue 1, Year Zero)

Publisher's Note: Big Jim's Almanac was sold from Big Jim's Trading Post, one of the first recorded trading settlements. Established Year Zero, Big Jim's Trading Post offered training and Big Jim's Almanac, in addition to standard trading supplies.

Whether or not Big Jim himself was a real person, or just a fabrication, is still up to date with historians, but the information contained in each almanac gives historians a detailed look of

I remember survivors scramblin' for weapons and armor in the first weeks of the Risin'. I was not one of them; of course, I was prepared and had been so since 9/11. I saw many people trying to grab as much as they could and I also saw people unable to carry what they found. One poor bastard was so loaded down with ammo that he couldn't even outrun the slower deaders and was pulled down before he got half a block.

Something a lot of folks don't think about is just how heavy all of that ammunition really is. Well let me tell you, it's damn heavy. You need to be picky about just what you carry. And for Christ's sake, only take what you can use, leave some for others so they can use it too.

Here is a list of various calibers and their weights:

As you can see, in small amounts, ammunition is very easy to manage, but when you find that huge stash in a military ammo dump or bunker you need to plan very carefully in order to make the most of your carrying capacity.

First off: only take the ammo that fits your weapons. If you don't have a .50 Cal then don't take the .50 Cal ammo. That shit is heavy and there aren't many .50 Cal weapons around anyway.

Second: only take what you need. You don't have to take everything you find just 'cuz you "think" you may need it later on. Just leave it there. The Risers aren't gonna carry it off - though I wonder about some of 'em - and if another survivor takes it then they probably needed it more than you.

Caliber	Weight / Round	Clip / Box /Sling	Belt / Clip / Bandolier	Can / Box / Case
Handguns				
9mm	.044 lbs	10 rnds/clip (.5 lbs)	20 rnds/clip	500 rnds/box (13 lbs)
.357 Mag	.041 lbs	20 rnds/box (1 lb)		50 rnds/case (2 lbs)
.45	.079 lbs	10 rnds/clip (1 lb)		50 rnds/case (4 lbs)
Longarms / Heavy				
5.56mm	.035 lbs	30 rnds/clip (1 lb)	200 rnds/belt (7 lbs)	4 belts/can (28 lbs) or 840 rnds/can (29.5 lbs)
7.62mm	.077 lbs	10 rnd/box (1 lb)	100 rnds/belt (7.5 lbs)	2 belts/can (15 lbs)
.50	.350 lbs	10 rnds/box (3.5 lbs)	100 rnds/belt (35 lbs)	1 belt/can (35 lbs)
12 Gauge	.083 lbs	20 rnds/box (1.5 lbs)	50 rnds/bandolier (4 lbs)	250 shells/case (21 lbs)
Grenades				
40mm HE	.500 lbs	5 shells/sling (2.5 lbs)	12 shells/bandolier (6 lbs)	48 shells/can (24 lbs)
40mm Buckshot	.250 lbs	5 shells/sling (1 lb)	12 shells /bandolier (3 lbs)	48 shells /can (12 lbs)

Lastly: only take what you can easily carry. If you load yourself down too much you'll end up Riser Chow. My rule of thumb is this: 25% of my carrying capacity (whether it be in a backpack, saddle bags, or vehicle) is dedicated to ammunition. No more. No less. Of course, this can vary depending on the situation, but in general this is a good amount of ammo to carry.

I know most of you will just ignore what I'm tryin' to tell you, and that's ok, eventually you'll be just one less dumb-shit I'll have to deal with later. But if you want to have a chance at bein' around after those things are finally gone, you'll pay closer attention to what kind and how much ammo you carry.

Brains over Bullets, people. Brains over Bullets.

-Big Jim

SURVIVOR'S TALES OF RISEN AMERICA

VOLUME THREE: 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 woke up to someone throwing their arm over my waist and spooning up to my back. My eyes snapped open when lips brushed the nape of my neck. I could see the wedding ring on the hand connected to the arm around my waist, and I could still feel the guy breathing against the back of my neck, but I nearly burst out laughing when the man behind me whispered: "I love you, Barbara."

I wasn't being assaulted, the soldier behind me was dreaming of his wife.

Reaching down, I lifted up his arm and slid out from under it, dragging my rifle with me. The guy farted loudly and then smiled as I set his arm back down. I caressed his cheek real quick, and he smiled again. No harm done, ya know? I realized I was able to see without the night vision, and there were voices in the main part of the building.

Out of everyone there, I could see that Harker and Sergeant were missing, and the guy from the sandbags the night before, Parks I think, was now sleeping, curled up around his rifle with his thumb in his mouth.

I yawned, stretched, and added to the stench with a butt rumble of my own. I left them there to enjoy my parting gift, and wandered into the main room, scratching my ass with the hand not holding the rifle by its nice little handle. The

Ell-Tee glanced over, and then waved at me to join him. The guy who was constantly at his side was sitting in a chair, writing stuff down in a notepad, I could see what he was writing, but it didn't make any sense to me.

"Private Winter, still interested in continuing your enlistment?" the Ell-Tee asked me.

"Yes, sir. As long as you hold up your end of ammunition, food, and helping me protect myself." I answered, standing up straight. He smiled at that, then nodded at my rifle.

"You hold it up, it's easier. Biddle, show her, will you?" One of the guys stood up, and lifted his rifle up, so the handgrip rested against his shoulder, his hand on the handgrip and one finger in the trigger. The strap was behind his shoulder, and when he let it fall, I noticed that it hung way down.

"Adjust the strap, and hold it like that. There might come a time when you need to be able get ahold of it, or bring it into play real fast." He nodded at the empty part of my weapon where normally a magazine would be. "I appreciate firearm safety and all, but when you go to sleep, just clear the chamber and keep a magazine in. You can go ahead and load it."

"Yes, sir." I told him, then adjusted the strap first, and loaded it second. I moved over to a box of magazines and got another to replace

the one I'd put into the weapon, and another to replace the one I'd partially emptied the night before. I tossed the partial one into a box marked "PARTIALLY EXPENDED" and walked into the sunlight.

Sergeant was out there, along with Harker. Sergeant had his bullhorn sitting next to him while he ate one of those plastic bagged meals. Harker waved to me, then tossed me one. I caught it, sat down on an empty ammunition box, and ripped it open.

"How is it out there?" I asked, looking around. While I had been sleeping, someone had moved the cars in the street into a two and sometimes three car deep semi-circle completely blocking off the street. There were a ton of those "infected" on the other side of the cars, moaning and bumping against them.

"Bad. There's no way anyone's gonna make it to us on foot, and I'm not sure if anyone is going to make it in a vehicle." Sergeant said, waving his plastic spoon at the barricade, "But we didn't really have a choice with all of those guys gathering."

"The government is still saying that it's bioterrorism, but the Three Core guys at Fort Hood the Ell-Tee is talking to, say that it's not a bio-weapon they know of." Harker told me, tossing the empty meal packet over his shoulder. "First Cavalry Division is mostly in Iraq, same with Fourth Infantry Division, which we're a Reserve component of. Still, there's about five thousand boots at Hood, and from what the Ell-Tee has said, they're forting up there and going to provide support to everyone."

"OK, so what's that all mean?" I asked, and Sergeant laughed.

"It means, Private Winter, that instead of having about twelve thousand combat troops and all their gear to back us up, all we've got are units that just got back, were getting ready to leave, or were unsuitable for deployment due to condition, personnel, or being vital to running The Hood." Sergeant said, opening his brownie and squeezing peanut butter on it. "But it does mean we have a shitload of support nearby."

"I've got a question." I told them, looking at

the buildings.

"What's that?" Sergeant asked. I'll admit it; he didn't sound condescending, which would have pissed me off.

"Why don't we use boards to cross the buildings, and put another outpost right there. That place doesn't have any waist level windows, those windows are all at head level, and there's steps to the front door. We pull a vehicle up to the door, and surround it, say, five vehicles wide, all the way across the street, as a platform we can keep those fucks off of. That way, we have a second building, and another refugee center." I said, pointing at the gaps between the buildings, the vehicles, and the buildings.

Sergeant sat there for a moment, then nodded. "Good idea, Private, let me talk to the Ell-Tee about it." He stood up, crammed the last of the peanut butter covered brownie into his mouth, and headed inside.

"Damn, you're a sharp one." Harker told me, a touch of admiration in his voice. "You make a good soldier, ever think of signing up before this?"

"Felony drug bust." I told him, and he nodded.

"Fuck, figures. Damn, you should have tried in the last year or so, a lot of recruiters were covering that shit up, and you could have gotten in." he told me.

"You been to Iraq?" I asked to quickly change the subject. Behind him, an infected tried to climb up on a car and slipped, chin hitting the hood hard enough that I could hear bone breaking over the *bong* of the impact.

"Two tours. It's not all that bad." He told me, turning to see what the noise had been. He didn't see anything and turned back. "Shit, did you hear about that Ranger team a couple days ago?"

"No, what happened?"

"Their fucking Enn-See-Oh-Eye-See went apeshit, had them kill everyone, drag the bodies out into the open, and shot everyone in the fucking head. They brought him back to Fort Lewis, up in Washington State, to try him for war crimes." He said.

"Think he really killed a bunch of innocent

civilians?" I asked, looking at the crowd around the vehicles.

"They got him on video tape shooting the last couple people, and they've got recordings of his voice telling his troops to kill everyone." He told me. "Of course he did it."

"Look around you, man. When did this shit start?" I answered, waving my hand at the people pushing against the vehicles. "Fucking think about it. He's fighting some of those terrorist assholes, he kills them, and they get back up and start attacking his crew and the civilians. By the time it's all over, he's been forced to fucking smoke everyone."

Harker stared at me for a second and suddenly nodded. "Shit, that makes sense. Oh, man, that dude got fucked."

Sergeant came out of the building, toting a pump action shotgun, with Parks and Hanson following him. Hanson saw me and glared, but I just kissed at him before shoveling some more squished chicken and catshit, or whatever that crap in the bag was called, into my mouth and swallowing it without hardly chewing.

"Hanson, take over for Harker. Harker, you, Private Winter, Private Parks, and myself are going to try to put Winter's plan into effect." He smiled at me and tossed me the shotgun. I dropped my crappy food catching it, but it's weight felt good. Parks stepped forward, and dragged my sling over my head, so the strap was across my chest, from left shoulder to right hip, with the barrel pointing down. I noticed, but didn't say anything, that Hanson didn't volunteer to go with us. Harker was right, the man talked a lot of shit, but was a pussy at heart.

"You can grab your weapon like so, and pull it into action, if the shotgun jams or runs out of ammo." He showed me, grabbing the weapon's grip and pulling it up so it pointed at the cars. "See?"

I nodded, and accepted the bandoleer of shotgun shells from Sergeant. I pulled it over my head, opposite of the rifle's carrying strap, and jogged after Sergeant up the stairs. I'll give one thing to Army guys; they're in fucking shape. I was out of breath after jogging up three flights of stairs with that heavy ass armored

vest, the ammunition, the shotgun, the helmet, the NVG's, the mask, and the rifle, but they weren't even breathing hard.

We passed rooms, where people were laying around on the floor, or gathered up in huddled groups. Sergeant explained it had been an office building before the Army had taken it over yesterday, and although a lot of the businessmen had left, a lot of the regular people had stayed, and probably a hundred, maybe two hundred, people had got to the "refugee center" before I had, the day before.

Parks and Harker stopped long enough to knock two doors off their hinges and drag them with them, then we exited out onto the roof of the building.

"OK, guys, clear all the obstructions out of the way. The Ell-Tee wants this roof clear enough for Crash Hawk landings and re-supply. Supposedly Damnsee is sending some medivack choppers to us to get the worst of the wounded out of here and bring in about a dozen First Kav boys to help stiffen us up." Sergeant said.

We quickly went to work, kicking or tearing loose the equipment on the roof and throwing it into the street outside. I noticed there were three Army trucks in the alley, blocking the infected from reaching the back door of the building.

"Our escape route." Harker told me, nodding at the vehicles. "If worse comes to worse, we load up in those humvees and drive the hell out of here." I nodded, and finished yanking one of those metal spinners off the roof. I chucked it off the roof and bounced it off some woman's head. She went down in a heap, and Parks laughed.

Harker threw a chunk of metal through the window of the building opposite of us, shattering it, then Harker and Parks dropped a door so it went from the roof of our building, over the foot or two gap, and into the window. They set the second door, making a pretty sturdy looking bridge.

"Winter, take point. Shoot to fucking kill. Don't fucking dick around." Sergeant told me, and I nodded.

I took a deep breath, and ran across the

boards, ducking into the room on the other side and looking around for any of those infected fuckers. The room was empty, and I decided it was my chance to act just like those guys on the news and in movies.

I kicked open the door, and looked first one way, then the other, in the hallway, well, looked over the barrel of my shotgun. If anyone had been there, living or dead, I would have blown them away.

See, I'd never felt like that. Not even when I was stoned, or getting the best fucking of my life. I could feel every inch of my skin, was aware where Harker, Parks and Sergeant were, I could hear them breathing, feel the sweat running down between my breasts, and was aware of every fucking thing on God's Green Earth around me.

"CLEAR!" I shouted, and the other three entered the room. I turned left, and moved up to about two paces back from the corner of the hallway. The other three moved up next to me, and I nodded to the Ell-Tee. He nodded back, and I swept into the hallway, shotgun first, the butt tucked tight against my shoulder. In the back of my mind, I heard that black guy from the movies, Samuel L. Jackson, yelling: "WASTE THE MOTHERFUCKERS!"

They followed me to where the hallway turned into a T intersection, and I checked left. At the end of the hallway, there was another window, facing a window over a gap of about three feet.

"Harker, Parks, get doors. Winter, cover them." I nodded and followed them as they tore two doors off of their hinges and drug them back. None of the infected showed their faces, so I didn't have to fire anything off.

"Winter, blow the windows." The Ell-Tee said. I suppressed a chuckle. The last time a guy told me to blow something, I'd hit him in the face with my baseball bat. I leveled the shotgun and fired it, blowing both windows to smithereens.

Within seconds, over a dozen hands were reaching through the window, and several people leaned forward, trying to get from their building to ours.

"FIRE AGAIN, GODDAMMIT!" Sergeant yelled, and I followed orders, the sound of his

voice pretty much meaning a spinal action with me for some reason. The pellets blew the shit out of them, the three nearest heads blown apart like melons, a girl's face erasing, and a man's arm blown off. Sergeant threw something into the room and yelled "GRENADE!" over the echo of the shotgun. I followed their example, throwing myself to the floor. A long second passed, and I started to look up when there was a thunderous detonation, and chunks of people spattered me. The whole building shook, and I leaped to my feet. My whole body was singing with adrenaline, and I was having the time of my life.

I hurdled through the windows, dropping on one knee. I cocked the shotgun again, and fired at the two infected who pushed open the door, their heads exploding from the heavy guns pellets. Harker landed next to me, losing his balance and falling to the ground. One of the infected reached for him, and I jumped up to my feet, stepped forward, and kicked the guy in the face hard enough that bone snapped and blood sprayed all over my front.

"Jesus..." Harker breathed as I spun and fired again from the hip, folding over an infected and blowing the face off of a kid running at me with his arms outstretched. I cocked it and fired again, hitting the infected in the top of his head.

"FUCK YEAH!" I yelled, and grabbed one of the grenades off of Harker's harness. I'd seen Sergeant use his, and had it figured out. I stepped on Harker's back, let the shotgun fall, grabbed the ring, yanked it free, and chucked it out into the hallway.

"GRENADE!" I yelled out, and dropped next to Harker. He was pale, but grinning, as the grenade went off, showering both of us with flakes of plaster. There was a band of dust falling from the ceiling, and another rising from the floor. It was kind of odd, but I ignored it as I stepped into the hallway.

Two kids took a shotgun shell in the face, and I turned around and fired another one into the face of an old woman. The woman's legs were trembling and kicking at the floor, and one of the kids I'd just winged was shrieking at the top of his lungs and thrashing around like he was

having a seizure. I shot him again, just to finish him off. I cocked it again, and stepped back into the room.

"Reloading!" I called out, and began shoving shells into the shotgun. Harker nodded and moved out into the hallway as Sergeant and Parks came into the room.

"Christ, Winter, slow down, before you make a mistake. You're good, but I don't want you getting sloppy." Sergeant told me. "Now take a couple of deep breaths and a drink of water." I finished loading the shotgun, nodded, and took a couple of deep breaths. I unscrewed the top of the canteen, and took a swig of the water.

And promptly threw up on the floor.

"There she goes." Parks said, and Sergeant was holding my straps to help me keep my balance as I puked out the food and the water onto the floor.

"No shame." Parks said stepping into the hallway. I finished puking up my toenails and stood up, wiping off my mouth.

"Sorry." I said.

"It's called a combat high, apparently you're very prone to them." Sergeant said, "No worries, my old team leader used to do the same thing. Just follow me, you're on drag till the stomach cramps pass, and your job is to watch out backs."

I nodded and followed him out of the room. Sergeant looked at a computer printout, and pointed left. Harker went first, a pistol in each hand, followed by Parker, who covered any open doorways we passed, then Sergeant, who was grimly watching his men's backs, and looking back to check on me. Me? I was looking in the doorways and checking behind us, just in case.

"Elevator?" Parks asked, and Sergeant shook his head.

"Haven't you seen Dawn of the Dead, dude? I don't want those elevators opening to reveal a couple dozen of the infected crammed into it." Sergeant told him pointing at a door. "We take the stairs. Winter, you up to point?"

"Yes, Sergeant." I answered, and stepped forward. Harker stopped me from opening it, and waved me back. He stayed to one side, reached forward, and opened the door, backing

up quickly.

The stairwell was empty, and we quickly moved down to the first floor. Harker listened against the door for moment, and pulled back with a grimace.

"I can hear them on the other side. We'll have to go in hard." He said.

"Fuck that. Harker, you open it, Winter, fire one shot over his head, Parks, you and I will throw grenades, and Harker will slam the door." Sergeant said.

I nodded. Harker knelt down, reached out, and looked back. I heard metallic sounds, and two pings, and a metal lever flew by me.

"NOW!" Sergeant whispered fiercely.

Harker yanked open the door, I fired at the mass of infected flesh on the other side of the door, then threw myself to the side. Harker slammed the door and threw himself down next to me.

Less than two seconds went by and the door crashed open, smoke filling the room and blood splashing all over me and the wall. I scrambled into a crouch and lowered the shotgun, pulling the trigger and cocking it as fast as I could, blowing the infected apart with each hit. If you've never seen a shotgun hit someone at close range, you have no idea the kind of power it packs. I saw one hit blow a guy's leg off at the hip, another of my shots blew a woman's head clean apart. My fifth shot blew the entire side of a man's stomach away, and he folded like a hooker hit with a bat. I'm serious; a twelve gauge blows parts OFF any motherfucker.

"GRENADE!" Sergeant shouted, and grenades flew by me again. I dove out of the way, just as they exploded. Sergeant and Parks were firing, short tears of sound, and Harker was getting up, holding the side of his face with one hand. I could see blood pouring from between his fingers.

I ran up to him, kneeling down in front of him, and pulled the package he'd told me was a bandage out of the pouch on his harness. I remembered to not use mine on someone else, to use theirs. I tore it open with my teeth, and let it unravel. He began firing his pistol with one hand, past me, and grabbing for the other pistol. He had a nasty gash in his cheek, and I

could see his teeth through it.

"FUCK!" I yelled, pressing the bandage against his cheek as the pistols went off behind my head. My ears were ringing and I could barely hear the gunshot as I wrapped the tails of the bandage around his head. I tied them off, and tapped his chest. He raised his right arm, and I crawled away from him.

Sergeant was saying something, pointing at my shotgun, and I nodded and began feeding shells into it. The sound of their weapons fire was muted, I was deaf from the explosions and gunfire, but I could hear my heart hammering. I finished feeding the beast, most of the bandoleer gone now, and scrambled up.

Sergeant waved me in, and I stepped into a lobby. Across from us, the open double doors had about eight of the infected pushing through it, with more still coming. I pointed at the doors and yelled that we needed to close them. Sergeant nodded, and started moving across the lobby.

I followed him, firing the shotgun at groups. Behind me, Harker was firing his pistols, each shot hitting the infected in the face or head. Parks smashed a man out of his way with his rifle, hitting the guy in the face hard enough that a couple of his teeth bounced off my cheek.

I fired twice, once into each doorway, and Sergeant and Parks slammed the doors, reaching up to engage the locks. I spun around and went back to help Harker, who was rolling around on the floor with a topless woman who was missing her left breast. I kicked her in the ear with everything I had, and she began thrashing around in a seizure.

Harker pointed, and I swung around where two rent-a-cops were reaching for me. I pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. Following Parks' example, I smashed the butt of the weapon into first one, then the other's head. Harker scrambled to his feet and dropped the pistols; the slides locked back, and drug his rifle around.

Parks and Sergeant were firing, and men and women were dropping. My hearing was starting to come back, and I could hear the popping of their weapons. I started feeding the beast again, as quick as I could. My hands

were covered with blood, and I dropped two shells, but rather than bend down and reach for them, I just grabbed replacements out of the bandoleer and kept feeding the beast.

I went back to firing, killing the infected or blowing their limbs off. Sure as shit, the elevator doors opened, and over a dozen of the infected spilled into the lobby. I snapped the last shot out of the beast, but all I did was speckle their legs and blow apart a potted plastic plant. I hollered "OUT!" and slung the shotgun away, bringing around my rifle. I started firing, going for headshots and usually hitting. I went through the clip in my weapon, and then a second, and finally, almost all the way through a third.

Finally, it was done. We owned the lobby, and no more infected were coming out of the hallways. There was over a hundred corpses around, and I began to shake, tears spilling out of my eyes. I bent forward and vomited again, the hot bile splashing across the marble floor.

I wiped my mouth, straightened up, and dashed the tears off my face. Sergeant was looking at me with a smile.

"Welcome to the US Army. Let's get to work." He said, reloading his rifle. Parks made a face, slightly lifted one foot off the ground, and blew ass, and I couldn't help it.

I started laughing.

--Autobiography of Winter Discontent

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