

# **The Zombie Slayer.**

By

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*Chapter 1.*

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With a neck snapping stop, Waco slid his cycle sideways as he looked behind him, his free hand dusted off his zombie splattered black leathers he wore. Kicking his cycle into neutral he frantically waved his hands in the dusty night air as his vintage Harley slowly became visible through the cloud of thick dust it had kicked up. He strained to see if he had been followed and with a breath of relief, he saw he had not. He had outrun them all, the dust cloud had covered his harrowing escape.

Perched atop a rise he looked out over the part of the desert he had just left and was stunned that he managed to survive...all of them!

In the brilliant silvery moon light he could see his trail of desert dust slowly dissipating...and the hundreds of zombies that he had just driven through, around or over. Of course that wasn't even close to the thousands he could barely make out in the far distance. It was a relief and he wasn't sure that he'd ever survive another ride like that.

When he had started to leave they had been more disbursed. Ten minutes of zigzagging hell at high speeds and dusty desert night had drained him, but now Waco realized that he would have to drive back through them...again! Back to where they had been, back to where they had started from.

"Thank God Chino got through." he muttered as he looked back in the direction he was going "Waco, you're an idiot...an f'in' idiot." He dusted off his faceplate so he could see and hoped that some lucky zombie wouldn't pull him off his bike, or cause him to take a spill, which had happened more than once getting where he was now. One mistake and the rest would be on him like...Waco didn't want to think about it anymore.

"Watch your moves...keep cool...and don't die." he muttered. One final deep sigh and a crank of the throttle, the dusty, but well maintained cycle leapt forward...and back into the hell he had just left.

His path still partly covered in the slowly dissipating dust clouds, he managed to swerve as two zombies appeared in his headlights. Swerving back on his track, he avoided three more and slashed a fourth with his machete...then it hit him like a ton of bricks.

"Christ!" he shouted "They're seeing my lights...the movement. Waco you idiot, you know better!" he cursed at himself as he reached up and flicked off the headlights from his classic Harley. He had done all the modifications himself, including the extremely quiet exhaust. It was something he was extremely proud of, and now it appeared that it might pay off as it had done so many times before. He was now quiet and running dark...and more or less blind as the moon slipped behind some clouds.

Waco swerved through a group of a dozen zombies, or zoms as the 'Brat Pack' had called them and he realized that he missed those damned kids a lot as he swerved once more to avoid driving into a pack of undead.

Knowing the stumblers were the easier ones to get through he headed toward what he figured was the largest, but farther spaced group. It was the rarer runners and ramblers he had to worry about, they moved a little faster and the 'fresh' ones had better coordination. Runners were the freshly turned zombies that came from the few surviving humans and there seemed to be fewer and fewer around these days. He did not want to run into runners at this point as they would mean certain death.

Straining in the moonlight to see more than a few feet ahead, he ducked as two arms reached through the dust cloud he had left floating across the Tularosa Basin. More bony fingers reached through the dust to grasp his leather jacket nearly pulling him off the bike sideways.

"Jesus that was close!" he shouted at the night as he twisted back forward and laid as close to his cycle's fuel tank as he could get. Another zombie was avoided, but its arm slammed into the Plexiglas windscreen and snapped it off at the makeshift, breakaway brackets and sent it flying over Waco's head.

"Christ!" he shouted as he glanced back "That was my cycle you..."

Suddenly he broke through what was left of his dust trail and his heart sank as the moon gave him a glance from the top of the last sandy hill of the fast flattening desert.

In the distance sat the two hundred foot tower that Waco had just left...no fled from, minutes before. Between him and the tower stood several hundred more zombies, and luckily, now were wandering away from the tower.

"Waco old friend, it looks like now or never if you're gonna get there." He cranked his throttle and the rear tire kicked up a cloud of dust in the direction of approaching zombies coming up from behind him. The leather clad biker didn't have too much time to look the situation over so he headed out along his 'best guess' route and prayed that the moon wouldn't vanish behind another cloud before he reached the tower.

He frantically kicked out his leg to send one zombie flying backward, nearly wound up in the dust, and prayed that another didn't get that close again.

Swinging wide left he missed a small pack of two dozen ramblers that slowly turned and began to follow him. Zigzagging left and right Waco managed to avoid several more, until a lone runner broke through the pack to his right and its bony fingers grasped around his shoulder causing him to jerk backward to a point where he almost dumped the bike.

Waco felt his neck jerk and a quick grasp to his collar verified that the runner had pulled the headphones from his neck...the only pair he had!

"You motherfu..." he started to scream back, but as another hand cuffed the side of his helmet, he decided his temper could wait. He glanced skyward "Sorry dad about the almost cuss." The apology almost cost him his life as once more he slipped a grasp that nearly pulled him sideways again before he managed to twist back around and lie flat against his tank. As he sped through and around the hordes he could feel dry rasping fingers sliding over his leather vest clad back.

Peeking over his handlebars, loomed the tower and his main destination. In the poor light he could barely make out the makeshift winch that he and Chino had made to hoist everything onto the lower platform. He also regretted cutting off the ladder rungs on the base of the tower that led up to the first deck. At the time it seemed like a good idea as there had been some stories of the undead actually climbing ladders and stairs...so Chino took a torch and cut off the rungs and left no way up as he had kicked the ladder flat before he had left. Now there would be no time to set it back up before he became zombie munchies and he had to accomplish what he came back for.

He veered around four more stumblers and aimed directly at the dangling rope hanging from the hoist. One more sharp careen and he was back on track. He cranked the fork stabilizer on his vintage cycle, pulled both feet up and with a hop, crouched on the long leather seat.

Stooping on the seat he gave his bike's throttle all he safely could.

Ten yards...five...he leapt into the air as the Harley wobbled. Flying through the air his fingers fumbled at the rope and burning pain scorched his leather gloved palms as he slid down the coarse rope, but somehow Waco managed to hold on. The rope swung to its apogee and as he started his swing downward he wrenched his body around enough to see a dozen zombies reaching toward him.

He frantically twisted his body a little more and managed to slam into them feet first as he grasped hand over hand from just above the hook that had stopped his slide to doom.

The impact had caused Waco to spin violently but somehow he managed to get another, higher grip...and another. Every pull up got him a bit farther away from the decaying fingers of the reaching undead. Every pull got him closer to the first deck that was twenty feet off the dusty desert floor...and safety.

Struggling with every grip, Waco managed to reach the deck level and then realized that while the swinging rope was well out of the zombies grip, the deck was a good eight feet away from where he dangled.

Kicking his legs, his hands screaming in pain for him to let go, Waco gave one frantic swing toward the deck and released the rope.

He landed with a loud chest high thump against side of the steel deck frame which held the wooden slats of decking. This caused Waco to nearly lose his out-stretched grip on the wooden decking as he began sliding backward, his leather gloves desperately clawing at the wooden planks. Slowly he slid toward the sea of grasping hands below him. With one final slam of his hand Waco managed to grasp the edge of the steel beam that held the deck.

His fingers screaming in pain, he managed to swing his legs back and forth until finally he was able to catch a heel on the surface of the deck. He strained with every fiber of his body and finally rolled onto the wood that was still warm from the beating desert sun of the faded day...how great the heat felt as he ripped off his helmet and laid upon the safety of the wooden decking.

Waco rolled over on his back and stayed that way for what seemed like hours. He looked at his gloves to make sure the rope hadn't burnt through, and saw they were burnt slightly from the sliding rope...it just felt as if they had ripped open.

"Jesus, man, you damned near get killed by zombies and all you worry about are your gloves?"

## The Zombie Slayer

As he struggled to his feet his body reminded him that it was just minutes that he had rested, but he pressed onward.

Slowly he got to his feet and walked over and laid his hand on the steel casing that ran into the ground from the second deck and winced in pain, his hands hurt that bad. Waco almost chuckled ironically, he had saved himself once again but figured he'd torn or strained every muscle he had.

The center casing was a foot in diameter and ran through the deck in the middle of the tower, from the ground all the way up to the second level. At the first touch he knew it had stopped.

"Dammit! I was right! That's why they were wandering away." he shouted into the night sky as if someone was going to pat him on the back for being right. Then his shoulders slumped as he headed toward the second deck ladder as he bemoaned...

"Serves me right for not filling the damned fuel tank."

Once up on the second deck that sat close to one hundred feet off the ground, he stopped to look around. There in the light of the full moon were tens of thousands of zombies all wandering haphazardly in the dim moonlight...away from the tower.

"No...NO!" Waco screamed at the top of his lungs "You bastards are supposed to stay here!" but only a few turned to pay him any attention, even with their primitive instincts they knew he was out of their reach.

He spun and ran to the generator and pulled the gas cap. Quickly pulling a flashlight from his belt he clicked it on, it flickered and...dead!

"Oh this is really a bad idea." Waco muttered as he pulled his lighter from his pocket and flicked it. Using the mirror in his flashlight he tried to direct the flickering light into the gas tank.

"Damn it...I do so hate it when I'm right." Grabbing one gas can after another he shook them until he found one that had fuel in it and quickly emptied it. Tossing the empty can aside, he managed to find several with tiny amounts of gas and drained every one of them into the generator's tank.

"Well, looks like three quarters full is going to be enough." he sighed. Waco pressed the generator's start button and it cranked over...and over...and slowed as the battery ran down to where it just clicked a few times and then nothing.

Waco looked at the sky and screamed "REALLY?"

Fumbling around he managed to find the rope pull and tugged long and hard several times...the generator sputtered several times and started.

"Now if..." the few lights that were turned on flickered as they came to life. There was a drumming that Waco could feel more than hear and a wide smile crossed his lips as he nodded in satisfaction.

He walked over the long center casing and felt, it droned in a deep vibration from within.

"Take that fate!" he muttered over the droning and patted the casing a couple of times.

He walked over to the main breaker panel that some long forgotten electrician had installed and pulled the handle marked 'floods'.

## The Zombie Slayer

Light blazed from the tower in all directions as well as the several small dilapidated wooden structures below and the poles their floods were on.

Before him moved a writhing sea of zombies, they had come back. He saw not thousands, but, tens of thousands and that was only what was illuminated in the half mile or so that surrounded the tower. What he could see in the moonlight when he finally had a chance to look beyond that point he dared not guess, there was so much movement that it looked like a writhing ocean beyond the lights.

Waco stared out over the writhing throng of undead.

“Good God Lolli, you did it.” He smiled briefly as he sat on the stairs that wound up to the top level another hundred feet above him.

The third and last deck of the tower held a huge rectangular metal structure that pointed skyward and beyond that, nothing but the stars. Waco sighed deeply.

“Wonder where my bike wound up?” he looked around to see it lying next to a building thirty yards away...and hundreds of zombies in between. They were packing in tighter than a can of sardines. He sighed deeply...

“Yeah, that’s not an option, bike’s out.”

Slowly Waco rose to his feet and walked over to the circuit panel and opened it. He pulled several wires and twisted them together. Slowly he nodded with satisfaction and closed the panel.

“Well guy, you’ve done it now. Fuel runs out...” he sighed “glad it had its own batteries in the control box...heheh.” he frowned “I’m laughing because?” he asked himself over the generator’s hum.

Waco walked over to the small radio shack that had been built in one corner of the deck and pulled the door open, looked at the radio and chuckled “Glad the generator started or you’d be dead like me...well...you know.” The sense of frustration was obvious in his voice as well as the lack of hope.

He sat at the radio and turned it on. In the back of his mind he was glad the shack had large windows that faced all directions, he hated to feel penned in. The radio hummed to life.

“Hey Brat Pack, you copy...” he frowned “Scratch that, I lost the friggin’ headset so I can’t hear any reply. All the relay towers looked good, and as Chino and I chatted with you all yesterday, I’m hoping that you hear me now.”

He grasped the mike and leaned back in the chair and locked the ‘speak’ button down and put the mike on the small table.

“Chino got away about two hours or more before I left. I got away, but had to come back to fill the damned tank.” Waco looked out of the window “Looks like the sun is about to rise.” He chuckled softly “Going to be another fine desert day kids.”

The ruggedly handsome blond got to his feet and opened the door as he rubbed his stubble laden chin and gave an ironic grin at the faintest of light in the east. The long cord on the mike, the one that he had teased Chino about, was now going to pay off as he scanned the horizon and spoke.

## The Zombie Slayer

“Lolli...I sure hope you...can you hear me?” he chuckled softly “Honey, you’re my favorite electronic genius teenager. I wish yer daddy was alive to see this. He was right...about it all, and you honey, you finished his project. He would have been so proud of you, of all of you.”

Waco slowly looked the full 360 degrees as the sun slowly slashed across the desert with blazing red and orange beams of light and he now could see the scope of his hopeless situation. “Lolli, there has to be over a million, scratch that, make that millions of the zoms that have come. Honey...I can’t see the end of them. They’re coming from all directions...everywhere! This works...damn it Lolli, your daddy was right! Jesus, they must have been coming for nearly a year.” Waco walked to the center of the deck and patted the long metal casing as it droned away. He walked back to the mike.

“Chino has all the data we found, so tell your friends they can find the other...well you know...” he walked back to the stairs and looked up as he sighed softly “Don’t look like this guy is gonna be makin’ it back this time. Don’t anyone try to come after me, won’t do any good, I rigged this thing to go off when the generator runs out of fuel and by the looks of it, we’ll be takin’ quite a few of those bastards along...”

Waco walked back into the shack and sat. He leaned back in the old ragged office chair, put his feet up onto the desk and smiled at the ceiling as the morning sun played across it.

“Guess if one has to go...” he felt strangely at peace “it should be in style.”

“Say, did I ever tell you all about how it all started?” he chuckled into the mike remembering how many times the kids had asked. They were all survivors, all smart and...young. Maybe that was why he didn’t tell them even though they had seen their fair share of horror.

Now Waco figured that he owed them that much.

“Seems I have about a half tank of fuel to tell ya how it all began.”

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*Chapter 2.*

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Waco's mind raced back to a time just before...before it all ended.

"Guys...I never told you and I'm sorry. I guess because your parents never told you..." Waco sighed deeply "and I don't know why they chose not to tell you, but here's what I know. Maybe it will help you all sometime in the future."

He looked at the old wooden ceiling as his mind spanned the years.

"Guess I was nine...no wait, I was ten. My daddy was an avid hunter, and at six gave me a BB-gun and began to teach me how to shoot, at nine a .22. Hell, I always was tall and muscular for my age and for my tenth birthday, gave me an M-15." Waco smiled "We spent a lot of time at the gun range, hunting and fishing, you know fun stuff."

Waco's face lost the warm smile as it became cold and serious.

"I remember my daddy and I were out in the front yard cleaning up after a long hard winter. He was leaning on our fence talking to our neighbor and I heard a bunch of birds overhead. I mean a lot of birds, kids, the sky was full of them.

Well those birds were flying east instead of north and that time of year they always flew north if they hadn't already. I noticed that the big billowy clouds looked strange as the thousands of birds flew from sight. Instead of billowing, the tops and sides to the east were all stretched out like my dad showed me prior to a wind storm, but it was a blue sky and few clouds.

As I watched the clouds were stretched completely out and I ran over to dad to show him."

Waco laughed.

"But a ten year old trying to interrupt adult conversations didn't go over too well...so I jerked his arm and he damned near fell over as it slipped off the fence.

Well he caught himself and looked really mad until he saw me pointing to the sky. You know kids, I never saw a look like that before. Dad knew everything, or at least I thought he did, but now...that look...I became frightened. Looking up I could see the clouds were now visibly stretching out...like someone turned on a giant fan, but there was no breeze. Dad looked at our neighbor and they both had puzzled looks on their faces and that frightened me even more.

I guess we all felt it before we actually heard it and everyone on the street slowly turned and looked westward in the direction of this weird happening." he sighed "I'm afraid even after all these years, I still can't describe the moment. Way up high to the far west was a strange dark brown cloud and as it got closer we could see it was swirling in all directions, but it was only moving in one direction...east!

Our neighbor asked if it was a tornado, but dad said no it was too high and the cloud went from horizon to horizon. Sort of the feeling like someone had a huge bass radio playing and it shook our insides, the ground and began rattling the fence.

## The Zombie Slayer

Our neighbor asked if it was a nuclear bomb, but again dad said no. Then the sky began to disappear under the cloud until all we could see was cloud, it went all the way to the ground and was coming fast. Dad shouted for everyone in the street to hear... "Get to your basements!"

He grabbed me by the collar and pulled me along and our neighbor shouted at his two girls to get inside. Some people are really stupid I guess, as my daddy pulled me into the door, I saw some people still standing there shielding their eyes from the sun, watching that damned cloud. As the door closed and we hit the basement stairs we could hear the rumbling. By the time we got to the spot under the stairs and dad covered me with his body, there was a loud rumble, like a train passing...but it kept rumbling, not for minutes, nor hours, but days.

Let me tell you kids, I was scared and crying; dad was shaking...but nothing happened, I mean nothing. Sure, the house trembled slightly and a few things could be heard falling upstairs, but other than that, nothing happened.

Oh sure eventually dad let me go and we just sat there waiting for it to stop. After several hours and the droning never let up, dad told me to stay where I was and that he was going upstairs to have a look around.

Well, I could see his feet going up the stairs and heard the basement door click shut. Minutes passed, nothing. After fifteen minutes, I carefully crept up the stairs to see my dad standing at the patio door staring.

Slowly I walked up beside him as we watched that strange brown cloud slamming into the house...or at least it looked like it was.

It hit the glass patio door and passed around the house, like leafs in the wind. Brown swirls like dirt and darker brown all mixed together and now and then black and dark gray swirls appeared.

Dad kept telling me to watch and then I saw one...or something. It looked as if something...like a big ball was burning behind the clouds where we couldn't see...the dark red glow just out of sight behind the brown swirls...and then it was gone.

I happened to look out the front window and pulled dad to it. Out the front it wasn't as cloudy, the wind or whatever it was blowing around the house didn't blow against the front like it did in the rear. Dad said later it was less because the house acted like a windbreak to this storm. Anyhow kids, we could see the cloud coming around the house and blowing back together again in the front. Now and then we could even see the tree in the front of our house, and it was barely waving in the wind...but the cloud looked like it was moving at over a hundred miles an hour; Dad was puzzled and showed it.

We watched for an hour or so and eventually went down to the basement. Dad would run upstairs to grab food and stuff, like blankets, extra batteries, clothes, and we lived there for a few more days. All the time the storm was ever droning like a giant bee hive.

On the third day dad became worried about Mr. Harper and his kids. Both dads had lost their wives within a year of each other...and us our mothers. Dad always had a lot of bottled water and he knew Mr. Harper didn't, so dad grabbed a case of water and headed upstairs. Of course I had to tag along, but dad put his foot down at the front door, I would stay at home.

As the storm seemed less in the front of the house and visibility was better to the edge of our house, it was the logical start point. Dad tied a rope to the front porch post and laid the water on the side of the porch. He moved to the side of the house where the cloud was roaring by, held his hand out into the storm cloud, and smiled.

"I was right." he said and told me the wind was not much more than a good summer storm. With the rope tied around his waist, he and the water vanished into the cloud the second he stepped past the side of our house. I watched the rope play out and knew Mr. Harper's side door was only fifty feet from ours.

I could tell when dad stopped and climbed over our fence. I could tell when he hurried to get to our neighbor's door...I could see the rope slowly play out as he felt for the door. Finally there was the three sharp tugs to tell me he had arrived at the door and had tied off the rope to something like he said he would. I knew it was his plan to get the neighbors and have them follow the rope back to our house.

I remember waiting and watching my wristwatch dad had bought for me. Never needed a battery or winding...accurate to the second, but it sure seemed like it ran real slow that day.

Dad said he'd be back within fifteen minutes or so, but not to worry if he was longer, that someone might be hurt and he knew first aid.

At a half hour I began to cry, at forty-five minutes, I went back into the house, shoved a big butcher knife in my belt and headed back to the front of the house.

Carefully gripping onto the rope, I pulled myself out into the cloud. As soon as I entered it, I was blind. Oh, I could see the brown and black...and suddenly, I saw one of those red glows. Before I could duck, it blew right around or through me and to my amazement, I didn't burn... Hell kids it wasn't any different feeling than the brown stuff, which seemed just like plain old wind. Once I realized I wasn't burnt, I began my hand over hand along the rope until I found Mr. Harper's door. Dad had tied the rope inside to the basement banister and the rope kept the door open.

It wasn't much harder than pushing a door open against a windy day, but steadier. I slid inside and everything looked normal to me. Being young and foolish I began hunting through the house for my dad, butcher knife in hand. Somewhere between the second bedroom and the girl's bathroom, I heard something down in the basement. I listened through the grate and ran back to the basement stairs.

Well, let me tell you the basement was poorly lit and having been down there before, I wondered if I should go down...it was really scary. Then I heard my dad cussing which was something he never did, he hated cussing, and it sounded like he was crying too. When I got to the bottom, I saw Mr. Harper with a hole in his head and lying in a pool of blood.

Listen guys, I jumped and ran halfway back up the stairs, until I remembered dad. Giving Mr.

Harper a wide berth, I hugged the basement wall with my back, never taking my eyes off Mr. Harper and slid back toward the laundry room and saw dad bending over the girls...and bawling like a babe.

In front of him laid both girls, the one that was about my age was lying under her sister who was older and dad knelt as he tried to wipe off the bloody ballpeen hammer. I must have gasped or something because dad turned and hustled me back up the stairs as I cried that I didn't understand."

Waco leaned into the mike and sighed deeply.

"Look you guys, I know you were born and raised since the apocalypse, but back then kids had been exposed to a lot of violence as well, but a different kind. Seeing my friends like that, well I started crying and dad frantically explained that something weird had happened to the Harpers. I knew dad wouldn't kill anyone unless he had to, but that was the first time I heard the word 'zombies'.

See, dad never let me watch horror movies, he said they were too scary for me. I but I sort of knew what zombies were and I wanted to go home, but he wouldn't let me go out alone. Look guys, I don't remember a lot after that. We gathered up whatever food they had stored and put it in big trash bags. We managed to get back to the house, though dad sure was on high alert. It wasn't until after we got home and secured the place that he told me he was afraid there might be more people out there like the Harpers; that this storm was making people be different.

I stayed up all night after seeing our neighbor's ashen face, his open staring eyes like big dull gray pearls and those horrible purple veins that streaked his gray flesh. Dad said they had to have changed during the storm, maybe because of it, and not much more. To be honest I think he was just as scared as I was because he didn't know more. For the first time in my live, my father didn't know what to do and I was scared...no terrified.

The storm rumbled on for two more days which meant it lasted for four...no, five days. I remember dad had pulled some plywood out of the basement and boarded up our front windows on the porch and nailed up wood in the inside of the patio as he tried to reassure me the other windows were too high off the ground for zombies to get in.

It was darker with the windows blocked and the drapes pulled but my dad didn't want to take chances. He tried to explain things I just couldn't understand while we ate lunch one day. Just as fast as it all started, the droning stopped...like someone flipped a switch and turned it off. My ears felt like they had popped out of my head it was so quiet. Sun light broke through the tops of the windows where the plywood didn't reach. Man, guys let me tell you that was so nice to see. Sunlight, glorious sunlight...you never know how much you miss something until its gone.

Of course dad stood on a chair and looked out...and just as quick ducked back down. All of you in the Brat Pack know that look; the one you all told me about. You know, that first time you saw a zombie. I guess parents are all the same when they feel their kids are in danger.

## The Zombie Slayer

Well, dad had that look and told me the street was filled with zombies. Some he recognized as friends and neighbors, others, not so much.”

Waco eased back in the tattered old office chair and sighed again.

“Kids, I need to go and see if I can figure a way out of this mess before that fuel runs out. Not that I’d feel anything,” he ran his fingers through his medium length blond hair “but hate to call it quits at the ripe old age of thirty.”

Slowly rising from the chair, Waco walked out onto the deck that now was flooded with glorious sunlight. Pulling his binoculars he scanned a full three hundred and sixty degrees only to see zombies. Stretched to the horizon in every direction and packed in as tight as sardines. He leaned into the shack and keyed the mike once more.

“The caller works really well Lolli, just scanned the horizon in all directions and am guessing that I saw about three million and that was only as far as I could see through dust and crap. Could be ten times that many.” He smiled as he lowered the mike and walked back outside. The lone man silhouetted against the morning sun muttered to himself..

“Well I sure as hell won’t be alone,” he glanced at the generator “whenever that son of a bitch stops! Sorry dad.” he growled in frustration for letting himself get into this mess to begin with. “THIS SUCKS!” he shouted and plopped down on the nearby stairs as he stared out into the sea of undead that surrounded him.

---

*Chapter 3.*

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Waco had been a loner most of his life after the apocalypse and prided himself for always being in charge, but this time he had gotten himself into a situation he was beginning to wonder if he'd ever get out of.

His mind drifted back through the decades...back before he met the Brat Pack, back before...

**Three years ago**

Waco had tracked one pack of zombies that had killed seventeen people in a caravan that had become trapped in their vehicles and couldn't turn around. The compound where he had been living at for over a year got their frantic call, but help arrived too late. Waco sent the rescue party back home and 'that look' came over him, a look that even with the rescuers having been with Waco such a short time, they knew he wasn't coming back until everyone of the horde was put down. It took him over a month and with over one hundred zombies in the horde, Waco had stalked them and one by one, ended their miserable existence. Now less than a dozen were left and through his scope he zeroed in on the first. From his perch on the top of a rusting semi, he rested his elbows on the hot roof of the trailer and grinned. "Thought you all would slip away from me splitting off like that, did ya?" He watched the head of the first zombie explode as his .308 split its head and staggered the one next to it. Her companion's head soon exploded as well and Waco sighted and squeezed the trigger...

**CLICK!**

"Awww...fuc... Sorry dad." he got into a sitting position "Ok, then we do this the hard way." He slung the rifle over his shoulder and dropped to the ground and slowly pulled his slightly longer than normal machete from the scabbard that hung around his waist.

One of the zombies in the rear of the pack noticed him and turned, but never made the complete turn as its head rolled across the jammed freeway of rusting vehicles. Two more heads quickly joined it and as more turned, Waco pulled his long 'zombie pick'. The zombie pick as he jokingly called it was a smooth twelve inch piece of stainless steel bar stock, ground completely round and tapered on one end for smooth entry and exit. On the other end he had welded a second piece of round stock and had wound it in rawhide for superb gripping and driving power.

He now buried it in the head of the next zombie as he felt that soft snap of skull parting and the ease it pushed into the soft brain. It slid to the ground as the pick slid out of the skull while Waco decapitated another with the machete in his other hand. Swinging and stabbing Waco cut his way through the remaining zombies of the pack that had left a trail of destruction twenty

## The Zombie Slayer

miles behind them...and for the last twenty miles, the clogged freeway was littered with bodies of the undead.

Waco looked around at the carnage and dark purple ooze. "Purple? Jesus, these are newly turned..." he stooped and looked closer "...maybe a few weeks, maybe a month, or the blood would be lot thicker and blacker. Dammit, probably some of those that were killed back at the caravan."

As Waco got back to his cycle he wondered if any of the people that had been killed at the caravan were immune to the bite. As it turned out some humans were immune and never would turn, that is assuming that they survived the attack...or the disease and infections that followed. "Naw, couldn't chance not picking them." he grinned "Couldn't chance running into them on the way back, if they weren't immune." Those rescuers that had come with him refused to damage the brains of those dead wanderers, Waco had no problems with it. At this point in time, everyone knew some of the undead took days to change, some minutes, but either way, not moving, or zombie, dead was still dead. Waco just preferred the not moving option and had since he was a child.

He checked the magneto setting, kicked his Harley over and cussed the fact that there was just nothing as a serviceable battery anymore, at least that he'd found twenty years after the storm. His bike purred and just as he was about to kick it into gear something grasped his leg. Waco barely gave a noticeable reaction as he looked down to see a legless zombie grasping his cowboy boot.

"Sorry pal." He wrest his foot free and slammed it rearward into the zombies head with the single four inch steel spur. There was that familiar, sickening crunch of bone collapsing and it laid still as thick black ooze trickled from the fatal wound, and the well-used spur broke. "Well pal, looks like you've been around for a while." Waco grunted, kicked the gear shift, and sped off back in the direction of the compound that others had built about fifteen miles from where he was, if he went cross country.

A quick glance at the horizon he noted sundown was close, and figured he would get there just about dusk. Riding at night had to be done without lights, as it seemed the zombies liked to head toward movement and a moving light at night. Waco chuckled "Well it don't take a ficken' genius to figure that one out."

Cruising along a flat stretch of meadow and old farmlands he could save at least an hour if he cut across it, but in the tall grass it meant that running into an old fallen tree was a good possibility. Then there was the old random fence post, or tangling wire in his spokes, or a flat, or barbed wire wrapping him up as he rolled across the ground. Waco didn't care for any of the possibilities.

One quick look at the setting sun, made his mind up for him and across the meadow he sped. The grass was as high as his handlebars and that made him nervous...but the setting sun was scarier.

Ever since his dad was killed, he had hunted zombies. Stalking zombies was his profession and Waco was the best. While what few survivors that still existed twenty years after the

apocalypse, or the 'storm' as most called it, most survivors still hid behind whatever walls they had managed to build.

Even the compound that Waco had lived at for the last year, had fewer than thirty people living there. Semi-trailers pulled from the expressway and tipped on their sides created strong walls, even twenty years later. Since then seventy percent of the trailer walls had long poles made from trees buried in front of the trailers so the trailers could be used for catwalks. The whole compound had been built around a farm. A farm with a windmill generator, water pump and hand pumps...and the survivors still hid, they had to.

The only time they went out was to find another grove of trees to create more wall. They farmed mostly inside the walls, they raised cattle outside the walls and were brought in at night. Over the decades, livestock had learned not to make a lot of noise. Like their human survivors, noise and movement meant death and they seemed to know it. They slowly grazed and as the light faded moved toward the rear gate of the compound all by themselves, they knew where safety was.

Waco on the other hand didn't like sitting behind walls, and slaying zombies was not just a profession, but his entertainment as well. He had become detached from his emotions, emotions like the ones that sickened him each time he found the remains of survivors, or killing those that were once humans, of those that were once someone's friends and neighbors.

Suddenly Waco noticed three zombies wandering through the fields and aimed his cycle straight for them. In one smooth move his machete came out and one swing forward sent the first head flying into the air spinning.

A quick swerve and a back swing sent the second zombie, headless and tumbling backward. The third died after careening to his left to catch it on the forward swing. Onward he drove as if nothing had just occurred.

As the sun touched the tops of the forested hill seven miles away, Waco saw the walls of the compound and grinned softly knowing that this night he could sleep with both eyes closed. As he approached the tractor pulled gate opened and Waco slowed as he passed through. People waved as he slowed to a stop in front of the main building.

A tall gray-haired man nodded as Waco dismounted.  
"Well, get 'em all?"

"Yeah, took a month, but I got 'em. Those fuc..." Waco grimaced as the man's wife walked out onto the porch "Sorry Millie...dad...those bastards weren't all that hard, but had several smaller groups split off, had to get them all. Ya know how it is."

"Bullets hold up?" The leader of the compound asked.

"Naw, had to take a lot of them by hand, but mostly was ok, ran out this last bunch."

"Sorry." Tom the gray haired leader shrugged "We can melt the slugs ok, but making that gunpowder is a..." he glanced at his wife sitting in the rocking chair reading her bible.  
"...a toughie." they both smiled sheepishly at Millie.

Millie smiled back “You staying here tonight? Got some stew on, plenty for guests.”

Waco smiled softly “Thanks sweetie, dinner sure...but I’ll be heading back to my shack at the rear wall.” he chuckled “Give me time to wash this zombie ooze off myself and...”

Tom nodded and smiled “Figured you’d be back my friend, saved all of today’s solar hot water for you...and you know we have the only tub.”

Waco grinned “Ok, you two twisted my arm long enough, tub and a meal it is.”

After a hot bath and a great dinner, Tom and Waco sat on the front porch enjoying the warm summer evening as Millie stood in the doorway and watched the stars.

“We picked it up again Waco.”

“The message about the hospital?”

“Yup! Always garbled and they don’t answer, but has to be power to send something with that strong of a signal. Sure the hell isn’t some hand cranked radio.”

Waco knew that for the last eight months sporadic messages had come over the air and had said something about a hospital, needing information or help and then it would fade. As each time the broken and partially garbled messages were received, they were different, so they knew it wasn’t a recording. Their radio operator said it was atmospheric bounce, radio signals bouncing off a layer in the atmosphere and that the signal could be only miles away, or the other side of the planet.

“I sure wish that we had some idea if it was in the U.S. or not.”

Tom nodded and pointed to the old worn map of the United States on the wall.

“Well it sure isn’t that fabled valley people called the safe zone or they would have said so.” he pointed to the map “Our radio operator said he thinks he heard someone say Taos.”

“New Mexico? Jesus Tom, my dad was from that area and I...”

Tom chuckled “Easy Waco, I said he thought, not did hear Taos. Even if he did hear it right, Christ Waco they could have been saying north of...or south of, east...and they are speaking English, so we think here in America.”

Waco grinned “Ok, ok Tom, I hear ya. Look all I’m saying is that my dad used to talk about the Taos area what little life that we had together. The terrain, roads, and even the cities. Before he met my mom, he used to travel around selling... What?” he looked at Tom and Millie as they grinned at him.

Tom chuckled and pointed at the map again “Ok I can’t keep a straight face any longer Waco...” he sighed “I know you’re chawin’ at the bit to find those people and that hospital.”

Waco nodded “Other than wanting to hit the road again Tom, let’s face it, a hospital could mean medicine or medical staff and you all need medical people.” Waco got serious as he looked beyond the porch at the starry sky. “How many people over the years have you lost here? How many died because Sam didn’t know enough medicine to treat them?”

Tom glanced at Millie standing in the doorway, and then at Waco.

“Our guy heard something ‘...nola’ Waco. There is a town called Espanola, southwest of Taos. I have to warn you though, it sounded more like directions than their actual location.”

Waco smiled a strange smile that Tom had become so familiar with this last year, every time Waco was getting ready to go out on the road to kill more zombies, or maybe he was trying to get himself killed. Exactly which Tom couldn't be sure, but Waco had always been hell bent on moving on. Before Waco could say a word Millie nudged her husband and nodded to the small row of shacks to the western wall and the garage between them.

“Ok Millie...Waco?” he nodded toward the shacks “It seems that you're not the only other crazy bastard around here.” Tom sighed “Go talk to Al, and don't ask, just go first thing in the morning.”

Waco smiled and bade them a good evening as he hummed all the way back to the shack he had called home for the last eleven months. Tom and his wife smiled at each other. The man called Waco was a contradiction, one time moody, the next acting as if the world was a wonderful place in which to be living. He could joke, smile, and kill, then he would sit for hours staring at nothing. He lived to kill zombies, yet hated the fact that they were once like him. A man of moods and contradictions, but someone you wanted to be on your side. There were rumors of what happened to those that were not.

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*Chapter 4.*

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Bright and early the following morning Waco was banging on the garage door of the assistant mechanic by the name of Elliot Daggart, or Dag as most called him.

Dag walked out his jet black hair slicked back and oil all over his clothes.

“Been expecting ya Waco...ever since I heard they had an idea of where those broadcasts have been coming from. I’m going with you.”

“You’re nineteen.”

Dag nodded and grinned as he pulled open the garage door to reveal a three-quarter ton truck that Waco had seen him working on. It was four wheel drive and from the sounds he had heard coming from the garage, he figured it had one hell of an engine, but this was the first chance that he had to see it up close.

“Double wheels on the rear axle, over five hundred horses under the hood.” he pointed to the front bumper “Steel reinforced front and rear bumpers, full body skid plate and ten ply tires...God knows what the hell they had been used for, but I got them on it. That’s steel grating in front and around the windows and the bed has raised steel sides to protect anyone or anything we put back there,” he beamed “and I’ve got a surprise.” They walked around to the rear to see a protected motorcycle trailer that would hold two cycles. It had five foot steel sides to protect the cycles as well as a gate that folded up from the rear to cover them from the back. “I might be a kid to you, I get that Waco.” He pointed at his well-stocked rig and grinned “I’ve been storing crap for years, just in case and have enough room for supplies for a long trip and extra fuel tanks and fuel.”

“Look Dag, its no picnic out there...”

“I go with you, or follow behind, don’t matter to me. Got no family, got no one to miss me...” he smiled “besides between the two of us, we could probably fix anything that goes wrong along the way. I could be real useful Waco.”

Waco opened his mouth, but Dag jumped back into his diatribe.

“I made my cycle quiet like yours and there’s extra parts in the back of the truck. We can’t go over 50 MPH due to the gearing, but we can push cars and trucks out of the way pretty damned easy...”

Waco grinned as he interrupted Dag “Ok kid you can go.”

“And you know I’m the best shot around, next to you and then...” his face changed to someone completely shocked “...huh? I can go with you?”

“Yeah kid you can go. Question is, can we get to New Mexico from here in Kentucky, with what gas we have? You know most of the gas that still is sitting in old gas stations is pretty damned useless by now. Christ by the time we strain it, filter it, rejuvenate it...”

Dag now had his turn to smile “Got that covered too Waco. Seems old man Taylor has whipped up some fuel reenergizer, just in case we use more diesel than I have shoved in the extra fuel tank and cans.”

“Seems like you thought of everything Dag, you get packed. I’m guessing that we’ll leave in about an hour,” Waco smiled and nodded at his cycle “and as soon as I get that thing loaded next to that ‘rice burner’ of yours.”

Dag snorted “Just because mine was made in Japan, don’t mean it’s not as good as yours...and we don’t have to wait, my shit is in the back already.”

Waco patted Dag on the back “Ok, kid yours is as good as mine, just try to remember that when yours is sputtering and straining to out run a pack of zombies. I’ll go get my bike, you get that ramp down and we’ll get going.”

Waco didn’t care to be leaving midway through the day, but in this case he did know the old toll road slightly to the north was mostly open and that they could easily reach one of his old hideaways he had set up before meeting up with Tom and the rest. With the sun overhead the two men set out and less than an hour later, Dag was pushing the last car back into place on the exit ramp that led to the compound’s road. Waco placed the sign back on the roof of the car that told of the compound. He strapped the last tie-down in place, nodded his satisfaction, and jumped back into the passenger’s seat. “Ok kid, westward ho!”

“Huh? What’s a westward ho?”

“Back before all this kid, old TV used to have these shows about the wild-west called movies. Seems like every one of them had someone shouting westward ho...means let’s head west.”

“Why didn’t you just say ‘go west’? Sheesh!”

Waco slid back into this seat and snorted “Christ kid, you sure make a guy feel old and I’m only thirty.”

“Well, I’m nineteen and not a kid, so stop calling me kid...” he sighed “I sure wish I knew TV. I mean I’ve seen one, but it was just some old rectangular looking thing the old man said needed something called a remote, power, and a signal to work.” Dag sighed again deeply “The old man said he didn’t have none of the three, guess I’ll never know what you’re talking about.”

Dag swerved around several vehicles and slammed bumper first into two zombies strolling along the expressway. They slammed into the serrated two foot high steel bumper and splattered against the steel louvers that protected the radiator. Parts flew once they hit the sharpened frame that covered the entire front of the 4x4 and Dag cursed as he fought the wheel as he sprayed the windshield to remove the zombie leavings.

“Shit, Waco that worked too good.” he bemoaned softly as he looked over and grinned

sheepishly at the man he idolized...and slammed into three more zombies, hacking them into somewhat larger parts than when he had hit the last ones.

“Christ kid, let’s just get out and kill the bastards before you get us killed driving while you’re trying to keep your windshield clean.”

Waco no sooner finished and the now much slower moving vehicle broadsided a car that sat crossways in the middle of the road. The blackish ooze covered windshield and was still smeared as Dag kept pressing the washer solvent button and cursed under his breath.

Dag looked up from the steering wheel “Point taken Waco.” He looked over to see Waco’s door open and seat vacant as he looked back through the rear window. Waco was in the process of dispatching two more zombies. He jumped on the rear bumper of another car and bolted onto the roof, his overly-long machete dripping black ooze.

“Check for damage, I got the rest of these.”

Dag jumped out and began checking his truck and once sure it was ok, turned his attention to his friend.

Waco was stepping off the front bumper of the car behind them and what looked to be a good seven or eight headless zombies lying next to the car.

“Holy crap Waco, I didn’t see...”

“They heard the crash kid...we ok?” Dag nodded “Then let’s get our asses in gear, but drive slowly.”

“Why Waco we can...” Dag looked to the far side of the expressway to see over one hundred zombies headed in their direction.

“Easy kid, get in and drive slow enough so they’ll follow us. We might as well lead them away from the compound. Take them west a few miles and then we’ll take off and get to my hidey-hole for the night. I figure they’ll just keep going in the direction they last saw us go.” he saw the worried look on Dag’s face and laughed “Don’t worry kid, where we lose them, they’ll be headed west, we’ll be going southwest on another road in the morning.”

“You don’t get scared do ya Waco?” Dag started the truck and backed it away from the car. Before he shifted into forward he held out his trembling hand.

“I mean, Jesus, you just hacked up a butt-load of zombies and you didn’t even break a sweat.”

“Naw, not anymore kid, might stain my shorts a bit, but the smell gags the zombies.” Waco looked over to the shaking teen and smiled softly.

“Was a joke Dag. No...I don’t get scared anymore kid. You see after my dad was bitten and I had to put him down, I was on my own. I figured that I was as good as dead. Hell, I mean what chance did a ten year old have surviving in a world covered with the living dead? I was big for my age, and dad made me tough, so I grabbed both of our machetes we used for deep woods camping and walked out into the street.

I was pissed that one of them bit my dad, and figuring that I was already dead, took all of my five-foot, two inch frame and started swinging as hard as I could.” Waco checked back to make sure Dag hadn’t lost the horde that was following them.

“About two dozen zombies later, I realized two things. The first being, I was glad my dad insisted on having sharp machetes.” Waco chuckled softly.

“And the other Waco?”

Again Waco laughed “I was glad I could out run the thirty or forty that came around the corner.” he laughed again.

“That day I learned that I should never scream when I was in a killing frenzy, or any other time. I also realized that I wanted to live.” he looked over at the intense Dag who kept checking the zombies in his rearview mirror and quickly looking forward to watch for more to the front.

“You see Dag, I don’t fret about dying anymore, because I should have been dead at ten.”

“You think you’re living on borrowed time don’t you.”

“ME!” Waco roared with laughter “Christ kid, you can’t live on borrowed time when you died twenty years ago. That day, hell, I was as good as dead. Wasn’t anywhere near a place to hunt, didn’t know squat about surviving in the city filled with undead critters trying their best to kill me...” he looked at the teen and smiled a chilling smile and with a completely blank stare added “I just made up my mind that day, that I was already dead...not surviving, just dead!”

“I...I don’t...”

“Understand this kid, if you’re dead, you don’t get scared, you don’t get hungry, you just do what those fuckin’ zombies do...kill.” he looked at the sky “Sorry dad.”

“And you’ve been killing them ever since haven’t you?”

Waco leaned back in his seat and grinned “Yeah...and enjoying every moment that I take one of those stumbling bastards out of its miserable existence.”

As he slowly passed around several more rusting hulks Dag asked “Waco? How many have you killed?”

Waco slid down slightly in his seat and tipped his cowboy hat over his eyes.

“Not enough kid...not nearly enough.” he snuggled down a bit deeper and snorted “Six more exits and then wake me up...then we lose those bastards.” he sighed “Wish I could kill ‘em all.”

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*Chapter 5.*

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After a good night's sleep and knowing that they had left the horde of zombies wandering far from the compound, the pair once again set out in the general direction of the radio signals. Waco knew there was no way he'd pick them up on his small handheld radio and the old hand cranked generator to power it, so he told Dag to take a road that he'd traveled a few years before.

It had been partially cleared by a group of survivors that had died out due to disease; but before them lay almost twenty miles of vehicle free interstate.

Finally reaching the interstate Waco and Dag stopped and looked at the open road...and the pothole riddled, brush filled concrete, and debris filled road ahead.

Waco frowned as he snorted...

"Well kid, get back in the freakin' truck and drive, it's overgrown, but at least there's no cars for you to smack into."

After a while the 'slap-slap' of the occasional tall growth between the concrete sections of pavement and the shaking of potholes and broken concrete, became the norm. Swerving around the bigger potholes Waco began to be grateful for Dag's mechanical abilities, and great shocks. That is until one hidden pothole caused them to bound over a lane and nearly slam head first into the center retaining wall.

Dag slowed to stop and jumped out to check the suspension as Waco climbed on the top of the 4x4...and quickly lowered himself into the bed with only his head poking out of the higher than normal pickup truck.

"Psst...kid...keep low and silent." As Dag peeked over the front bumper to where Waco was pointing his heart leapt to his throat. On the other side of the expressway and just slightly ahead of their position, walked what had to be one hundred zombies or more.

He looked back to Waco who was motioning for him to look near the top of an overpass about a mile away...and the huge break in the center wall that divided the expressway.

Dag sighed and slowly got into the open driver's door and quietly closed it. The zombie hoard had just cleared where they had nearly lost control, and only a few wandered back toward them. Now Dag hadn't been in zombie territory a lot, but he knew that they could fall over the center wall. That didn't bother him as much as the horde was headed in the direction of the broken wall...and the same direction they were headed.

He sighed, bit his lip, which caused him to wince, and cranked the engine. The truck roared to life and Dag shoved it into gear...and missed. The grinding of the transmission didn't go unnoticed.

More zombies turned and began walking toward them and bumped into the center wall. No sooner had the third zombie hit the wall, another bumped into it and it fell over into their lanes.

## The Zombie Slayer

Some of the horde turned and as more and more hit the wall, many began falling over the short dividing wall and soon their lane was covered with zombies all struggling to get to their feet.

“Shit!” Dag shouted and slammed the shifter into gear and floored the truck. Shifting as fast as the engine would allow he slammed into the zombies as they struggled to get to their feet. Sickening crunching and the occasional popping of the skulls could be heard above the whine of the transmission as Dag shifted again.

He shouted back to Waco to hold on and that he couldn't take time to unlock the rear window so he could climb back in.

Never taking his eyes off the road ahead he passed the entrance ramp and raced to beat the front of the horde to the broken wall. Even Dag and his beefy 4x4, wasn't sure he could plow through that many zombies.

Running over a growth of thigh-high grass and brush Dag could see the broken wall ahead and slowly his heart began to beat slower, they could beat the zombies to it!

Dag looked back to see how Waco was doing, but only saw his knees against the sliding rear window.

Then came the beating on the roof and not being able to hear, Dag looked ahead as they neared the top of the overpass and the broken wall...and the twenty yards of missing overpass!

Dag slammed the brakes on and skidded sideways. The truck slid with a screeching of locked tires on rough concrete. They stopped a few scant feet from tumbling fifty feet below onto the other expressway then that ran north and south. Shifting again, Dag spun the truck back in the direction they had just come and headed for the 'on ramp', just as the first of the zombies that had tumbled over the wall, now approached the accelerating truck.

Dag slammed into it and felt the 4x4 that was in two wheel drive skid on the thick slippery ooze he had squashed out of the hapless zombie. The rear of the truck slid into a fishtail and nearly spun out, but thanks to Dag's skills at driving, they hit the ramp front first, across the four lanes of highway below the expressway and with a little correction headed into the grassy plains. A quick adjustment and he was headed for the on ramp a quarter of a mile away.

Two cars blocked the ramp back up on the other side of the collapse, but he just downshifted and pushed one of the rusted out wrecks out of the way. As he did so, he finally had a free hand and let Waco through the rear window by unlocking the steel grating through the window.

Waco lifted the grate and slid through the window.

“Jesus kid...Dag...that was some of the finest driving I've seen in a long while. Damned fine job!” he patted Dag on the back as he tumbled through the rear window and into his seat.

As they reached the top of the on ramp they both took a few seconds to look back to see the front of the horde being bumped off the overpass by those meandering up behind them. They grinned as once again they could see far beyond where they were and what they saw made them both smile...no cars, and no more zombies, they would make good time now.

Tom's wife had packed them some sandwiches knowing that soon they'd have to be eating jerky and other foods preserved for longevity, they grabbed a quick bite as they drove.

Washing the food down with water from his canteen Waco pointed to what appeared to be some wooded tree line miles ahead.

“Ok Dag, that’s where we’ll be spending the night, about a mile past the tree line.”

“Is that safe Waco?” Dag asked nervously. He had heard tales of hunting parties being caught by zombies wandering the woods and forests and wanted no part of it.

“Relax kid. It’ll be on your left...an old farm house and barn. The house burnt, but the barn will let us go in with the truck and if we have to leave in a hurry, we can run through the closed doors.” Waco chuckled “Plus I locked the barn doors the last time I was there. If they’re still locked, then we’re good. Last time I was there, I also made sure there was no other way in. Windows are boarded and just allow enough light in to see once the doors are locked back behind us.”

Dag smiled at his idol “Shoulda known you’d had things worked out.”

Waco nodded with a smile “But not much farther kid. Remember I’m from the northeast, this is just about as far as I’ve gone...beyond that, we wing it.”

“What if the doors are open?” the concerned Dag replied.

“Well then kid, I do it the hard way.” he chuckled “I get out and clear the barn.”

“And me?”

Waco roared with laughter “You? Hell kid, you stay in the truck and keep the motor running. If you see me running out of the barn, you’d better damned well be putting this thing in gear, because if it isn’t...you’ll have to catch up to me somewhere up the drive.”

Dag chuckled “That’s funny Waco.”

“Funny? Kid, if I run into a barn full of zombies...” Dag nodded, Waco needn’t say more...he got the idea.

As it turned out the barn seemed to be as Waco had left it nearly a year before, but they took one slow drive around just to make sure someone hadn’t come around, broken in, and resealed their entry.

“Ok kid, looks ok. I shoved a piece of wood into each window and door I boarded up, and looks like they are all...uh-oh.”

“I don’t like uh-oh Waco.”

Waco nodded to a small side door. Where there had been a small piece of wood shoved into the top jamb, or board of every window and door, this one had none. Dag brought the truck to an easy and quiet stop as Waco got out.

Machete in hand he slipped up to the door and looked on the ground...

“Its ok kid, the wood is lying in front of the door. There’s no way someone could have gotten in and then put the wood here.

“Unless they opened the big doors and...”

Waco nodded as he tugged the small door “Nope still nailed shut.”

Dag pulled the truck over to Waco and he jumped on the steel running board and grasped the steel grating...and quickly let go.

“JESUS!” Waco stumbled as he fell backward, but managed to get his footing and looked at his fingers and the blood coming from the cuts.

“Dammit, Waco I told ya I sharpened the grating in case we ran into some robbers or zombies tried to grasp onto the grates.

Waco walked to the barn and pulled a hammer out from under an old wooden barrel. He pulled the four nails that held the small side door securely shut and opened the two large doors in the front to let Dag back his truck through. Once in, he sealed the door with two huge wooden beams into the clasps and plopped down onto a bale of hay. He nodded at the skeletons of a couple of horses.

“Those two were the unlucky ones. Guess everyone here turned, ‘cuz those horses looked like they starved to death.” he nodded to their closed stables “Poor bastards tried to kick down the doors to get at this hay.”

Dag nodded as he joined Waco “Yup, if they’d been out in the paddock, they’d be alive today.”

“That was twenty years ago Dag, remember? Maybe their offspring?” Waco quickly slid over the row of hay bales and grasped an old wooden ladder and carefully climbed into the loft. Each step he’d bounce to make sure the loft wouldn’t sent him falling through to the concrete floor fifteen feet below.

“Man whoever had this built, didn’t skimp. Roof doesn’t leak, floors still solid.” there was a loud creaking “And I don’t see any zombies, but we’ll check again before we leave in the morning. I’ll leave this open for light until the sun goes down.” Waco chuckled “Come on up kid, it’s a damned sight cooler in front of this loft door that it is down there.”

As Dag climbed up he had to ask the obvious.

“Waco...what if we get to where those people said they were and they aren’t...well, for real?”

“You mean baiting survivors in?”

“I’ve heard stories of cannibals, whole clans of them...they might kill us and eat us.” he looked at Waco with a look that screamed for reassurance.

Waco leaned back, slid his cowboy hat over his eyes and snorted...

“Then I hope I make those fuckers puke...” he looked upward “sorry dad.”

Dag leaned back and looked out the opening and sighed.

“Yup, that’s the Waco I know.”

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*Chapter 6.*

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Morning found them back on the road, but in a more precarious position. Long past the cleared part of the expressway, they had exited onto a highway to head in a more southerly direction. Now the going was slow and tedious as they took turns driving around vehicles of a world that once existed, of a world Dag never knew, and a world Waco barely had. However this highway had no median or protected side rails and most of the cars the day of the storm had run off the road in this stretch.

It was strange to Waco that the surrounding lands looked pretty much the same as he'd never been this far west. Buildings decaying in the distance, burnt out hulks of thriving cities long past. All reminders of the crumbling transportation system cluttered with rusting vehicles that once were filled with people whose bones now bleached in the hot mid-summer sun. More evidence that not all humans turned that day and just simply died...or were eaten.

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Nearly a week had passed and now at the New Mexico state line, Dag tuned in his shortwave radio that their radio man had tossed together for him. He gave the men a warning not to use it too much as he didn't think it would last very long.

Waco yawned and shook his head.

"Ok Dag, I'm pulling over and you take the wheel. It's getting near dark and we'd damned better find someplace to hole up and not be heard. Your shortwave makes too much noise when you're trying to fine tune..." he chuckled "squawks worse than..."

"...than what?" Dag asked and then his gaze went to where Waco's was "Holy crap!" Dag's jaw dropped as they looked down from the overpass. Below them and off toward some moderately large city, wandered what had to be several hundred thousand zombies. One huge massive horde and all headed southwesterly and the cloud of dust they sent skyward was immense.

"Jesus Waco, that's the same direction we have to go."

"Easy kid," Waco muttered as he slid out of the driver's seat and headed around to where Dag was sitting.

"They're farther west than where we're headed," he snorted "least I hope so."

They were east of the massive horde and slighter higher in elevation as the ground they were on was elevated slightly, which was probably why they both nearly jumped out of their seats.

"DOES ANYONE HEAR US?" blasted from the shortwave Waco had put on to monitor the frequency all past broadcasts had been on.

“WE’RE IN A HOSPITAL IN...” Waco turned the volume down “...and... need... soon...” the signal died out.

“Atmospherics?” Dag asked.

“Sounds like their radio or antenna is going bad, power loss...hell kid I’m not a genius. Did you hear what city?”

“Naw, it was so loud the static was too bad.”

Waco pointed to a rusty road sign that was barely readable Waco mumbled “Santa Rosa...can’t tell, but looks like Vaughn is about ten miles along this road to the southwest.

“Think that’s where those kids are?” Dag asked.

“Doubt it Dag, if it was signal bounce they’d have to be a bit further, closer we should have gotten all their message, but that’s just a guess. Whatever, the sun is going down soon and we need to find...” Waco grinned “well, kiss my ass. Ask and you shall receive.” Waco pointed right past Dag’s nose and slightly off the highway to a series of buildings.

Dag barely had time to slam on the brakes and make the turn.  
“Christ Waco, give a guy a little notice will ya? Now what?”

“That old mall I think I saw a big grocery store.”

“So?” Dag looked frustrated with Waco’s thinking on the fly.

“Most of them had loading docks and steel doors that can be used if they still exist. We can park the truck right outside. Plus if they had any freeze dried food, it still could be good.”

“Huh?”

Waco chuckled “If they have any kid, I’ll show ya.”

As they approached the small mall with a moderately sized food store anchoring one end, they rolled slowly into the parking lot filled with rusting vehicles and headed toward the rear. The amount of rust was much less than what they had experienced back east and in the central US, but their minds were quickly turned from cars to zombies as several could be seen toward the other end of the mall.

“Ok kid, easy on the gas now...just more or less coast. Only give it enough gas to keep us rolling slowly. Zombies don’t see well from a distance and there’s a chance they might not notice us. We’ll park, get inside and lock up...and then I’ll come back out and deal with them.”

“Why Waco? If they don’t see us...”

Waco waved his hand to stop Dag from going further and Dag nodded. He had heard of Waco’s penchant for slaying zombies. They said every zombie that Waco had come across laid rotting where he had found them. But then again Dag didn’t believe in rumors...but then there was Waco that he had seen in action.

Waco's sandy blond hair peeked out from under his dirty brown cowboy hat and his scratched sunglasses could easily conceal more than the man that Dag had come to know. Dag looked over to Waco dressed as he always was, in his cowboy boots and now spur-less heels, propped up against the dash. His tattered and worn blue jeans pants and shirt with his sleeveless black leather biker vest could give an indication that this man was no one to be messing with, but Dag knew Waco better than most. Waco was tough and no doubt had killed zombies and men alike, but he also had a soft side that he hid.

"Say Waco..."

Waco stopped Dag again with a wave of his hand and pointed to a steel rollup door and as luck would have it, had a ramp going downward that led to the door. Pulling a crowbar from under the front seat, Waco slid out of the 4x4 and leapt onto the dock beside the ramp. Within a few seconds, he shoved the crowbar into the door jamb...and paused. He looked at Dag sitting in the truck with the engine running exactly where Waco had him back into loading dock at. Dag looked back and wondered if there might be a better place to stop for the night, but just smiled warily.

Waco shook his head in dismay, tucked the crowbar into his left fist and raised it head high. With his right hand he grasped the door knob and opened the door. Fumbling around with his foot he dropped an attached door stop and the light flooded into the dark docking bay large enough for a semi-trailer, and plenty big enough for their large 4x4. He peeked in and as his eyes adjust to the darkness beyond the beams of light, he vanished inside.

A few minutes passed and Dag set the semi-automatic rifle on his lap and prepared to get out as the rollup-door slowly opened. It had to be Waco because whoever was opening this door, was doing it quietly.

Finally open, there stood Waco waving for Dag to back in and he did. As soon as the truck cleared the partially open bay door, Waco closed it as Dag got out.

Shining his flashlight around the large loading bay, he could see the bay that had obviously been ransacked at some point in time due to the scattered empty boxes that littered the floor. At both ends of the bay there were large doors. Dag nearly had a heart attack.

"Hey kid, don't sweat it, someone barricaded both doors years ago. We're good for the night, but we can check just to be sure."

"Jesus, next time don't scare me to death."

Waco grinned and then snorted "Grow a set of balls kid. You wanted to come along, get used to jumping at every little sound."

"Yeah, thanks." Dag snorted under his breath. He turned and smiled at Waco as he pulled out the lanterns from the truck bed.

"I'll put these around like every other night, while you..."

Waco laid the crowbar on an empty box and pulled his machete.

"While I go and get rid of any local zombies. Make us some dinner kid, I'm goin' to work up

an appetite.” He opened the walk in door that he had entered by and looked back to the nineteen year old that was unpacking their gear.

“Hey...lock up behind me, the lock is intact.”

“And what if you need to come back in...in a hurry.” Dag asked in a dead serious voice.

“I won’t!” Waco responded confidently, and then chuckled “Or I won’t be coming back at all.”

Dag knew Waco was half joking, half because he knew that if Waco ever did get in trouble, he’d never lead the trouble back to him.

“Yeah...well you’d better come back asshole...make me cook dinner for nothing.” he grinned “you’d better come back or I’ll come and kill ya all over again.”

Waco tipped his hat brim and grinned “Naw once will be enough, remember kid, I’m one of the few that’s immune to zombie bites.” He vanished out the door as Dag went over and locked it. He listened through the solid door and heard nothing.

In the dimly lit dock area Dag went about setting up a cooking area and double checked the doors at each end to make sure they were indeed well barricaded against whatever might try to intrude upon them in the night.

The bed of the truck sat below the floor’s grade and was easily unpacked and ready for easy departure. Their bed rolls set close to the edge of the truck ramp set in the floor, the food and eating area, just beyond. Several quick kicks and everything could be quickly shoved back into the truck’s bed. He even refilled the tank using a hose attached to the fifty-five galleon drum fastened in the truck’s bed. All was ready for morning...or a quick escape in the night. Dag looked at the hand chain operated bay door and wondered how they would get it opened in an emergency, he now felt as much trapped as he did safe. It was one huge door and steel at that. As he looked at the distance one of them would have to roll it upward just to get it high enough for their truck, and the fact that someone would have to stand out on the dock to use the chain that raised it, while only God knew what came rushing at them...

“Aw crap!”

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*Chapter 7.*

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Waco did return an hour later and splattered with what had been coined as ‘zombie goo’. A quick clean up and dinner the two settled in for the night with the shortwave running on the batteries and hand cranked generator.

Dag put the gear they were done with back in the truck and climbed back onto the loading dock.

“About time for their weekly broadcast isn’t it Waco?”

Waco sat on his bedroll and fiddled with the fine tuning.

“Yep! Maybe we can get the whole broadcast this time...unless...”

Dag sat on his bed roll across from Waco.

“Unless?”

“Well kid, we never did hear any broadcasts as early as we did earlier today. Maybe they were in trouble, maybe they knew something was failing and wanted to try to get out one last...”

“Attention... Is anyone out there? Can anyone hear us? If you can do not respond unless you are within ten miles of Tularosa, New Mexico. Our transmitter is working fine, but our receiving is being done using a standard citizens band radio with amplified signals. We can only send on this large transmitter. We...I don’t know how far we are sending all our gear is mostly destroyed by an electrical fire. I am going to pause for five minutes to give anyone a chance to respond, and then as usual, we’ll transmit the entire message...please respond.” They couldn’t and soon the signal was gone again and they knew there would be no more.

Dag looked at Waco “At least we know the city now.” he frowned “Jesus Christ, Waco...she’s a kid.”

“Sounds like one at any rate...kid.” Waco snorted a laugh at the youthful lad.

Dag frowned “I mean she sounds like someone younger than I am.” he looked at Waco strangely “Speaking of kids Waco...how did a ten year kid get the name of Waco? You must have been some tough kid...dad said he’d heard of you before I was born, before coming to the compound. So I figured that dad said Texas was known for tough, rugged people and Waco is...”

Waco roared with laughter “That’s what people think?”

“Well you are the strongest, toughest, meanest...”

“Good God kid, I was named after my two granddaddies...Walter Alcott and Carl Olsen...”

A huge grin beamed across Dag's face "W...A...C...O...my God you..."

"HEY!" Waco snorted loudly "If you ever tell a soul, I'll skin ya alive ya little shit!" he looked up and muttered "Sorry dad."

Still laughing Dag crossed his heart and pointed to the heavens and with a chuckle "Not a soul Waco, not a soul." Still chuckling he leaned back on his bedroll as his friend leaned against an empty fifty-five gallon drum.

"Guess we need to get closer so we can ask them where this hospital is." His train of thought was interrupted by...

"This is Lolli Popp...I'm the electronics technician and radio operator...if you are close beware of the Rippers, they are to our northeast...cannot transmit farther for fear they might figure out where we are... out!"

"Rippers? Jesus Christ Waco...Rippers, here?"

Waco just shrugged "Dealt with their kind before kid. Sure, they're a lot nastier than zombies, but easier to kill, they're alive."

"Tom said they sharpen their teeth so they can eat people without cooking them. He said they run in tribes and sometimes eat zombies and are immune to zombie bites because they eat zombies."

Waco snorted a chuckle "Don't believe everything you hear kid. Yeah they sharpen their teeth, they are cannibals, but they do not eat zombies. Hell even starving wild animals or vultures don't eat zombies. Rippers are partially immune to zombie bites though, so I heard." Waco sat up and looked at Dag.

"A guy once told me that they start by scratching themselves and put a drop of zombie blood on them. They get sick, some turn and are put down. The ones that get better repeat the process."

"And that makes them immune?"

Waco laughed "Not immune, resistant. You see kid it don't work for most people because the rippers lose nearly ninety percent of their inductees. But let me tell ya one thing kid...a bullet between their eyes, in their heart, or anywhere they'll bleed to death will stop them. Crazy cannibals or not, it's not like the zombies where you have to kill the brain, or lop off their head to break that biological circuit that runs them." Waco leaned back against the drum and pushed his cowboy hat over his eyes.

"I go out of my way to kill Rippers."

"Waco, you go out of your way to kill zombies."

"Yeah kid, whatever. Dead is dead and that means more space for survivors of the storm." He sighed and snuggled into a lower position.

"Now shut off the lights and go to sleep..." he yawned softly "think tomorrow is going to be a busy day."

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Standing outside of the old store Dag watched as Waco lowered the dock door and moved a heavy empty crate in front of the door next to the dock. On the door he wrote in red grease marker “Safe inside” and then walked over to Dag.

“Waco...look.” He pointed toward the small town beyond some trees and the smoke wafting skyward.

“Yup, saw the signs of Rippers last night, that’s why it took me so long to get rid of the zombies, couldn’t risk a shot or the Rippers might hear it.”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

Waco slid into the passenger side and pulled the bolt back on his well-cared for M-16. “What and have you up worrying all night? Naw, I need ya healthy and alert.” he grinned “You drive kid, I might be busy.” Dag checked the trailer with the cycles on it to make sure they were well tied down and secure as the rough, pot-holed roads had a tendency to loosen things up. He looked at the sharpened spikes protruding high on the sides of the trailer that were designed to slash at any zombie that tried to grasp onto the moving trailer, he nodded with satisfaction.

“Should work against Rippers too, wish I’d put them on the loading ramp now.” and slid into the driver’s seat. He looked at Waco and gave him a nod...and received one in return.

Dag took one huge deep breath and twisted the key.

“I’m guessing that we have to go through that town?”

“Unless you want to go farther west and tangle with a million zombies.”

Dag shifted into gear and frowned “Through the town it is.”

As they closed on the small town they saw every home, shop, and business had been set aflame. They drove over a few dozen zombies and Dag realized that Rippers didn’t like zombies either as they had not left one moving.

Upon reaching the far side of the several block long main part of town, Dag started breathing a bit easier now he could speed up.

The road ahead had been cleared of the few vehicles that had been on it and he knew it was done long before the Rippers had visited. He checked his rearview mirror to see the town slowly growing smaller in the distance...and about two dozen motorcycles screaming up behind them.

“RIPPERS!” Dag screamed.

“Well, time ta go ta work kid...keep her steady.” Waco slid through the large rear sliding Plexiglas window and into the bed of the truck. He fought his way over and around the covered supplies as the truck bumped and swerved down the highway and managed to find a satisfactory spot to fight from.

He wedged his machete between to small crates and as he looked up a bullet passed by his left ear.

“They got guns kid!” he shouted to Dag as he raised his rifle and took out the first two bikers. As blood gushed from their bodies, their bikes wobbled and as one went off the road, the other flipped taking two more down with him. As those down flipped through the air, Waco doubted that at their speed any of them would be getting up.

As the 4x4 went up a grade Waco saw that he wasn't close to the guess of two dozen, it was closer to four.

“Shit! KEEP IT STEADY KID!” he roared over the truck's engine. Dag had turned the baffles to the mufflers open to gain more speed. No longer was he worried about zombies hearing them.

More shots rang out and more Rippers fell, but it merely seemed to outrage the rest. The Rippers came with such ferocity that they were driving over their own fallen comrades. One Ripper shot a slower one that seemed reluctant to get in the line of fire. As his kill flipped off the road, he floored his cycle and zigzagged behind the trailer hoping that Waco wouldn't risk shooting their own cycles.

The Ripper screamed something in whatever language they had developed over the decades and the others rode to each side of the trailer as Waco ran out of rounds for his M-16.

Climbing on the trailer's un-spiked rear loading gate the Rippers struggled to stay on their feet as Dag began to weave from one side of the two lane road to the other. Several Rippers were hit by the trailer, one managed to join the others on the trailer, four more were sent tumbling along in the fields to either side of the road...and one unfortunate Ripper was impaled upon the side spikes on the trailer, the penalty for making a poorly timed jump. One passed Dag's door and a quick swerve sent him off road and slammed into an old rusty barbed wire fence, snapping two rotten poles and wrapping the rusty wire around the Ripper. Even from the truck Dag could hear the screams as he went unnoticed by his tribe.

In the bed Waco could see the hatred in their eyes as he picked one after the other off with his pistol. Rippers fell in and off the trailer. Cycles flipped and slid off the road, some Rippers screamed, some couldn't as they had died as Waco's bullets found their heads. Now swinging chains and any other weapon they had created they came at Waco as he tossed his pistol to the bed and grasped his machete and long dagger he always kept in his boot. Slashing and stabbing he took one Ripper after another as they climbed over the trailer's hitch and tried in vain to enter the truck's bed.

Now and then a Ripper would manage to time Dag's swerving and leap to the truck's side to climb onto the supplies...and would instantly meet his death on the six inch long spikes that rimmed the truck's bed. One made a high jump, only to meet Waco's machete. Waco's arms burnt with pain from swinging his weapons, he panted desperately gasping for any air he could force into his lungs...and the Rippers kept coming. Waco tossed one Ripper over his shoulder and turned to finish him with a dagger to the throat...but he left his rear open to attack!

Two Rippers jumped him from behind and he fell to the narrow gap between the tarp covered supplies. Waco managed to spin to his back only to see the Rippers closing on him. As

one Ripper closed on his throat, sharpened teeth clicking like a mad animal, he managed to slit the Ripper's throat as he kicked the second backward and over the tailgate. There was some brief screaming as the Ripper was dragged and then silenced as the heavy trailer claimed his life.

There was loud sounds of bodies hitting the side of their truck and Waco managed to get to his knees to look. Along both sides were zombies flying in all directions. More and louder thumps could be heard from the front of the truck and Waco spun to see they were driving through some horde that must have been part of the larger horde that they had spotted the day before.

He spun rearward to see the Rippers being mobbed by hundreds of zombies that had now turned their attention to their noisy motorcycles. To the rear of the horde a few Rippers tried to skid around and retreat the way they had just come...to see dozens more zombies staggering out onto the road behind them.

A quick check around to make sure no more Rippers had remained on board, Waco tossed the few bodies over the sides and flopped down to his knees at the front of the truck's bed. He looked through the window.

"Driving into a horde of zombies...good job kid." he gasped.

"Didn't figure their cycles could take it, but my baby could." he patted the dash. "I saw them heading west and swung toward them and those Rippers were so busy trying to get to you, they didn't even see the zombie horde until we were in the midst of them."

Waco picked his hat off the bed floor where he had tossed it and laid back against the truck's cab as Dag pulled the lever that sent the exhaust back to the mufflers and once again the truck became quiet as it cruised along.

"Waco...we clear?"

"Yeah kid, the zombies are turning now that we're out of their range and taking care of the Rippers that are left."

"They get 'em all?"

"Think so kid...by the size of that horde...no survivors."

"That's good."

"Yeah kid, that's good. Now if I just knew why those goddamned zombies all seem to be hell bent on going somewhere."

Through the open window Dag shouted back nervously "Uhhhh...going?"

"Those bastards back there are now headed in the same direction that giant horde we saw yesterday were going."

Dag sighed "And you want to know why."

Waco managed a weary grin "Just as soon as we find that hospital."

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The young driver simply nodded, he had expected action and excitement when he joined his long time idol on his mission. However he never imagined anything like this in his wildest dreams... or nightmares. Waco wanted to still find the hospital, the hospital that appeared to be in the direction that massive horde was headed.

Dag sighed deeply "Sure Waco, why not."

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*Chapter 8.*

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Now well past a city named Vaughn and still headed southwest, they pushed on. Each evening the radio was silent and that began to worry Waco. Had they gone silent out of fear from Rippers, or something worse? Perhaps they had come all this way for nothing, and presently turning back was out of the question, they had come too far and Waco was too stubborn.

“Waco...did you notice those Rippers were covered in crap that looked like that zombie goo you get when ya slice one up?”

“Notice kid? Christ all mighty, I was inches from one of them and his ugly face. That bastard had zombie guts wrapped around his neck.”

“Why?” Dag asked.

“Dunno kid, maybe they think that if they smell like zombies, zombies will leave them alone. Maybe they think it makes them scarier to people.” Dag laughed nervously “Well they sure scared the hell outta me Waco...” he looked over to Waco who was calmly cleaning his machete.

“Scary as hell, maybe, but didn’t work very well for the bastards on the road back there, now did it?”

Dag chuckled as he stared at his companion and idol.

“Only thing that scares me more than Rippers is you Waco. Jesus...doesn’t anything scare you?”

“Yeah, kid...but only one thing...” Waco grabbed the steering wheel jerking it to the left and then pushing it back to the right as they swerved around what appeared to be some sort of jagged steel I-beam that had been dropped in the middle of the road.

“...kids that don’t watch where the fuck they are going!” Waco looked skyward “Sorry dad.” and then he glared at the teen that was looking sheepishly back at his friend.

“I...I’m...sorr...” Waco’s arm shot out and jerked the wheel once more and the truck skidded sideways and around another steel beam in the road; this one attached to a Ripper body.

The truck skidded to a stop and the stammering Dag buried his head in his hands and rubbed his face vigorously.

“You’d better drive Waco,” he slid over to the middle of the truck’s bench seat “didn’t feel too well this morning, don’t feel well now.”

“So yer gonna quit driving? Jesus kid, quit yer bitchin’ and get back behind the wheel. Sick or not, we go on.” Waco rolled his eyes “So what in the middle of a freakin’ zombie fight you’re gonna throw up your hands and call a time out?”

“What’s a time out?”

Right about then Waco felt much older than he was.

“Never mind kid, never mind,” he sighed and put his machete into its scabbard “just keep driving.” he cocked his cowboy hat over his eyes and snorted “What’s a time out...Jesus how I miss football...baseball...” he slammed his fist against the wall of the cab.  
“Shit! I miss all of it!”

It took nearly until sunset for them to reach the city limits of Tularosa and fearing the possibility of running into a horde of zombies in the dark, the night was spent in one of Waco’s old favorite spots to hole up for the night...a service station. Intact gas stations had served him well in the past as they provided bays to park in, usually some kind of roof access to survey the surroundings, and if he was really lucky, old stale fuel to be rejuvenated. Backing into one of the large service bays that was large enough to get both the trailer and truck into, Waco lowered the door and cursed the decades of dust that trickled down over him. They found a part where the roof had not collapsed and curled up in the corner of what appeared to be an old office.

Dag opened his mouth to ask Waco what and how they were going to find the hospital in the morning, but his hand shot out and covered Dag’s mouth. Waco’s other hand pointed to the missing office door and beyond to see several ‘stumblers’ passing by the mostly broken glass bay doors. He leaned toward Dag and whispered.

“Good thing those door frames are still mostly intact or those things would be in here with us.”

“Maybe we should sleep in the truck Waco?”

“Naaa...kid, don’t know about you, but I need to stretch out. Jesus you know how much I hate going into cities, this one ain’t any different. Not a good sign neither, we get here and see a dozen walk by...add that to the million or so we’ve seen over the last few days...” his voice trailed off, but he needn’t say more, Dag understood.

Dag slipped over to the doors and watched through the broken windows of the sand blasted aluminum to make sure the small pack had kept going.

“They’ve gone Waco...” he ran his hand over the worn doors “Jesus, these must have been pretty back in the day.” he laughed softly “And probably not as noisy as the one you managed to get up so we could park in here. Probably what drew their attention?” Dag smiled and looked back through the missing office door to see Waco with his hat pulled over his eyes stretched out on the hot floor. He marveled that his friend never snored, but figured that to stay alive out in the undead lands, one had to be quiet and that meant even during sleep. He learned that quickly after joining up with Waco. No matter where they were, Waco slept light and had elbowed Dag several times to wake him up the first night they had left the compound. Finally he handed Dag a cut up sleeve from something he called a parka. It had

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large cords cut through seams so he could tie it around his mouth and secure it without strangling himself.

“Now maybe I can get a good night’s sleep,” Waco had joked and then added “or keep some zombie from chomping down on yer throat because he heard ya snoring a block away.” Since that time Dag dutifully tied the ‘muffler’ over his lower face.

The following morning and not a sign of undead, the two of them forced the bay door open as this morning it refused to open without a fight. Finally Waco just looked at Dag and then the half open door...

“Get in kid...you open it with the truck.”

Dag nodded knowing the steel bars that protected the cab windows would take care of the flimsy metal door, he shoved the pedal to the floor and blasted through the old aluminum door and winced at the sound of crashing metal clattering to the ground.

“Well Waco if that don’t bring’em running, they aren’t around.”

As they pulled out into the nearly empty street heading into town, Waco nodded to the large side view mirrors...and the zombies rambling behind them.

“Well kid, you were right.” He chuckled knowing that they would soon lose the ramblers.

Within a few minutes they hit an old highway that led straight into town and seconds later saw the remains of a sign that had an arrow and a big ‘H’ on it.

Waco was old enough to remember before the storm and all the various road signs he always asked his dad to tell him what they meant. He couldn’t wait until he was old enough to drive and he never got to show his dad how good he was at driving. Waco had become a great driver thanks to a few trips down the old dirt back roads gave him enough to teach himself what dad never did, He began learning mechanics by asking and eventually helped his dad work on the two cars they owned. Then there were friends and neighbors that always asked his dad if he could fix those as well. By the day of the storm, Waco could damned near tear an engine down and rebuild it himself. He smiled at the memories of his dad and...

“SHIT!” Waco screamed as he pointed to his right. From the overpass they were on they could see to the northwest...and the dust cloud that had to be nearly fifty thousand zombies were making.

“Is that the same massive horde we saw the other day?” Dag mumbled.

“Can’t be, moving too slow...Jesus!” he tapped Dag’s hand “Slowdown kid we don’t want them to see us and change direction.” he sighed and pointed to what was left of an old overhead sign.

“Looks like another freeway ahead somewhere, numbers are gone, but let’s stick to that...maybe we’ll see that hospital from...”

Dag glanced over to Waco and saw him staring off to the south. There sticking up above the surrounding structures was a building that looked like it could be a hospital that appeared to be about five stories high. Waco had Dag pull off at the next exit and swung south onto the city streets...and a pack of undead.

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“Shit!” Waco shouted as he pointed to a side street and the white 4x4 turned down and headed parallel to the road the hospital was on still several blocks away.

“Wouldn’t it be funny if that wasn’t the hospital?” Dag snorted as he veered right to avoid an old wreck.

“LEFT!” Waco shouted as Dag skidded left without asking why. A quick glance as they turned revealed at least two dozen more zombies rambling toward them and more behind them. Once again they turned south and once again they ran into more of the undead. Two more blocks and south once again...and once again more zombies.

“There kid!” Waco pointed to a parking lot between two rows of single story stores as Dag veered into it. They sped down the aisles of parked cars and trucks parked in neat rows, rotting in the sun.

“There!” Waco shouted, but all Dag saw was a space between two buildings and a four foot high fence.

“There’s a fence there.”

Waco snorted “Then drive through it kid...sheesh!”

Dag snorted back something unintelligible and floored it. With flying wood and metal they crashed through and into some sort of park over grown with high grass and piles of blown sand. Swerving around a little fountain of some sort Waco pointed to the top few stories of the five story high building that was now visible. Somehow Waco had zigzagged them nearly to their destination.

Dag cranked the steering wheel and headed straight toward a high wooden fence. “Man that thing better be the hospital, ‘cuz we might gonna be needin’ it!” he closed his eyes and blasted through the fence and about five metal trash cans with a crash that would have awakened the dead...had they not already been awake. Truck and cans flew down a drive and out into the road past the small diner they nearly hit the corner of as Dag steered past a faded sign that said “Open soon.”

Off to one side of the five story structure was a huge crane that had partially collapsed onto the roof and several other rusting pieces of machinery parked off to one side, but seemed to be in much better condition.

Waco held his hand out and pointed off to the side of the entrance. There sat over two dozen motorcycles and a ladder up to the second story window that was busted out. He pointed to a spot among the other vehicles in the parking lot.

“Ok park here. We’re away from the hospital and...”

“How do you know this is the hospital Waco, there is no name or...”

Waco smiled nervously. He knew Dag wasn’t old enough to know what the huge silver medical symbol that was smack dab in the middle of the structure meant, nor the huge chrome cross with a snake wrapped around it on the wall in the front. Some huge metal letters had been put up, but were no longer intact and were undistinguishable.

## The Zombie Slayer

“This is it kid, trust me and with the cycles over there, I’d guess that’s why the transmissions stopped.”

“You think someone with ill intentions heard it and broke in on them?”

Waco nodded slowly “Look kid, you were drooling at the sound of that little gal’s voice. Think what it would do to a bunch of horny raiders.”

“We gonna leave?”

Waco looked at the cycles and then to Dag. Dag nodded knowingly...  
“Thought not!”

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*Chapter 9.*

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Hoping they weren't seen driving into the wide open parking lot, the two men slipped out of the truck and stayed low as possible. Dodging between cars they made it to the side of the lot near the construction equipment.

"Now what?" Dag asked.

Waco handed him the M-16 with the scope.

"You go over there on that pile of sand. It has to be at least a story high. Pick off anyone that pokes their head out the window, careful not to hit the good guys. Keep them busy."

"Where you goin'?" Waco grinned and pointed to the old rotting hulk of the crane that obviously had fallen years ago and now laid resting precariously against the side of the building and onto roof of the building "Hey, how do I tell the good guys from the bad ones?" a second glance at the bent crane and it hit Dag where Waco was going, not behind the crane, but...

"Up there? Noooo...not up there Waco. Jesus it looks like it could come crashing down any minute."

"Probably why they used the ladder to get in kid." he laughed "Won't be expecting me to get in that way if they couldn't. You stay here until I call for ya...if night comes and I haven't called for ya...go home kid."

Waco started to get up and head toward the crane, but Dag grabbed his arm.

"You're crazy Waco." A few muffled shots could be heard, not as if in a heated gun battle, but rather slow methodical shots. It appeared that this gun battle had been going on by well entrenched fighters.

"Yeah kid, I am." And off he sprinted at a crouch as he zigzagged through several closer vehicles toward the side of the hospital where the crane was.

Waco climbed the crane that seemed to be precariously perched on the roof when it had fallen some years earlier, but even horribly bent and twisted, it was steadier than he had imagined. Upon reaching the first collapse, he saw the roof had no access to the hospital, so he kept climbing along the nearly horizontal framework to the second part that leaned upward against the roof. This teetered slightly and all the way to the fifth floor roof the gusting winds felt as if they were trying to stop him, but he pushed himself onward as the steel groaned until he hopped over the ledge.

Now two floors up from the lower roof, he could see two square structures and figured one had to be roof access to an old helipad by a faded red 'H' painted on the roof. Upon reaching the steel door, he found it locked and it seemed too solid to break into without being heard.

The second building turned out to be a structure that held all the elevator motors and cables and while the steel door was also solidly secured, Waco found a large vent to let the heat out

that came off without much effort.

A quick look around and he ran back to the roof's edge and waved to Dag that he was going down and to watch the windows.

By removing a metal grating to the two elevator shafts Waco found maintenance ladders running the length of the five stories and then figured that maybe possibly two more basement levels. Now he began to wonder if perhaps he had bitten off more than he could handle...this was quickly pushed aside by the screams of a young girl.

**“You keep your hands off of me you son of a bitch!”** there was raucous laughter followed by a loud slap that was loud enough for Waco to hear through the large vent that was obviously not coming off.

“Listen you little bitch, if I wanted to rip your clothes off and...”

“Wade! Pike said he thought he saw movement out in the parking lot, but by the time he got around to that side, it was gone...but there is a white truck and trailer parked way in the back that wasn't there when we snuck in a few days ago. Oh and a few of those damned kids are still holding most of the surgical floor, wounded Harry.”

This Wade seemed to Waco that he might be the leader of the raiders, and again he was right as there was a loud crash of something hitting the wall and an angry shout. “Jesus Christ! We got us fifteen men and y'all come up to me to...” there was something unintelligibly muttered “...get the fuck out of here and go have some of them check it out! I'll watch from here.”

Waco heard the sound of radios echoing throughout the adjoining elevator shafts. “Jesus they have radios?” he blurted out softly to himself “Radios? Where did they get the batteries?” Realizing that he had gotten distracted, Waco tried the top floor elevator door, but it wouldn't budge. He looked down to see someone had welded it shut with several ‘tack’ welds and knew that the elevators must not be working. In the distance below he could hear the hum of an old generator...a big one.

As it turned out someone had tack welded all the large vents that ran into the shaft and a frustrated Waco climbed down to the sub-basement...and landed in about a foot of water. Down here he realized that no one had been taking care of this part of the building as the welded door was so corroded that he easily broke the tack welds with his steel zombie spike.

Slowly Waco pried the door open and luckily it opened enough so he could squeeze through. The lowest level was pitch black and moldy smelling. A flick of his gas filled lighter showed him he was near stairs and access to the stair well was easy...too easy. The main basement where the generator was, wasn't huge and quickly checked out for raiders, but just as Waco was about to open the door to the main floor, he heard a radio squawk. “Boss said check out all levels.”

“Yeah, yeah...we got the basement. He's gonna deal with those kids and don't want to be disturbed.”

Another voice could be heard on the stairs that sounded a bit more distant.  
“You know Wade wants to pop the cherry on that little blondie with the temper.”

“Yeah, said the rest of us could have the rest...but ya know I have a problem with the real young ones.”

“Then you can sit and watch.” the other voice shouted with a snarling chuckle.

The door opened and one grungy man walked through and met Waco’s blade to the temple which dropped him without a sound.

“Hey Willie, you know I was thinkin’...maybe we could share one of the older ones? Whatcha think?” there was a pause “Willie?”

Waco could hear the sound of a gun’s slide being pulled back and booted footfalls on the concrete and metal stairs.

Soon the door slowly opened and a rather large .45 poked through the entrance and swung to the left and slowly back to the right as the owner tried not to enter the basement without checking it out. From behind the door Waco’s hands shot out and grasped the raider’s wrist and twisted upward, an elbow to his ribs, and a quick pivot brought the two men face to face. Waco glared at the thug “So you want something old do ya?”

He pushed the raider back against the wall and he looked down to see Waco’s huge knife stuck just under his breast bone. His eyes slowly raised to meet Waco’s cold stare, his mouth opened but no sound escaped as Waco removed his knife.

“Yeah, I’d leave this with ya, but I think some of your buddies might be wanting a turn.” The pain of Waco removing the blade was worse than when it went in and as the raider’s fading vision tried to follow Waco as he opened the door, only managed to see his own radio in Waco’s hand. Waco turned as he slowly slid down the wall as blood gushed from the open wound.

“Oh, thanks for the radio...asshole.” he looked upward “Sorry dad.”

As Waco rounded the stairs to the first floor he reached for the door and another rather nasty looking thug burst through to see it wasn’t Willie that he heard. Instead he found Waco’s bloody blade, but Waco was just a half second too slow as the man’s gun echoed through the atrium. With one quick move he tossed the body tumbling down the stairs and cursed under his breath.

“Thirteen.”

As he burst into the large atrium gunfire erupted all around and he dove for a concrete planter that held large plants of some kind. As he slid he rolled to his back and took down one man firing wildly in his direction.

“Twelve”

Waco rolled to his left and fired twice “Eleven” as another fell over backward with a hole in his head.

The sound of glass shattering and Waco turned to see the main entrance that had been well secured with heavy sheets of plywood. Over the doors were several windows and as a second shot now could be heard in the distance, the gunman dropped to his knees with a blank stare on his face.

“Ten”

There was a shot from the second floor and then another as he looked to the men shooting from the railings and knew the atrium was not a great place to be. Waco also knew that Dag couldn't shoot inside anymore that it seemed that every one of the raiders had come to the railings on every level and had begun to shoot in his direction.

Waco dove for the stair well on the other side of the twenty foot long planter and found himself puzzled with the thought that as he ran he had noticed that corn was growing in it...a bullet whizzing by his right ear snapped him out of that.

On the stair well another fell to Waco's well aimed shot “Nine!” he shouted as he burst through the second level door...and slammed into another raider. A brief struggle...

“Eight”

Dangling from the ceiling was a long rope that apparently had been used to haul stuff up and down. Waco knew men would be waiting on the third floor and covering the stairs and began to wonder what was next.

“You mothers had better not use up all your fuckin' ammo.” Wade's recognizable voice shouted “We ain't staying here forever you know...there's zombies out there.”

Waco figured that this was his chance and took a long run at the railing and with a huge leap grasped the rope and swung outward into the atrium. As soon as he hit the rope, he began his hand over hand ascent to the railing of the third floor as shots rang out at the swinging man. As expected one man each had the two doors to the stairwells covered as he flew toward the chest high protective railing opposite them. Waco kicked out from the solid four foot high railing and on the back swing swung his legs up, let go of the rope, and landed a few feet from the seventh man and with a spin decapitated him with his machete.

“Seven”

Waco was out of bullets so he grasped the raider's 9mm and rolled to his back as the other raider fired wildly until his gun clicked. Waco pulled the trigger... ‘CLICK!’ Both men looked at each other and leapt at each other, but only one walked away...

“Six”

The way the atrium was laid out there were rooms that faced outward along most of the far side. This created a solid wall of patient windows that faced the atrium so this made it nearly impossible for any of the other raiders to shoot at him unless they were in the rooms. The railing side where he was, were all rooms that faced the outside and their doors were facing the walkways on every level. This was bad as the walkways all arched to an inner curve, so anyone at one end could see the other. He ran to the closest end of the arched walkways and he found that if he crawled next to the solid, stomach-high railing, they couldn't see him.

Now and then Waco would pop his head up which would be followed by several rounds blasting through the railing's solid knee-wall. One round found its mark as flesh tore along the grazing path as it took, along with a small chunk of Waco's outer thigh.

As both of his guns were empty and bullets rained down, Waco decided to try the stairs as those above had no idea where he was, and their numbers were thinning. Upon reaching the fourth floor he heard their leader's voice again screaming over the radio. **"Bullets don't grow on trees you dumb fucks!"**

This was followed by "Jesus, Wade this guy's a fucking ghost." there was a gurgle over the radio followed by...

"Five"

"Who the fuck is this?"

A shot rang out and then another, the radio in Wade's hand blared.

"Four"

Wade peeked over the railing from the fifth floor and saw nothing. He stood upright and held a pretty little girl that Waco guessed to be about fifteen or sixteen. Her long disheveled blonde hair was over her eyes and as she struggled he could see her hands were tied at the wrists, Wade screamed loud enough that Waco didn't need the radio.

**"We talk or she goes over the edge motherfucker."**

Waco replied just loud enough to be heard in the large atrium "That little gal is all that's keeping you alive, toss her you die too."

Holding the little teen with his left hand he grasped her small breast with his other. "Hey, I wanted her for myself, but now we've gotten all the hidden supplies out of the kids, I'll trade her if you walk away."

Waco never replied.

Wade let go of the teen's breast and pulled the radio back out of his belt.

"Hey did you hear me?"

There was a clatter from down the fifth floor hall way...and...

"Three"

Wade pulled his pistol and fired ten shots until it clicked.

"He's down there."

As Waco readied himself for the long run down the hall into the waiting room of the wing he could hear Wade shouting for the last two of his men to go after the intruder.

"Fuck you Wade, I'm outta here..." there was a loud gurgling sound and a clatter and as Wade peeked around a column he saw one of the raiders clutching his neck.

Waco shouted out loud enough for Wade to hear... **"Two"**

## The Zombie Slayer

The last one of Wade's men looked at the body on the floor and dashed in Waco's general direction.

"He's out of bullets...don't shoot."

Waco didn't...as the man dashed past one of the rooms an arm shot out and a dagger he took off his last victim found its way to the thug's unshaven throat. As blood spurted and he desperately clutched his neck, he sank to the floor in a puddle of blood.

Waco now stood out in the open barely twenty yards from Wade.

**"One"**

With his arm still around the lass's neck Wade spun and dragged her into the maze of rooms off the waiting area. In his other hand he carried his Bowie knife and as he reached the series of wedge shaped hallways that led to the rooms and nurse's stations, he spun again with the dagger to her throat.

Waco was nowhere to be seen.

Wade slowly backed into the center hallway dragging the lass with him. Suddenly a hand shot out and grasped his knife hand and twisted. Wade spun and Waco's blade buried itself deep between his ribs and Waco's snarling face inches from Wade's. Waco's lips curled into a snarl and his raspy whisper...

"Zero!"

Wade's stunned stare faded, his face became expressionless, his final words stammered out of his bloody mouth.

"Who...who are...you?"

Waco leaned in to the man's ear and whispered...

"Death."

Waco turned to the blonde lass to find her trembling hands holding Wade's Bowie knife directly at him.

"Just because you killed all of Wade's raiders don't mean you scare me mister." Her hand was shaking so badly Waco almost laughed.

"What's your name kid?" he asked as he slowly reached out and took the knife from her hands and walked her back to the waiting area and along the railing to tell the other's it was all over.

"Lolli...Lolli Popp and don't you make a joke about it...and I'm not a kid!" she defiantly replied.

"Aw, he calls everyone a kid, get used to it." Waco nearly jumped out of his skin and spun to see Dag, rifle slung over his shoulder and dangling from a rope.

"How the hell did ya get up here kid?"

Dag laughed as he swung over to the railing and smiled at the lass.

"See? Everyone's...kid." he dropped to the floor "Well, the shooting stopped so I figured I'd

## The Zombie Slayer

better come and check on ya...as far as getting in, I came in through the open skylight on the far side of the little house with all the machinery in it.”

“Open skylight?”

“Yeah isn’t that how you got in?”

Waco frowned and sat on a chair as he pinched the wound on his leg.

“Skylight, Christ I could have started at the top and saved some time...skylight...shit!” he looked skyward “Sorry dad.”

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*Chapter 10.*

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As Waco sat and watched the nineteen year old Dag calmed Lolli down and got her to tell him where the other's that Wade had mentioned were being held. Two more kids that had held out in another level, joined them on the floor below and one looked to be barely nine or ten. As Dag and the kids went to release the ones that were being held in another area, Waco dug through some of the drawers looking for something to patch the hole in his leg. Finding an old, but clean, patient room Waco pulled off his jeans and looked at the back of his thigh.

"Glad I'm not wearing my leathers." he muttered as he looked at the long cut in his jeans  
"Guess it could have been worse."

"Hardly more than an abrasion." a young voice commented. Waco nearly fell off the bed to see a young lad standing in the doorway holding a tray of medical supplies.

"They call me Doc, but my name is Kirk Bowes." he put the tray on the stand beside the bed.  
"Don't let my fifteen years of age throw you, sir...I am a licensed surgeon, or would have been if they still handed out licenses."

"I can handle it kid." Waco laughed "Patched myself up many times."

Again Waco jumped as a soft female voice spoke. He spun around to see a beautiful woman standing in the doorway. Her hair was raven black and flowed over her shoulders, her clothes torn and disheveled.

"Doc here has been trained since before he could walk by his father to be our doctor and surgeon."

Waco grabbed his jeans and laid them over his lap as the brunet laughed musically.  
"My name is Lea Roth and I'm a medic and leader of the Brat Pack, along with my brother Carl...and by the way, I have seen male parts before."

"Not mine you haven't!" Waco snorted as Doc began to clean his wound.  
"What's a Brat Pack? Saw it scrawled on the walls here and there."

Lea giggled musically once again and motioned outside in the hall and the room filled with kids and a few older looking people.

"This is the Brat Pack Waco...yeah, your friend Dag told us your name." she smiled "Of course you saved us from a horrible fate. Wade and his bunch had plagued us for years." She motioned to her clothes.

"We were locked in different rooms and questioned about where our supplies were all stashed. It would seem they figured that they got all the info they wanted as two of them came in to..." she looked at the younger kids and then to Waco "...to uh..."

"I get it kid."

“KID?” her smile changed to a snarl “I stopped being a kid the day I was born into all of this shit! Hell, we all were. Our parents, from the time we began to understand things, began teaching us in their professions so we could carry on when they were gone.” her snarl eased as she began pointing to the others.

“Doc and myself you’ve met. The tall good looking fellow behind me, is my brother Carl. He’s co-leader and a damned fine welder, among other things. Our dad was a nuclear technician, our mother a physicist. She gave birth a day before the storm, that’s how we are here...and Carl is twenty-one. I don’t remember a thing as I was only one at the time, but dad said we were visiting mom the day of the storm.” she looked sadly at her brother and then back to Waco “Our baby brother was stillborn. Dad and some others killed the zombies that were in the hospital.”

“Others?”

“A few medical staff, patients, visitors...others.”

“Gotcha...ouch!” he frowned at Doc who had just stuck him with a needle to stitch up his leg as Lea continued.

“Lolli you’ve met and she’s our resident electronics genius...not bad for a sixteen year old. Runt here is Lolli’s brother and is ten...and our cook.”

“And a damned fine one at that.” the ten year old blurted out.

“PETE!” Lolli scolded.

“Sorry sis...durned fine cook.”

Lea smiled “Twig over there, never got a name; she’s also ten. Her mom came banging on the door one day and Lolli’s dad lowered the ladder. He climbed down to help her and her newborn up, but she showed him her arm...she was bit. She handed him the newborn and told him to take care of Twig...” Lea looked sadly at Waco as Doc finished stitching him up. “and ran off to die...or kill herself.”

Twig nodded “But others raised me like they were my momma and papa. The other bigs taught me to hunt and scrounge out there.” she pointed toward the window.

“Jesus, they took a ten year old kid out there?”

Carl laughed “Hell, she went out when she was about seven...came back alone one day all by herself after the scrounging party was caught by the zoms.”

Lea nodded “She’s small, but smart as a whip and a hell of a survivor.” Lea pointed to a tall Latino standing to one side of the room.

“Over there is Chino. He came to us one day four years ago...” she looked at the ruggedly handsome Latino.

“My wife and I came here from Mexico about a year before the storm. I figured that I could find work as a mechanic.” he smiled at Waco “I was a chopper pilot for the Mexican army, but my wife testified against some drug lord and they came after her. I was a chopper pilot, but never had a chance to take the tests and classes here in the states, so I worked as an auto mechanic.” he snorted in distain “Then came the storm...I had to kill my pregnant wife when she turned. It seemed that God gave up on the world that day.”

Lea turned back to Waco “As I was going to say, thank you for saving us. We all owe you our lives.”

Dag squeezed through the Brat Pack and stood next to the jean covered Waco. “Yeah, the compound we were at picked up your broadcasts.”

“Must have been atmospheric bounce if you got them within the last year as our main tower came down in a storm and we never got it back up.” she smiled at Dag “Never figured anyone heard us...until Wade showed up in our area. I put everything behind one last plea for help as his men were breaking in...my fault for even suggesting that we try to contact others.”

Carl nodded “Seems they were in the area for a while, but never used the frequency we were on.”

Twig stood there with her hands on her hips and a pouting frown. “And you saved us before I had a chance to find out what they were staying in this area for.”

Dag looked at her “For?”

Waco looked at the tiny lass “They weren’t from this area?”

Twig shrugged “Dunno, the guy that brought my food said they were looking for something to fix...and then there were shots and he ran out locking the door behind him.”

Well,” Dag looked at his friend and mentor “if they weren’t from the area and told Twig they were hanging around...”

Waco nodded “Could be something important.”

Carl looked at the newcomers sadly “Maybe they had something to do with the disappearance of our folks.”

Both men turned to Carl “Folks? People vanished?”

“For quite some time now, could be these raiders had something to do with it.” Lea shrugged “Maybe someday we’ll find out for sure.”

Carl nodded “If we can find out what they needed to fix.”

Twig snorted loudly “Well I was about to find out until he started shooting.”

Waco grinned and winked at Lea “Sorry we came to save ya then.”

Lea rubbed Twig's shoulder and smiled "But then we would have never found Waco and Dag." She began to push the pack out of the room "Now let the gentleman get dressed and we can talk more later."

"Gentleman?" Dag roared with laughter "Guys, this man before you is not a gentleman, nor polite, but I'd ride into hell with my friend Waco..." he frowned "even if he does keep calling me, kid."

Lolli stopped at the door and looked back at Waco.  
"Yeah...I was in the atrium, I saw him operate. I also saw how he didn't even flinch as he pushed his knife into Wade."

"Sorry 'bout that kid, you needn't have seen that part."

Lolli laughed and tossed her golden hair as she spun out of the room.  
"Don't be, somehow I feel much safer with you around...Mr. Death."

Dag looked at Waco with a puzzled, gawking stare as Waco got up and put his jeans on.

"Don't ask kid...don't ask."

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*Chapter 11.*

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The next few days were spent chatting with the Brat Pack, as Lea's father had begun to call them. It seemed that each time the small group of survivors prepared to leave the hospital, another baby was on the way. Of course leaving with small children was out of the question, so finally the well barricaded hospital was decided to become home. Of course the fact that it was a brand new structure that had only partially opened, but it was a FEMA emergency support base. It was sturdier than most buildings and was shielded from radiation should the worst happen; no one planned for, or figured on a zombie apocalypse.

One curious thing Dag and Waco kept catching word of now and then, was something about Lolli's mom and dad had going on in the desert with many of the others. No one wanted to talk about it, but every now and then pieces came out. They'd vanish for a week or more at a time. Some times more adults would go...some never came back. Since the years after the storm, there had been many survivors that found them, but over the years many died due to Rippers, zombies, or zoms as the Pack called them, or natural causes.

About a year and a half ago one of the kids mentioned that about half of the adults had gone out to this mysterious place in the desert for some major work, and never returned. After nearly a month past their return date, another group left and never returned. By the time the last group left, Lea and Carl were put in charge and told not to try to find them if they didn't return...returning is something they never did.

Waco sighed deeply and Dag followed suit as Waco snorted.  
"Just what we needed, another freakin' puzzle."

"They do seem to be hiding something from us Waco, but I don't think it's anything bad."

Waco grinned "Or is that you're feeling something about the little blonde gal Dag? I've seen the way she looked at you...and you her."

"I just don't feel..."

"Relax kid, I think this bunch is aces."

"Who?"

Waco was beginning to feel old again as old slangs he heard his dad use littered his mind. Every time he used some aphorism from the past, he'd get strange looks and he'd realize that anyone born after the storm would have no idea of what he was referring to.  
"You never saw a deck of cards?"

"Nope," Dag looked more puzzled than before "but heard about them. Think some of the folks back at the compound made some a long time ago."

## The Zombie Slayer

“Sorry kid, just another thing I’m going to have to tell you about sometimes.” He nodded to the group of kids that were sitting around various tables eating fresh vegetables as Lea motioned for the two to join her. Waco pulled out a chair at the far end of the table as the lovely brunet smiled in his direction...something that she’d been doing a lot of lately, and it puzzled him to no end.

“We don’t bite you know.” She patted a chair next to her and across from Carl. “We have some things to discuss.”

“Oh?” Waco frowned as he sat “The last time I got talked into helping people out, I wound up getting shot and babysitting a bunch of kids.”

Lolli grinned “Ouch! Guess that would be us?”

Carl nearly choked on his salad. “KIDS! Buddy, this kid can out shoot you, out think you, and sure as hell can...”

Lea patted her brother’s hand and smiled “Somehow Carl...I doubt it.” she smiled sweetly at Waco “Look Waco, you can say no at any time. We aren’t holding you here, not that we would try to...” she looked up and down the rows of tables and her friends “all we ask is that you and Dag hear us out.”

Waco toyed with his plate full of vegetables “Awww...I don’t know...you see...”

“We might be able to kill millions of zombies all at once, that is if Lolli’s summations are correct.”

A chunk of lettuce and part of a radish fell from Dag’s open mouth and Waco’s fork slid across his plate and landed somewhere in the middle of the table as he looked at the lovely woman that sat next to him smiling. She laughed softly. “Somehow I thought that would get your attention. I mean, all Dag has done for the last few days is brag about his friend Waco and all the zombies he’s killed.”

Carl nodded “From what we’ve heard, it would seem that you’ve been fighting some personal war against zombies while the rest of us just kill enough to get to where or what, we need or want.”

Dag laughed “In a little less than a year that I’ve known Waco at the compound, he’s gone out every day. Rain or snow, storm or sun, Waco’s out there stalking and killing zombies. Tom, our leader, told us that Waco has killed over six hundred in the year we knew him. Hell our area is mostly devoid of zombies thanks to...the Zombie Slayer.”

Lolli giggled loudly “The Zombie Slayer?” there were a few more muffled snickers from the other tables.

“That’s what we call him.” Dag proudly proclaimed.

“Jesus kid, will you shut the fuuu...hell up? Let these two tell us what the hell they want from us and we can get on our way.”

It was Lolli that came from the adjoining table and sat between Dag and Carl across from Waco. The lass unrolled a large wad of faded papers and nodded for Chino to sit. “This is the plan my father created for a zombie thumper.”

Waco and Dag looked at the papers and then each other...  
“A zombie what?”

Lolli looked sadly at the men “My mom and dad...you see they had an idea...well mom did.” Lea smiled warmly at the sixteen year old electrical genius and nodded for her to continue “Mom had a theory that the Earth...that’s what they used to call our world you know?” the guys smiled and nodded.

Lolli hesitated, but Carl gave her a little hug as she took a deep breath and smiled. “Sorry, I miss my mom and dad, we all miss our parents. Anyhow, mom said this cloud must have had some sort of parasite living in it.”

Waco looked a bit skeptical “Living in space?”

“Living in space. Mom said there is a lot of things we don’t know or understand about things in space. She said that they must have been some form of living energy as she saw some of the people here in the hospital turn and there was no cloud in here, nor damage to those that turned, other than they became zombies.”

Dag chuckled “Damage? I’d say turning into undead walking zombies is damage.”

Lolli frowned and Dag mouthed the word ‘sorry’ as she reluctantly continued. “I know you saved me...us. Waco, but I didn’t want to tell you this so soon,” she shot a frustrated look in the direction of Lea “but our leaders said we need to trust someone...you...before this is lost to the world.”

Waco leaned back in his chair and groaned “Look kid, we said we’d help, but if we’re gonna hafta pull it outta ya like a damned bad tooth...we’re out.”

Lolli nodded that she understood “Ok here it is, because if we don’t trust someone, we could lose this to people like Wade and his bunch...or Rippers...or zoms...or...”

“Jesus Christ kid!” Waco snorted “Spit it out!”

“Ok, mom noticed that there was something strange about the cloud.”

Waco snorted “Ya think?”

“No...no, you don’t understand Waco,” she smiled softly “mom said that she thought these parasites lived in the space cloud, or maybe the storm hit their home planet. When it did they found it was a better environment for them to live in.”

“Sounds a bit like science fiction,” Dag muttered “I read a lot of old books about planets and stuff.”

Waco frowned at Dag “Christ, if you aren’t interrupting, then the cute kid is stammering and...”

“And you aren’t interrupting?” Lolli grinned as Waco snorted again and leaned back in his chair as Lea and Carl chuckled.

“Look guys, my mother had a theory that the cloud had something in it that those parasites liked, and she thought it might be a way for them to communicate, or maybe travel. Anyhow it hit Earth and the parasites found humans...” the lass looked sadly at the rest “killed them almost instantly. However the cloud left and the parasites were stuck with human hosts. Dad agreed and figured that maybe that really low rumbling sound might be them communicating, but mom said she thought it was the cloud itself that made the rumbles, some natural anomaly but the parasites might gravitate to that sound if we could recreate it.”

Waco rubbed his face with both hands, leaned forward and started fingering the brim on his cowboy hat.

“Ok so let’s say we buy this crap...” he sighed and eased off on glaring at Lolli a bit “so why on Earth would anyone want to call a million zombies, or zoms as you all call ’em?”

Now it was Lea’s turn to sigh “We don’t know for sure Waco. Lolli’s parents and some others worked for something called DARPA and had some sort of top secret thing going somewhere southwest of Alamogordo at some place called White Sands or north of it...we really don’t know.”

Carl nodded “Our parents went too; a lot of them did over the years.”

Lea nodded sadly “But as those adults that stayed to help train us while our some of parents left to work on their project, stayed for good. Many that left never returned, some were killed by zoms, other by Rippers...so new comers were welcomed.”

“There is a ‘but’ in here somewhere I imagine?” Waco asked.

Lea smiled softly “Isn’t there always? Dad was building something that mom kept telling him to be careful around. Several men got really sick putting something up on a big tower in the desert.”

Carl nodded “Their hair fell out, their teeth...” he nodded to the youngster they called Doc “Kirk over there, was training and already a fine doctor, but his parents wouldn’t let him go near those in isolation.”

Chino nodded “I believe it was radiation poisoning, but those that worked on the project kept silent.”

Lea nodded “And when they died, everything in the rooms was taken out and burnt.”

Waco and Chino had a good idea as to what it was they had been working on, and what had happened to the men...and began to understand why the Brat Pack was never told.

“Ok, so what if we say ok? What do you want from us?”

Carl looked at his sister and nodded. Lea glanced at the younger kids that usually hung out together, and made sure they couldn't overhear as they played down the hall. "Dad made one of his thumpers several years ago, a small one, and the zoms were drawn to it."

Carl nodded "That's why all the zoms in the area."

"My brother's right guys, the invention worked like a dream and zoms were drawn to the building downtown. Not just hundreds, but thousands, tens of thousands. Dad surmised that they could feel the vibrations much farther away than they could hear them from the banks of speakers they had put on the building. So one day they cut off the speakers and the zoms still kept coming." she smiled warmly "Mom and dad always worked so well together and soon they had a plan to make a larger thumper...out in the desert so they'd be called away from the city. It worked so well that hordes numbering tens of thousands or more came from all over."

Carl smiled "You see mom and dad decided to use something that would send signals through the earth. Lolli's mom and dad designed it, our parents built it..."

Lea nodded "Dad was right again, the parasites seemed to know which way the signal was coming from and thinking it was the cloud they had lived in and got around in..."

Waco looked up from his now folded hands. "And came to find the cloud...Christ...they want to phone home." That got him several strange looks "Long story, something I remember from my childhood."

"Anyhow..." Lea interrupted "the plan was to set this thumper up in the desert. Our parents would do whatever they were to do, and then we all were going to try to find some place a radio message called Utopia, or Eden, something like that. We had heard rumors of some valley that had rivers and springs, was miles wide and even longer. Survivors had sealed off the one road into it that was high on a mountain side and even had a dam for generating electricity. But we always hear it was called 'Peaceful Valley'.

"Might be more than one valley?" Dag asked more than stated.

Carl shook his head "Lot of valleys in Colorado I guess...but mom and dad never came back from the desert to go, nor did we ever get another radio message from them.

Lolli nodded sadly "My parents neither. Others went, but never came back. Finally Lea and Carl were told to watch over us and the last of the grownups went out to see what happened, to find the rest." she paused and gently laid her hand on Dag's arm "They took the only really good vehicles we had left."

Chino nodded as he stood off to the rear of the group "Did my best fixing what we have, but I seriously doubt that they'd make it to Alamogordo, let alone back. I've been studying the thumper plans and Carl and I were going to take Lolli to see if we could continue on with their parents work."

"How good are you at riding motorcycles Chino?" Dag started to speak, but Waco stopped him.

“I rode for about two years just before I got out of the army. I wanted to come to America and get a job as a chopper pilot, so when I didn’t, being an auto mechanic that could also work on cycles, put me in demand.”

“Gotcha...” Waco looked at Dag “Dag my friend, this trip you don’t take...” he looked around the room to notice every one of the kids were looking at him “nor any of the rest of you. We’ll get what parts we need from all those bikes out front that Wade’s people were riding. We’ll ride hard and fast while Dag strips other usable parts, fixes whatever needs to be, and gets the truck ready to roll to Colorado.

I did notice some hand radios and other assorted radio gear in one of the sidecars of Wade’s bunch.” Waco smiled at Lolli.

“Bet you can make some sort of repair to that shortwave gear, and I saw a signal repeater mixed in as well.”

“But that’ll need power Waco.” Lolli tentatively stated.

“I saw several of your little backup wind generators on the roof, I’ll use one of those. Put the repeater on a pole or tall object and hook up the genny to it.”

Chino grinned “That I can do while you’re setting up the repeater. Who do you think set those generators up?”

Waco looked at the brother and sister that had led the Brat Pack for over a year. “If DARPA was involved, somehow, we could be shot on site.” he teased Chino.

However the Mexican ex-soldier just grinned.

“I think if they were still around, that they’d be here...or the kids would be there. Waco my friend, somehow I think that it’s the zoms that we should be worrying about. If what you saw has arrived where we’re going...”

“Yeah...” Waco snorted “we couldn’t get through with a tank.”

Lolli nodded “The thumper works, but I think the zoms are more or less moving in the direction they heard it last. You see Waco, I think Lea’s dad hooked it up to a wind turbine. If that’s the case, then it could be it only works when the wind blows.”

“Makes sense,” Waco nodded in agreement “You’d want the signal to stop now and then so you could get out of the area and not face a solid wall of zombies...or maybe put in some sort of timer to turn it on and off.”

Chino nodded “Don’t worry kids, we’ll find this mysterious tower and fix whatever needs to be.” The forty plus, Latino looked at Waco “And I know they had a lot of tools there from what the kids tell me.”

Waco sighed “We’ll leave in the morning...” they all got up from the table and the men started back to the rooms they had taken for living quarters. Once they were away from the rest he added “...and hope that we don’t face the same fate as the kid’s parents.”

“That would be bad.” Dag muttered.

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“Yes it would.” Chino chimed in with a half grin.

“Not my time to die.” Waco chuckled “...’least I hope it isn’t, dying would suck.”

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*Chapter 12.*

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Waco retired early and as he laid in bed his mind raced back to the times just after the storm...and his dad.

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In his foggy memory he could hear the echoes of himself screaming “DIE YOU MOTHERS!” as his machete lopped off head after head. On the ground around him lay a dozen or two zombies. No longer was Waco keeping count as the ten year old struggled to keep his arms high enough to swing at the necks of the closest undead, they felt as if they were made of lead.

They had killed his father and now he would make sure none of them ever killed again, never made another orphan. At some point the lad stopped his crying, his anger subsided. That day the lad had become numb to all around him and his only aim in life was killing these things that had taken his dad from him and his friends next door.

Waco was hungry and frightened, but that didn’t stop his killing spree. His arms throbbed with pain, but he kept killing. And when his street was motionless, he moved on to the next, and the next after that.

“That’s Mr. Williams’s house.” he muttered as his machete dragged along the ground “Arms too tired to kill more.” Waco lifted weights with his dad every day since before he could remember. They ran together, played together, and hunted together...the lad was in top shape, but now even though his need to kill zombies still burned deeply within, he knew he had to rest, and more importantly, eat.

The only zombies he could see were to the far end of the block and he figured that they’d still be there after he ate and rested. He wearily climbed the stairs to the front door and peered in through the window to the side of the porch. Lying on the floor with a gun in his hand was Mr. Williams, next to him lay his dead wife, blood had stopped flowing from the little round hole in her head. Even at that young age, Waco knew what had happened.

Using his machete, he smashed the window, slid the blade around the wooden frame until there was no glass left. He smiled as he remembered the time his dad had locked themselves out of their house. His dad broke the rear window and cleared the frame of any glass as he smiled at his son.

“Wouldn’t want you to cut yourself son.” he winked at his son “You’d probably say something that you promised me you wouldn’t say and have to apologize.” Waco smiled as he remembered how much his dad hated cussing.

Waco clambered through the window. He looked down at the bodies to make sure they were not moving and hurried to the kitchen.

As hungry as Waco was, he just couldn’t eat because of the stench, so he packed up what he

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could and left carrying his backpack, at least now he had food...and several rather large butcher knives.

Living in the southern part of the Midwest he didn't have too hard of a winter and decided to stay in one rather nice home with high steel fences, and even a nicer fireplace, the brave lad struggled through his first winter alone. Breaking up furniture, raiding nearby homes for anything wood, he slept huddled next to the fireplace on a mattress he'd pulled from one of the bedrooms. Of course he had to kill the zombie residences at most homes he raided and quickly learned that zombies didn't do two things.

One, they couldn't open door knobs. Two, when they were destroyed, their bodies didn't rot. Waco made several trips to the homes he'd hit before and over the winter they had begun to disintegrate. Not rotting but they just seemed to be slowly vaporizing and turning to dust. This was confirmed the following spring when he returned to his old house and found every zombie that he had slain was nearly dissolved, even their bones. Unlike the ones he had slain and the ooze that glopped from them, there was nothing left of that ooze, nor signs that they oozed while they vaporized.

And all that came to Waco's young mind was...

"COOL, no clean up."

The lad had become a silent killer of zombies over the winter and many had fallen before his machete and even greater wrath. With the memory of his dad's smiling face and the times they had together, he had slain every zombie that he'd come across...and the days turned to months, the months to over a year.

Waco had lived on his own until just before his twelfth birthday. He had been moving around town killing every zombie he found. If the packs were too large, he figured out ways to draw a few at a time away and then go after the rest.

The day before his birthday he found a full gasoline tanker truck and knowing there was a huge horde of over one hundred zombies close by, he came up with a plan.

It took Waco nearly two hours to figure out how to hook up the hoses that were stored in the lower compartment of the truck, but he did. He ran some down the street a bit, got on his bicycle and rode through the grasping hands of the horde's edges as he rang his bell and shouted...that got their attention.

It was a long winding street that he led the zombies down, stopping to make sure they all followed...waiting for them to catch up, and then hurrying back toward the tanker.

Finally close enough to the truck where he could see them and they he, Waco peddled as fast as he could, jumped off his bike, and then began opening the valves.

The gasoline gushed out of the end of the hose as the bricks on the end held it down and aimed in the right direction. The horde entered the fuel as it began to puddle at the bottom of the slight hill.

Waco frowned as he could see not all were in and found himself using a phrase his dad had used when he was frustrated...

"Well shit!" and the second it came out he could feel his dad looking down from heaven at him and frowning, he looked skyward "Sorry dad...won't happen again."

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The lad looked at the other valve and opened it and jumped back as he was splashed by the fuel as it flooded the street where he was and began to run down toward the zombies that had started up the slight hill. He picked up his bike and moved half way down the block. Reaching in his backpack he pulled out a road flare...he looked at it and sighed. "Well dad, you taught me how to use this...but not what happens next.

The zombies reached the truck and he dared not let them get out of the flowing fuel, so he struck the flare and threw it as hard as he could...it landed ten yards from the truck. Waco started trying to grab another flare from his backpack as he watched the zombies passing the truck, soaked in fuel. Nearly a dozen of them were walking past and his heart sank...right up until the first one closed on the flare that had fallen short. There were several flashes as the fumes from the approaching horde neared, the burning zombies flailed their arms and staggered in various directions, but not back toward the truck.

Seeing the second flash, Waco's eyes became the size of saucers as he remembered what his dad had told him about gas fumes and how they stayed low to the ground...

"Ohhhh...shiiitttt!" he jumped behind a car sitting in the middle of the road with some poor zombie pawing at the window.

There was an explosion that shook Waco's body so hard he thought he was going to pop. He had rolled slightly when he dove behind the car and now he could see a huge fireball climbing for the white billowy clouds in the sky and feel the tremendous heat.

He rolled to his knees and jumped into a crouched run as he could feel the heat burning his back.

Somehow nearly a block away the fireball had been replaced by a black cloud of smoke from the burning truck and better still, hundreds of now still crispy zombies.

All around as far as he could see laid burning corpses, or a few zombies that were caught on the fringes of the inferno staggering around until they had burnt enough to fall and finally be consumed by the raging conflagration that Waco had unleashed.

"Take that you motherfuckers!" he screamed as he danced up and down in the middle of the street...and then looked to the heavens.

"I'm sorry dad...about the cuss words. I am trying."

The almost twelve year old took one more look at the now still bodies and nodded satisfactorily; he had done well, and did it on his own...and never shed a tear.

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Waco started and his eyes popped open and panic filled him as he felt a body fall against his. His dream gone, his survival kicked in and his hand grasped the throat. His other hand quickly went to the back to grasp whatever clothes he could to rip the body off him by...there were no clothes!

His hand slid up and down the naked back and slowly he realized two soft breasts pressed against his chest.

He struggle to see in what moonlight had filtered into his drape covered window as he released

his grip on the neck. A soft feminine whisper echoed in his ear.

“That’s a hell of a welcome for someone that wants to jump your bones.”

“You’d better be over twenty-one.” Waco chuckled as he pushed her away enough to see who had climbed into bed with him “Jesus...Lea?”

“Who else did you expect?” She replied as she lowered herself back on his chest and nibbled his ear.

“I’m eight years older than you...” he sighed deeply “...and haven’t been with a woman in seven...no eight years.”

There was a soft throaty giggle as her tongue darted around Waco’s ear.  
“Yeah, its been a while for me too.”

Waco tried to resist, Lea was different from women he was used to; the local hookers of various settlements and survivor camps. Mostly the small ones didn’t have hookers or loose women, or they were already taken and Waco never messed with a married woman, though some had thrown themselves at him. He had to stop her, getting involved was not something he wanted.

*“Christ your body is so soft...and warm...”* his mind screamed *“Oh good job of pushing her away!”* “Seriously Lea, I’m not the guy you...”

Her soft finger pressed against his lips, which was quickly followed by her warm lips and Waco was lost in his passion and Lea seemed to be enjoying it even more. Their bodies writhed in heated passion that both had missed for so long, entwined in each other’s arms, the horrors of the world in which they now existed in, vanished; for both it had been a long time since either had thought of anything other than surviving.

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*Chapter 13.*

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The night passed slowly which was just fine for the rugged Waco as the two of them cuddled in the narrow hospital bed. Something within Waco stirred holding Lea in his arms. She had never known the world in which he had a brief ten year glimpse of. Now they lived in a world of moments strung together all in the name of surviving another day. But to Waco somehow...what ate at him? He looked down to see Lea looking back up at him. "I know this is just one of those brief moments, you know, a night to feel like we belong to someone...something..."

Her fingers danced gently along his lips as she snuggled in to his chest. "I figured it would be a shame to waste someone like you out in the desert and never know what you were like in bed."

"Thanks." Waco snorted with a laugh.

"You know what I mean. I saw you looking at me when you didn't think I was watching, I did look at your ass a few times and found myself wondering..."

Waco jerked and sat up nearly spilling Lea from the narrow bed. "Zombies...a lot of them."

"Where?" she sputtered.

Waco crawled out of the bed and pulled back the heavy blanket that covered the window. "Out on the street in front of the drive to here. Guessin' a few hundred all headed southwest like the rest."

Lea licked her lips at the naked Waco standing in the silvery moonlight. The way the light played off his sweat drenched skin. Leaving the blanket pulled back to let the moonlight in, Waco walked over to the small washbasin and wiped his muscular body down. "One thing's for sure Lea, you sure know how to make a guy work up a sweat."

"Ninety degrees at night, you don't need me to work up a sweat." she laughed softly "How the hell did you know about the zoms?" she asked as she slid out of the bed and behind him. She locked her arms about his chest and pressed herself against his back. "But as long as we're both sweating..." she reached around to his front and slid her hand down along his washboard abs until she found what she was after. "Jesus...you didn't need much..."

He spun and picked her up in his arms and tossed the brunette onto the bed as she gave a girlish squeal. He gently laid upon her heaving body and softly kissed her ear. "Other than being a long time," he panted "and having a fantastic body..." he thrust himself into her "if I'm going to die next week, then I have a lot of..." Lea thrust herself upward and

Waco lost all thoughts of anything but pure pleasure.

Her arms wrapped tightly around his neck as a silent scream formed on her lips. This would be a night neither would forget and Waco prayed that he'd live long enough to remember it for many years.

A pinkish-orange sky hinted at another hot sunny day as Lea slowly dressed and Waco tried his best not to watch her nearly skin tight shorts or how her breasts moved hypnotically as she bent to put on her skimpy top. She sat on the bed and looked at the half naked Waco as he snapped his jeans. He frowned as he zipped them up.

"I have one extra pair of these things and they're in worse shape than these." he swore under his breath "Only place that can still make these things is almost a thousand miles northeast of here." he sighed "May never get to see a new pair again figurin' on all the zombies we've seen heading in the direction I have to go."

As Waco looked from the distant window and over to Lea and the tears trickling down her cheeks, he gave her a strange look.

"Ok kid, now don't be trying to get soft on me now. You know if I can take out a butt load of zombies, I gotta try."

"I didn't think...last night...that'd I get...attached to you."

"Attached?" Waco smiled softly "That's a strange way of putting it."

"Ok, then how would you want me to put it?" Lea was angry and Waco was confused "We fucked and that's it? Or...or how about we bumped uglies?"

"Geez Lea, I only..."

The sobbing and irate Lea jumped to her feet and stopped short of the closed door.

"Jesus Christ, Waco we've met and talked...became friends...just because we had sex, do you think..." she clenched her fists and swung them in the air "do you expect me to tell you that I love you or something? That I don't want you to go on the mission I begged you to go on." she spun and ran out of the door.

Waco plopped down on a small chair and sat there for several moments wondering what had just happened. Slowly he got up and as he walked by the mirror he paused momentarily to glance at the puzzled man he saw there looking back at him. He shrugged and nodded his head. There was a loud knock on his door and he jumped. A second later Carl walked in.

"Morning Waco."

"Yeah kid, it's morning."

"Just saw Lea running down the hall crying." he sighed "Look I know she's got this thing for ya and snuck in here last night and I have no problems with that. Aside from that gruffness of yours, you'd be good for her."

"I'm eight years older than she is and not too damned dependable about sticking around in one place."

Carl chuckled “Yeah, that’s what I told her...but then again she never did listen to me. However I never thought she’d be running around crying...what did you say to her?”

Waco rubbed the back of his neck and gave Carl a sheepish look.  
“Damned if I know. Last night was good, this morning was good...”

Carl held up his hands “Whoa, that’s a bit too much information for a brother to hear.”

Waco chuckled “No, I meant us, getting along, talking, not the sex part.”

“Then what happened?”

“Kid...I have no idea. I mentioned zombies, jeans, and she said something weird about how she felt...or something. Next time she was sputtering out words so fast I couldn’t keep up, started with the tears and ran out of the room.”

Carl nodded sadly “Waco, you’re the first man she’s been with since her boyfriend and lover was killed a few years back.”

“Yeah, I remember she said something about that a few days ago.”

“I think she was about seventeen and there were only a few adults left here. We were making most of the decisions and Lea knew we needed supplies. We knew Roswell had supplies, so Lea ordered a mission to get the critical supplies...”

“And her love was killed?”

“Yeah, she and the others had to sit nearby and watch, too many zoms. Took her a couple of years to get over it...him.” Carl smiled at the tall rugged newcomer “We’ve had a few travelers pass through, but she never gave any of them a second look...and then you came along.”

“ME? Christ kid, I’m older than she is and she damned well knew I’d be leaving. She gave us the mission to head out in the desert...and...” Waco looked at Carl “...oh, and most likely die.” Waco sat on the bed.

“So she thinks that she takes a lover, sends him out on a mission, that he...I’m gonna die.”

“Tomas did.”

Waco arose from the bed and snorted “I’m not some fuckin’ guy named Tom.” He grabbed his backpack and headed toward the door, looked up “Sorry dad.”

“Chino and I will head out and do what you all asked. I’ll send Chino back if we live to tell about it. When done, I’ll radio Dag to meet me and we’ll be heading on to other things...you tell Lea that I’m sorry if I upset her wagon.” Waco walked out of the room and headed for the repaired doors that led to the stairway down.

“Women!” he snorted “Can’t understand them, can’t figure them out, and sure as hell can’t think like them.”

The others in the Brat Pack had helped Chino get started with what he had to do to prepare for the journey out in the desert to find this tower and whatever the adults had been working on

for all those years.

The truck had been well packed and whatever supplies they might need had been stowed in the bed. The trailer and cycles had been checked out, extra parts taken from the raider's bikes that Dag figured would work on their machines. Tools, pulleys, other gear and parts shown in Lolli's dad's blueprints had been stored in the rear as well...they were ready. Lolli had already taken some of the radio parts that Wade's bunch had stashed in one of the sidecars, upstairs to fix her shortwave.

Waco had hoped the trip would only be a day there, but that was assuming they didn't run into any of the giant hordes they had witnessed. Finding the tower could take a week or more as its position they didn't have. Even with Chino along and all his qualifications, Waco doubted that they could do what had to be done, but he never went back on his word, nor his mission to rid the world of zombies.

The weary Waco opened the passenger side door of the truck when he heard Lea shout his name. As he turned the beautiful woman slamming into him, wrapped her legs and arms around him, as she kissed him passionately to the giggles of the younger children.

"Lea's got a boyfriend...Lea's got a boyfriend." they chanted as their co-leader clung to Waco.

Slowly she released his lips and leaned into his ear, her warm whisper sobbed "You come back to me you bastard...I love you."

Waco started to open his mouth, but Lea slid off him and dashed back into the hospital sobbing. He started to follow, but feared that if he did their mission might never happen. Carl walked over to him and smiled.

"I'll talk to her."

"Thanks...I can't go after her or..."

Carl nodded "Yeah, I know."

Waco slid into the passenger's seat and looked out the window at Dag and saw him standing there grinning.

"Now I know yer gotta get back safely."

"How's that kid?"

"Cuz...Waco's got a girlfriend...Waco's got a girlfriend."

Waco's hand raised and his middle finger stuck straight up...and then slowly pointed to the road out front of the hospital to Chino who was driving.

"That way..." he looked over to his chuckling new friend "and my personal life is no concern of yours." Waco snorted and leaned back in his seat and slowly looked in the tall side-view mirror, back toward the hospital, to where the woman that had gotten to him emotionally awaited.

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*Chapter 14.*

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They drove in the Tularosa Basin that was much lower than the surrounding terrain and Waco wondered if at some point in history if it may have been an inland sea because of its size. The crude map they had showed they had to turn off into the desert north of Alamogordo and seeing the dust some huge horde that had to be thousands of zombies kicking it up, decided to parallel them southward. In the distance Chino pointed out many more dust clouds scattered over the scenic desert terrain. This made it a bit easier to figure out which way to zig and which way not to zag. As there were many miles in between the clouds, the guys could navigate safely between the hordes. Whatever dust the truck kicked up, the zombies apparently just instinctually figured it was another horde, or so Waco hoped. If Lolli was right about the zombie thumper, these scattered hordes had to be headed in the general direction. Waco wasn't sure how the zombies knew which direction, but it sure seemed to him that every horde or pack was headed in the same general direction...they'd just follow the dust and pray they didn't get trapped between the flood of undead.

The desert was better than Waco had expected as far as being flat and dry, but zigzagging through packs of the undead was causing them to waste too much time and the chance that they'd get hemmed in some place where they couldn't get out, became a nagging problem. Switching off the driving chore, Chino was hanging onto the roll bar in the rear of the truck's bed and keeping an eye out using binoculars as Waco also had to make sure he didn't toss the standing Chino out onto the dusty desert floor. On the other hand, Dag's modifications were working like a charm. A few smaller packs they had to drive through and as zombies reached for the truck fingers and limbs were severed and flew through the air like brief, gory showers.

Chino leaned back to check on the cycles and as he scanned rearward through the binoculars again leaned down and shouted through the sliding rear window. "Waco, small road to the east. Looks to be going up some fairly steep hill. Think we're leaving enough dust so if you do some swerving the cloud should cover our ascent to wherever that road goes. It's near sunset and finding a place for the night might be wise as it seems higher might be safer."

Waco nodded and shouted back "Ok Chino, we have to get the hell out of this area for the night, agreed. If the road's steep enough, the zombies won't climb it very easy." and without hesitation he swung east and toward the road. Thankful the wind was all but nonexistent Waco grinned at the huge dust cloud in the rear view mirror. Shouting for Chino to hang on, he swung the truck in a skidding slide and hit the beginning of the road. About half way up to what appeared to be near the top, Waco was forced to slow down.

“We’re gonna draw zombies if we move faster Chino, the dust is less up here and they might notice us, even with the dull finish of the truck and windows.”

“Si, but zoms don’t usually look up Waco.”

Waco grinned “Until we hit the top and see if this goes anywhere or not, I’d just as soon as not...” the truck topped the hill and they saw a tall chain link fence and gate. There behind the gate was some sort of concrete structure totally surrounded by a well maintained fence...and a high reinforced one at that. Someone had done that reinforcing within the last few years, now the question was, could it have been the Brat Pack’s parents?

Near the top they ran over a steel grating of some kind and the tires barely spanned the bars over the ten foot deep trench. Obviously a zombie deterrent of some kind, Waco was forced to slow even more.

As the road up leveled out there was a large faded sign...

**WARNING: U.S. Government property.**

**KEEP OUT!**

**NO TRESPASSING!**

Chino leaned in and tapped Waco on his shoulder “This must have been one of the bunkers for the atomic testing.”

“No way, too well kept up, too new.”

Chino looked through the binoculars at the surrounding terrain which sat well over one hundred feet higher than the low desert they had been in.

“There’s an old road heading east, but it’s the wrong way from the way we have to go...hmmmm...”

“What?”

“Waco way at the far end of that road, looks like another older fence and gate.” He scanned the entire area along the old main road and saw it was all fenced in from one cliff face to the other.

“Hey! We’re on some sort of fenced in peninsula, maybe there won’t be any zoms in there... Nope, don’t see any breaks in the fenced in areas either and it’s a good mile and a half to the main road.”

Waco pulled close to the twelve foot steel and chain link gate.

“What say we climb on over and see if we can...” there was some sounds of boots clunking over the roof of the cab and in a flash Chino was over the fence, his machete drawn and looking around.

“HEY!” Waco leaned out the window “You dumb shit, what happens if you open the bunker door and...”

Chino leaned into the guard’s booth, there was a metallic pop. The rugged Latino walked over to the gate and pulled it open. He grinned and shouted to Waco...

“Manual release, pull in and we both can check out the bunker.”

Waco grinned and nodded as he pulled the truck through the gate but kept it slowly moving. Chino closed the gate and turned to see Waco kept rolling toward the bunker's door. He nosed the truck at an angle knowing they'd have to open the door of the bunker outward, but only wide enough for one person at a time to get in...or zombie to get out.

As it turned out the bunker was only three rooms, but the strange thing was the bunker had been sealed, yet there was no sign of dust and as Chino pointed out there is always some dust somewhere. This bunker still had its hermetic seals intact and now the question popped up, but by who? This puzzle was soon solved.

In the last room that looked like some sort of bunk room. In one old footlocker Waco found a stack of files and documents.

"Hey Chino?" he raised the arm full of folders up "these look like technical manuals and other crap...diagrams to something."

Chino took the stack and went into the other room and told Waco he'd look through them as Waco made one last check outside to make sure they'd be secure for the night. It took Waco about twenty minutes as he checked everything, including using the binoculars from the top of the single story concrete bunker.

Scanning the area he could see what Chino had seen, but clearer. Someone had not only blocked off the road and gate back on the main road, but they had also taken a backhoe and dug a deep trench across the road. The trench followed a path over to the steep wall that fell down to the lower desert. It was a zombie trap and as it hadn't been filled in by time and blowing sand everything began to fall into place. This had to be some halfway point for the Brat Pack's parents as they worked on whatever they were working on. Zombies would fall into the trench, couldn't climb the walls, and follow it to either end, and fall off, clever.

Waco manually locked the door and opened the sealed air vents as he walked through what used to be some sort of control room. Once fresh air was flowing, he strolled into the next room where Chino was reading through the stack of papers. The older Latino was much smarter than Waco when it came to knowing things from the old world. Their world changed when he was ten, for Chino, his world ended at twenty-five. Now they lived in a much deadlier world in which survival was the top priority.

He knew about choppers and flying them, he knew some mechanics, electronics, and other things that Waco had just heard stories about from the Brat Pack.

He walked into the sleeping quarters and tossed their packs on two beds and grabbed food to take into the room Chino was in. It appeared to be some sort of work area and living space full of tables, chairs and cabinets.

"Well Chino?"

Without looking up the much older Mexican grinned.

"Well kid..." he winked and Waco knew it was a dig at his always calling people kid "it's like this..." he looked at Waco with a beaming smile "I now know what the hell all the secrecy is about."

Waco worked on making dinner and more importantly, coffee. “Ok old man, you talk and I’ll make dinner.”

“Holy Mother of God, Waco...Lolli’s parents made a giant zom caller, she was right! They put it in the tower they told the kids about, hooked it up to a wind generator, a regular generator on the tower, and some sort of controller. It sends signals through the Earth similar to what Lolli told us about...you know the cloud’s rumble. Their theory was right, zombies could feel it more than hear it, as they were parasites of energy and didn’t have ears. The signals are turned on and off regularly as zoms usually keep heading in the direction they were pointed.”

“Yeah, so?”

“This way he could be calling them from...” Chino looked at the ceiling “Jesus five, six hundred miles away, maybe more. If the papers are right, they’ve been calling them for the last...uh...nearly two years.”

“Well that explains the massive hordes we saw.” Waco laid a cup of coffee on the table for Chino and tossed him a sandwich made from...as Waco called it “good old veggies”, no meat. “Christ nothing like wilted lettuce and other crap in this heat.”

Chino laughed as he kept reading while eating “It’s good protein and nutrition, shut up and eat kid.”

“Ha-ha, funny old man. Look...” Waco had trouble swallowing the vegetables and started looking through the cabinets.

“Oh lord, we’ve been saved!”

Chino turned to see Waco holding up a bottle half full of rum. “Got first dips.” he laughed as Waco frowned and tossed him the bottle.

“Keep it Chino.” He chuckled as he produced another full bottle from the same cabinet. “So now their parents spent all this time calling the zombies...what the hell were they gonna do with them now they got them?”

Chino leaned back in his seat and took a long swig of rum. “That my friend is an unanswered question, but there is a note in one folder that said that all the rest of the data was in a bunker near the White Sands Missile Range...the bunker near the tower.”

“Ok, cool! Now we know where.”

“Not cool, White Sands...we’re not really close.”

Chino sat upright and looked at Waco “When you were out and looking around, you used the binocs?”

“Yeah.”

Did you see what looked like a huge mesa to the southwest?" this time he got a nod "Then you saw the Jarilla Mountains. The map shows the tower is about thirty miles west-southwest of that."

"Then that's where we go tomorrow." Waco took a huge slug of rum and kicked his feet up on the table.

"Think ya can get that radio going? I checked the tower and it's ok. I'm figuring we can use it as a relay tower to get hold of the kids, Dag packed a bunch of radio gear in the back of the truck, maybe we take a day or so to fix it and...shit!"

"What amigo?"

"Power," Waco grinned "Dag usually fixes the wind turbines back at the compound." Chino laughed boisterously as Waco frowned "Ok what now?"

"Amigo, who do you think went up on the roof and fixed the turbines when they broke? Lolli was always too busy working on her daddy's theories and no one else likes heights."

Waco took another slug of rum "So it was send up the old guy eh?" Chino winked and nodded as he took another slug of his bottle. They wouldn't get drunk, too much rested on them being sober, but this night was looking a bit better, thanks to a couple bottles of rum.

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*Chapter 15.*

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The next morning the first thing to do was fixing the wind turbine atop the bunker roof and as it turned out it, was just fine. It had been locked so the wind wouldn't wear it out before it was needed, that meant someone had to lock it. It also meant no one ever came back to use it to call the Brat Pack.

The radio wasn't in too bad of a shape considering, but one major burnt out circuit board meant whoever was here last, couldn't have fixed it...however the genius Lolli, had Dag pack several spares her dad kept back at the hospital and within three hours, Chino sat at the radio console and clicked the mike.

"Hey there Lolli, you copy?"

After several more tries a relieved voice replied.

"Are you two ok?" the young blonde asked softly "We were worried...did you find any sign of..."

"Easy kids." Chino said quietly "I know you are all worried, but no, not yet. We found an old bunker that was the one I heard one of your parents mention a few years back. They had locked out the wind turbine and I'm guessing they must have intended to return by way of the Air Force Base west of here instead of back this way."

"But why shut down the relay station?" Carl asked over Lolli's soft voice "Even if they were coming the different route, they..."

"Carl, kids, I don't know why, it's just that we found some old manuals, notes, and other papers that pretty much explain all about the thumper. The notes say the rest of the documents were taken to the bunker near the tower. That's where Waco and I are headed next as soon as we get off the radio..." he chuckled into the mike so the Brat Pack could hear him "and this time we'll leave the relays on so we can talk to you from the tower. There is another relay somewhere near the mountains that rise up out of the basin floor and we'll check that one the way as well," he grinned "assuming the zombies will allow us to."

Lea's musical voice came over the radio.

"Waco, find our parents...no matter...how you find them." The two men looked at one another and nodded sadly as Chino told them they'd try.

Lolli asked "Did you find out what the tower was about at all?"

"Just to support the thumper and something called 'Newt'. Ever hear of your parents talk about it?"

"Sorry, all of us are puzzled too." Lolli muttered over the open mike "Just before the last trip when all the other adults vanished without a trace, mom told me to be good and that they'd

find dad and the rest.” Waco could hear her voice trembling as she spoke and neither man pressed the issue further.

“Well look kids, we have to hit the road. If we can avoid the massive hordes we keep stumbling across, we should arrive just before sundown.”

Waco leaned into the open mike on their end and smiled as if they could see. “Kids, it could take us another day or two if we have to zigzag a lot, so don’t worry if you don’t hear from us.” he chuckled “Hell, we might even have to fix the radio over there too.”

“Waco...” Lea softly spoke “you come back to us, you too Chino. Brat Pack out.”

The guys gave a big sigh and prepared to leave. As Waco finished loading the truck Chino slapped him on the back.

“You know Lea has it big time for you, right? Man we’ve had some nice looking guys come through heading north as they looked for that Utopia, Eden, or whatever they’re calling it now a days. Lea never gave them a second glance.”

“Cept her boyfriend.”

“I meant after her beau. She said that she could never love another man.”

“Love? Ha, she just wanted to...” his face became strangely contorted “nawww, no way. Christ Chino, I’m set in my ways, live to kill those bone-squeakers out there, and sure as hell don’t need some kid eight years younger than me hanging around my neck.”

Chino jumped into the driver’s seat and grinned at the rugged Waco.

“Amigo, who are you trying to convince? I saw the way she looks at you and you her, she’s not here to convince you to not love her, only you can do that.”

Waco propped his feet up on the dash and pulled his cowboy hat over his brow.

“Just shut up and drive old man.” he snorted loudly “Convince myself...shit! Sorry dad.”

“Then what were you doing?”

Waco peeked out from under his brim and frowned “I wish I knew Chino. I can’t expect any woman to come with me, too dangerous. What if I just don’t come back home someday? I couldn’t do that to anyone.”

“Anyone?” Chino grinned.

“Ok then...Lea.” He slid back deeper in the seat and snorted “Happy now?” Chino just grinned as he worked his way back down the dilapidated road back to the desert floor.

Luck was with them for a while and not a zombie was seen, however just before noon, Chino slowed and the napping Waco who had taken the second watch, snapped out of his light slumber.

“What!” he pushed his hat toward the back of his head and rubbed his face vigorously “Is it time to get up momma?”

“Funny Gringo...” Chino’s finger pointed to the west and then swept around to the south, and the east.

That got Waco’s attention as he promptly sat up and stared out the windows. To each direction at varying distances were massive dust clouds. With no wind blowing, the clouds were being carried almost straight up in the desert heat.

Chino muttered softly as if some zombie in the closest horde nearly two miles away might hear him “Look behind us.”

Both men swung in their seats to see out the rear window to see the entire horizon blanketed in one massive dust cloud as many of the hordes had merged.

“Must be millions.”

Waco nodded and gave Chino a wry grin “Yeah, well don’t hit reverse.” and with that slid back into the seat and pulled the hat back over his eyes.

“Wake me in an hour or so...” he snorted a chuckle “and don’t run into any dust clouds.”

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It took another two days for the guys to reach the general area of the tower and it was going to be a real pain in the ass to see as the mirages blurred the distance even with the binoculars. Chino cursed as they drove back and forth across the desert hoping they’d see something other than the massive hordes of undead.

“I should have pressed their parents harder, but even though I’d been with them for years, all they wanted was for me to protect the kids while they were gone.”

“Look Chino, they’d never told you squat for this very reason. I mean, look at us now. They didn’t want you running off and looking for them if anything ever happened, if ya don’t know, you can’t go looking and leave the kids alone.”

Chino grinned “Oh yeah and that’s just working so well now, isn’t it?” he sighed softly “If they had told me, we’d been back by now.”

They stopped to change drivers and as Waco looked around. “Guess they never figured that some old guy and a kid would come along and...” Waco snapped around and pointed off to the south “That it?”

Chino swung the field glasses and a big grin broke out over his face. “Unless someone else built a two hundred foot tower out here in the desert. Jesus, that thing is really built. Christ, it’s built like the Eiffel Tower big steel...” he paused “yup, can see the steel core I read in Lolli’s dad’s notes; that’s where the thumper is and...SHIT!”

“Don’t like shit, oops, or duck...WHAT?”

“Wind turbine is not turning, I know there’s a back-up generator on the tower somewhere, but this long its got to be out of gas, or worse...broken.” He looked over to Waco and pointed toward the tower as a series of small buildings and structures slowly appeared through the wavering heat rising up from the desert floor.

## The Zombie Slayer

As fate smiled once again, with the thumper down the hordes of zombies that were near the tower, simply wandered aimlessly in horde formation, but at a distance.

“I see a few scattered zombies Chino, but looks like most are doing what they do, stick with the pack.”

They slowed down to a crawl and in the extreme heat of mid-afternoon, the guys rolled up their windows. One of the many things that Waco had discovered through the years, was zombies didn't seem to notice slow movement of vehicles or the people within and unless they saw through Dag's tinted glass, they might actually reach the buildings.

Finally sitting low in their seats, they cracked the windows before either one of them passed out. Two hours of what basically became coasting at near idle, they made it through the packs and smaller hordes, and to one building. It had an old faded and sand blasted white sign that simply read 'Command'. Waco grinned “This has to be the one that was mentioned in the notes.”

They had switched off a few times as their hands and legs cramped and now Waco who was driving looked around for some way to get into the main building without being seen and that appeared as a broken window to the rear and between the building behind it, about twenty yards away.

All the buildings were on some sort of stilt system that put them a good four feet off the desert floor. It also meant the windows were higher and easily seen if they climbed into it.

The good thing was the closest horde was a good mile off, the bad, there were at least two dozen zombies wandering around that would have to be dealt with as Waco reminded his new friend.

“If we don't take 'em now and they see us. Hell, they'll pack around the building and most likely draw other packs and then the packs, a horde or two. We'll have to move slow and take them 'em out with as few movements as possible.”

Waco pulled up tight to the window so they could climb out into the truck bed to get in, but first there was one little thing they had to do...

Chino sighed and pulled his machete as Waco did the same. It was them or the zombies, no shooting, no yelling, and worse yet, they couldn't take the chance of moving too fast.

“Slow and easy my friend.” Waco muttered as he slid out the rear window.

Chino slid out the passenger's door and gently closed it.

“Si, slow and easy.” and with his first swing, severed the closest zombie's head from its neck.

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*Chapter 16.*

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The first swing was all it took to get the rest of the wanderers to notice them and after that, severed arms, heads, and other assorted body parts fell like rain. All the time the guys stuck to the rear of the building so there was little chance of a zombie in one of the distant hordes or pack seeing their movements. Both men knew all it would take is for one or two zombies to see them and head in their direction, and others would follow. Chino took the two closest to them as Waco swung from the truck bed, then turned to make sure the glass was completely out of the window pane and reached through pulling one zombie out of the window that had been wandering around in the room and shoved his crowbar into the left eye socket. He tossed the body out of the truck bed and as he stood he swung with his other hand and decapitated the second zombie that had leaned out of the window reaching for him. A quick scan of the room and a glance at Chino to see if he needed help, he didn't. Chino jumped on the bed and grinned as he motioned for Waco to go first.

Waco nodded and climbed through the window as Chino made sure no more zombies were stalking them, and then climbed in after his comrade. The room wasn't too dark as most of the windows had been broken out, had been sandblasted to a frosty transparency through the decades, or just plain filthy, but as least they had light.

They listened and deciding that the other side of the door was quiet, entered slowly to find a hallway lit by skylights down the entire length.

Waco pointed to the ceiling

"Don't think skylights were part of the décor."

"Si Waco," he pointed to one of the open rooms to show him more skylights "someone put a lot of new work in this building." The floor gave a loud groan and both men froze.

"I think that perhaps we should walk near the walls to prevent more noise."

Waco nodded as he peeked through the next door.

"Don't think the undead can see us in here because of the sandblasted windows, most seem intact, some newer than the...hello!"

He pushed open the door he'd been peeking through to show Chino a large center room filled with high filing cabinets and desks scattered about. He climbed atop one desk and stood looking around.

"All clear unless we have a few crawling around on the floor, we're good...let's check this room out."

Chino nodded in agreement and with weapons drawn, they began a methodical search. The room was a good hundred feet square and lined with old aging computers that even Chino hadn't seen.

Rounding one corner of the high partitions, Chino let out a gasp and Waco came running.

## The Zombie Slayer

There were four bodies lying on the floor covered with dust tarps. Chino carefully pulled the tarps back and sighed deeply.

“It’s some of the first group of adults that subsequent parties came looking for. They used to come work in one month shifts on whatever it was they were working on. But there should be more bodies here, I don’t understand...”

Waco tossed his thumb over his shoulder toward the outer wall.

“Might be out there.” he leaned toward the bodies “Hmmm...these were all shot in the head one time, bite mark on two.”

“Waco!” he turned to see Chino pointing to one of the desks and a note on it. He reached down and read:

*“Party three all dead. We found their trucks north of Jarilla looks like they ran into one of the massive hordes we’ve been pulling into the area. Found several of party two, and some of four, wandering around here in the complex, four was here in the building.*

*Radio is down, need to get back for parts, all out here.*

*Jumper is in the box, turbines must have been installed by team four, but generator was out of fuel again.*

*Will set up controls on tower and leave for Holloman AFB in two days. It’s a chance and risky, but we feel that to go back our usual routes, would be far too risky.*

*Lolli baby, if we don’t make it back and you find this...”* Chino pointed to the stains that appeared to be caused by dried tears in the dusty letter.

*“Honey, it’ll be up to you and the others to see if this works and if it does, baby, you have to find someone and let them know.*

*Please God let there still be someone in authority, and tell Lea and Carl to watch over all our children.*

*Love mom.”*

Waco sat on the dusty desk “Jesus.”

“Look Waco, a manual and someone wrote on it...uhhh...Jumper?” he opened the manual and began to read as Waco finished the room check as well as the rest of the building. Upon returning he informed his partner that they were indeed safe for the present, but Chino kept reading.

“Amigo?” Chino looked even more puzzled “It seems Newt, and Jumper is one and the same.” And back to reading he went.

Now and then he’d stop long enough to pour through the pile of folders stacked upon the desk. He’d look through the file and then make a strange hmmm...or ahhhhh, and then go back to reading the manual.

For the next few hours Waco made the rounds as Chino read and studied, and then read some more. Now and then he’d walk over to the front window in the one room that had been sealed off from the rest so he could see out of the broken pane at the huge two hundred foot tower about a half mile away.

It was immense and built of steel. From where he was, appeared to have flights of stairs up to

the top that led to one huge rectangular box that looked like it was also of steel. It sat pointed to the sky, and from what appeared to be the middle platform, there ran a round casing down into the ground... "Gotta be the thumper." Waco muttered as he looked out the windows to the front of the building.

Through his binoculars he could see a pile of covered things sitting beneath the tower and what looked like heavy planks...and a smaller generator that appeared not to have been raised out of the way of the zombies.

Waco walked back into the room with Chino and sat across from him.

"Looks like we're going to have to raise a small generator to the lower platform my friend.

Guessing Lolli's folks had to leave in a hurry, maybe intended to come back. Whatever happened, if we are finishing this, then I want to be up there on one of those platforms when the genny starts. There is a good sized one already up there, not sure why the second one, but I'll bet it's gonna be noisy."

"That and that thumper will probably start back up." Chino reminded him.

"Yeah about that, the turbine isn't moving and I think it's something too big to fix." he shook his head slowly "Not to mention it's about a half mile farther than the tower, out in the middle of those undead bastards that are wondering around out there. No way in hell could we get out there to work on it and expect to get back...assuming that we could fix it to begin with." He chuckled "Oh and by the way, looks like we're going to have to make some sort of winch to get that gear up to the decks. If we time it right, the way those hordes are moving we might be able to idle the truck over to it."

"And get away?"

"Doubt it Chino. Sure, we load the cycles on pointing toward the rear of the trailer so we can leave in a hurry, but..." he hesitated "even if we put the rear gate down, too many zombies would tip us in a heartbeat."

Chino nodded "It has to be done." he pointed to the paperwork on the desk. "Lolli's parent's project...all the kid's parents."

"And?"

"Don't think you'll like it," Chino sighed and kicked his feet up on the desk and leaned back in the old squeaky chair "But first, let's just take it easy while I mull some things over in my head." he grinned at Waco "Why don't you tell me some things about you, how the hell did a ten year old kid survive out there?"

Waco realized his new friend had a lot going on and just needed a break, so he leaned back in his old dusty chair and kicked his feet up as well. He put his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling at the light streaming through the sandblasted skylight, as his mind drifted back through the years, to a time when he was reborn into what he is today.

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*Chapter 17.*

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“Well as I told ya, I survived on my own for nearly two years until my twelfth birthday, more or less. How I got to nearly twelve I couldn’t tell ya, time back then is kind of blurred. Hell back then, my dad’s watch was working, but I rarely looked at it anymore, self-winding you know.” he chuckled “I mean it wasn’t like one of my favorite TV shows was going to come on. Dad never had to tell me that when the sun set I had to be clear of zombies and safe somewhere. One sort of comes to that realization when you see those ripped apart bodies of those that didn’t find safety.”

“I told you all about the tanker explosion during our chats in the hospital, well it seemed that it drew the attention of some old guy that had been surviving in the same area that I had. Oh, I’d seen traces of someone taking food and eventually it became a race to find stores that hadn’t been looted...even found trace of his footprints in the dust at the library where I used to go and take stacks of books to read.” Waco smiled softly “Even returned them when I was done. In case somebody wanted to read them...or so this lonely child hoped.”

His thoughts drifted to a few days after this birthday...or perhaps it was just before, he no longer could remember and that frustrated him to no end. He did remember that he had decided to celebrate it by heading into an area that was heavily populated by the undead.

Waco had taken a small electric cycle from a dealership and using the solar panels at his home, found that he had a silent mode of transportation and now it came in handy for the over confident twelve year old.

He dodged and swerved through wandering packs of zombies before they could hear him coming. Zigzagging left and right, careening through parking lots when the streets were full of ramblers, Waco managed to get within a block of the huge ‘mart’ he remembered his dad took him to. Until now, this had been too far away to attempt...and from the distance he could see the windows remained unbroken and that was a good sign...maybe.

A few more turns, and taking one more hard slide, he swung into the alley behind the mart and stopped next to a tall wooden fence that ran the entire length of the huge chain store. Checking the alley one last time, he squeezed between the chained gate and into the empty area behind the loading docks.

At this point in time Waco was five eleven and a good one seventy with bulging muscles as he had worked out every day like his father had taught him. “We must be strong to survive,” still rang in his ears at least once a day. He strived to be a survivor and he was not going to let his dad down. Waco worshipped his dad and had copied everything he had done, and now it was paying off.

Pulling his machete from behind his backpack, he peeked around the side of the building toward the front...too many zombies. The same was true for the other side and he realized there was no going in the front door. Looking up, he realized the roof was a possibility, but for

now out of the question.

He wandered along the rows of closed steel roll down loading doors and the three steel walk in doors spaced evenly among the others.

As luck had it, the first one he tried opened, he peeped in and saw a huge loading dock with a dozen zombies wandering around in attire fit for those working there.

The first few weren't too hard to take down, but as the rest headed toward him, they bunched together and Waco knew he'd never take them all, so he climbed up on a high stack of boxes, laid on his stomach and swung down on the reaching limbs of the undead that were trying to reach at him. First their limbs were removed and that left their heads vulnerable.

The first six went well, but the seventh took Waco's machete down to the floor as it fell...machete embedded in its head.

The lad cussed leapt to his feet as he began running and jumping along the top of the stacks of near ceiling high boxes. He got nearly half way to the set of doors he had set his aim for and one long leap...landed him in a stack of rotting produce boxes and the squishy boxes collapsed under his weight.

Hitting his head as he hit the floor, Waco kept trying to scream in his own mind to get up and run, but he was stunned. Finally something within him snapped him awake and he realized that not only was he fighting the urge to gag at being covered with two year old rotting produce of various kinds...and the zombies no longer paid attention to him.

Still motionless he allowed his head to slowly move, his eyes to wander. Some of the zombies had started to wander around again, others just stood near the pile of rotting produce and soggy boxes, but they weren't after him. Through his mind he wondered if it was because he barely had moved his eyes...or...

Waco slowly moved his arm to his calf and the slim spike he had made from some steel stock...nothing. The zombies didn't pay any attention. Slowly he got to his feet, the zombies and their white dead eyes looked at him, but made no aggressive moves. He inched away from the pile and toward the door and still nothing. Now the lad knew it had to be the gagging stench from the produce that must be keeping the zombies from smelling him as human...or was it the zombie slime that covered him? Either way he began to realize that if he moved like a zombie, whatever it was, he could get to safety.

His back nudged the swinging door and it opened to his relief. He slowly closed the doors and looked to see as much as he could...his heart sank!

The store had been ransacked, shelves overturned, broken items littered the aisle ways, but his gaze fell on one thing he had not hoped for, but there they were, big as day...bows and arrows. He blocked the door to the loading dock and headed for the sports department. Besides shooting, his dad had taught Waco how to use a bow at a tender age of being able to draw a bow back. First a toy bow, then a bow, and at seven he had a compound bow made for his son. Waco now had a compound bow staring him in the face and two partially full display boxes of arrows. Slightly to the left of the boxes was a quiver and a slow grin appeared.

"I'm getting my machete back." the lad muttered as he ripped the arrows out of the display

## The Zombie Slayer

case and shoved them into the quiver he attached to his belt so they hung just below his waist and slightly to his back.

Seeing one zombie half the store away he sighted, drew the bow, and fired. The zombie slowly turned to look at the lad that had buried the arrow in his shoulder. The second arrow found its head as the zombie fell into a heap on the floor.

Waco ran and got the arrows and then proceeded to move up and down each aisle dispatching every rambler in the store.

He made sure that he stayed away from the front of the store where the glass doors and windows were, and then turned his attention back to the loading docks and his machete. One more sweep of the store he smiled as he checked the dock doors and locked each one. Then carefully timing the packs walking in the parking lot out front, he found the manual locks and locked himself inside.

With the bow, the loading area was easily cleared and his machete returned to the leather scabbard attached to the other side of his belt.

Satisfied that he was safe by making one more sweep of the entire store, Waco turned his attention to his cycle out back. Another quick peek around each corner assured him of at least five minutes to work. He climbed the side of the fence and checked the alley, clear! He gave a soft sigh knowing he had time...

The tool department provided him with a large set of bolt cutters and he went to remove the chain from the gate. Pushing his cycle inside he closed the gate took a padlock he brought from inside, he relocked the chain, but left the lock unlocked for easy retreat. He had opened one door next to a ramp so he could drive the bike in, but the cycle didn't start...it was dead.

"Oh man, dad would be pissed that I forgot to charge it last night." he lamented softly. Not wanting to push it up the ramp, he leaned it next to the loading dock and locked himself in the mart for the night.

Just knowing that somewhere in the store there had to be some hard candy, he searched until he began to feel strange and realized that he had to clean himself off. Somewhere in the back of his mind he remembered his dad telling him about fermentation...some of the produce he was soaked in, was still sopping wet and so were his clothes. In two years the center of the stack of boxes must have been still in the process of decomposing...fermenting, and now he was getting the effects of the alcoholic vapors.

"Good thing I didn't strike a match." The lad chuckled as he dashed around the store.

Waco ran to the clothing section of the store and stripped. Using some clothes he wiped himself as best he could, but he still felt lightheaded. The butt-naked lad ran to the food section and found some scattered water bottles and dish soap...instant bath.

A trip back to men's clothing he found some black jeans, a denim shirt and a leather vest...and a cowboy hat.

"Hi dad." he muttered as he looked in the mirror "This is what you always wore." A tear formed in his eye as he tried not to think about his father again, not now. Remembering his birthday he went back to looking for a birthday treat.

Whoever had looted this store had missed a lot of things and Waco figured that there couldn't have been many of them. Obviously there had been a furious fight due to the skeletons and mummified zombie bodies scattered around. This also meant there should be enough for him to pack up.

He packed up a suitcase full of the exact same clothes he was wearing and in the next few sizes as he figured he was still a growing boy. Tools and other items he figured that he'd need, he piled all up behind one of the roll up doors back on the loading dock.

He now had canned and packaged food, water, and medical supplies, this store had been a boon to him. The docks had been overlooked either because of the zombies, or the last looters died before getting to them, he didn't really care.

As Waco settled in for the night a sad reality started to form in his mind...he had to leave his home...his town. This was it, there were no more stores, no more safe places and he could not stay here. It seemed that zombies tended to migrate and being close to a large city, more and more seemed to be headed in his direction. He knew they were coming, he had scouted, his dad had taught him well.

In the morning he'd figure out a way to get to a car and...it hit him! Waco leapt to his feet and began running through the store finding all the skeletons. He frantically went through their pockets and when he returned to the place he had bedded down for the night, he had three sets of keys.

This store had been a death trap for some, but now became hope for the young lad of twelve. "At least I think I'm twelve by now." He looked at the broken watch on his wrist that his dad had given him and smiled as he slowly pulled it off and laid it on the floor.

There were watches in the case near him, but he had no idea what time it was, nor day...he frowned "Or month, for sure." he swore under his breath.

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The following morning the well-rested Waco peeked out the front door to see the usual amount of zombies wandering through the parking lot, now if just one of the two key fobs would work, assuming the batteries were still juiced up.

He pressed the first button and the lights flashed on a small compact car that had obviously been in a wreck before the storm. It was battered and unrepaired...

"Naw."

The second button was pressed and from the side of the parking lot lights flashed and a horn blew twice. The zombies began wandering toward the car, and Waco grinned as he repeated it several times. Now with the zombies off to one side of the lot, he could sneak out the door and find the car that had no fob on it.

In his mind he ran through what he had learned and his father told him. Older model no doubt, but how old? He looked at the key and noticed the Chevy emblem.

"Cool, an older Chevy." he slid out the door and keeping low he crossed the walkway and into the rows of vehicles. Moving past non-Chevys he tried the door lock, and another, and another.

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Now and then he'd push the other fob button to get the car to blow its horn to keep the zombies on the other side, and the ones that had started wandering away, ambled back to the car.

There were about fifty cars in the lot...half Chevys and every one of them the key didn't work. The frustrated Waco began to head into the store when he checked to see where the zombies were. Sitting right next to the car he'd been using for bait...sat a big Chevy truck! "Great Waco," he muttered under his breath "the last Chevy in the lot and you had to draw the zombies straight to it."

Ducking to the far corner of the building Waco ran around the back and stood on the other side and shouted, banged a steel pipe on the ground and soon had thirty or more zombies rambling toward him. It took almost fifteen minutes, but he finally managed to get them to his side of the building's rear. Repeating the noise, he led them to him around the rear of the building and to the far side. He stopped on the far side from where he had started and banged the pipe again until he guessed that every zombie had turned the rear corner and were headed toward him.

He spun and dashed to the front of the store and prayed no more had wandered onto the lot, it was clear...and better yet the key fit the truck

Waco almost shouted with glee as he slipped into the driver's seat and turned the engine over. Not only did it start, but it was relatively quiet, this was good he smiled as he shoved it in gear. Swinging around to the rear again he blew the horn to get the undead to follow him once more and led them to the very front of the parking lot, but noticed a strange thing.

While he was rolling along idling as he waited for the zombies that were following him to catch up, two zombies that he didn't see walked out between two vans and they didn't seem to notice him as the truck slowly rolled by. Of course he dared not move until they passed, but this thing he would remember for the rest of his life and this little trick would save him many times in the future.

Now clear of the zombies, he did a slow turn and headed back toward the rear of the building as the pack he had gathered emerged from the opposite side.

Waco winced as he hit the loading dock much harder than he had intended as he backed in. He jumped out and dashed into the building and began carrying the goods out of the entry door and tossed them into the truck's bed.

Remembering how his dad let him drive on the back roads in their truck, he formed a wry little smile, his dad had really taught him what he needed to survive.

He tossed the last suitcase and trash bag full of things in the bed...

"Oh shit, the bow!" he looked up to the sky "Sorry dad didn't mean to curse."

A quick run through the store he emerged to find the rear of the building...to find it full of wandering undead, they had heard the crash of steel bumper against the concrete. Now here he stood with his bow and arrows and a good two dozen zombies looking at him, and he had fewer than a dozen arrows.

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*Chapter 18.*

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Waco took a quick glance at the closed truck door and figured that he'd never squeeze through the tight quarters between the door and the side of the ramp and wished that he'd taken the time to give himself more maneuvering room. Then the reality hit him, if he went back inside, he'd be stuck there for days, or even weeks...maybe forever. Never taking his eyes off the approaching pack of undead, he dropped his shoulder pack and raised the bow to aim at the closest zombie, he loosed the arrow... "BANG!" the zombie dropped.

Waco looked at his bow and the arrow stuck in the fence behind the zombie; it had fallen before the arrow reached the target, no it's head had exploded and the arrow went through the glob of brain matter and broken skull. He looked back around toward the fence and alley only to hear the sounds of a machine gun and a glance back to see the zombies doing a macabre dance as they slowly burst into red spray in the morning sun. Something was ripping the zombies apart. Another glance back toward the sounds of the gunfire and he saw a man inside some sort of metal turret firing a .50 caliber machine gun as it peeked over the high fence.

The undead were now really dead as the old man stood upright and glared at the lad. "Jesus Christ kid, you planning to stand there all fuckin' day, or are ya gonna get in yer truck and follow me."

Waco cupped his hands over his mouth and shouted back. "You could be wanting my stuff!"

He swung his .50cal around away from the rear of the store and patted it "Could have cut yer ass in half kid and taken it." he pointed at Waco's truck "Now ya comin' or ya stayin'?"

Waco was flabbergasted and lost for words. All this time, two years and this was the first live human he'd seen. He jumped into this truck...one slow spin of the engine and it was dead.

"Get yer shit and toss it over the fence to me, then git yer ass over here." Waco started grabbing some things, but... "Never mind kid, ya got this trip and one more, get whatcha need. I'm about out of ammo for this baby, and we got company." He pointed to a new pack of undead walking around the far side of the building.

With a suitcase of clothes in each hand and his bow slung over his shoulder, Waco looked to the far end of the store and the endless stream of undead rounding the corner of it and wondered if he had two trips before he was zombie snacks. A quick jump down and he dashed to the fence and tossed each suitcase to the stranger,

followed by the bow. Keeping the quiver on his belt he dashed back to the truck and saw this indeed would be his last trip.

“Water and anything that counts as fuel.” the stranger shouted as Waco threw everything aside. Knowing that the empty five gallon containers had been the first things that people looted, he grabbed the four of the five gallon plastic containers he had found hidden among boxes in the loading dock. As he hit the end of the ramp a zombie appeared and without a pause, Waco ripped an arrow from his quiver and shoved it into the eye socket of the zombie’s dead white eye.

He never dropped the two cans in his one arm, and now with the other’s closing fast, he recovered his arrow, stoop and managed to grasp on to the two that had fallen as ran to the fence.

As he neared, he threw one to the stranger who caught it and pushed it down somewhere Waco couldn’t see. Another two steps and the second can flew, number three followed as both vanished over the fence. A quick look behind him, he knew it was him or taking time to toss the fourth container...the fourth fell to the ground as Waco kept running.

The high wooden fence now obscured the stranger as he ran and Waco prayed that he would still be there...and took a huge leap at the top of the fence. He slammed into the wood and as his foot slipped his head smacked the top support and one hand slipped off.

As he felt his fingers slipping there was a tight grasping hand on his wrist...and then another hand reached over for him to grab.

Waco glanced back to see at least fifty zombies within ten yards of him. Six got close enough to grasp at his legs as the stranger pulled him over onto his truck wedged tightly against the fence.

“Hey, this isn’t a truck.” Waco muttered.

“No shit kid...it’s an armored car. Hell, I used to haul millions in this, now I haul my precious ass around in it.” he chuckled as he pointed down to the hatch in the roof “Made the turret myself, hatch too.”

He looked at the lad as he struggled to get to his feet...and the worried looks when he saw the three dozen or so zombies that surrounded them.

“Come on in the turret and climb down, pull the hatch shut behind ya kid, and we’ll head on out of here...k?”

Waco didn’t say a word. He clambered over the steel sides of the turret that had a tubular steel ring running completely around it which allowed the .50 to ride on that rail to shoot in any direction.

“Cool.” Waco muttered and into the hatch he jumped making sure it was tightly closed behind him. The steel had been cut to allow access to the driver’s compartment and once closed there were two heavy steel ‘dogs’ to lock the hatch into place. The old man had already taken his seat and patted the passenger’s seat.

“Have a seat kid and buckle in. Found out that if we go real slow, they don’t pay much attention and my windows have a tint in them so the slimy bastards can’t see in.” he grinned wryly “Got window shades for night too, filtered ventilation...fuckin’ air conditioning don’t

work no more.” He cranked the engine and it purred to life and Waco thought he’d cry out of happiness.

The armored car began to roll forward and over whatever zombie happened to be in the way either moved or met the tires of the multi-ton vehicle.

“Armored underneath too kid, no chance of them fuckin’ up the axles or brake lines.” He laughed sadistically as several zombies ‘popped’ under the tires.

“God I hate those fuckers...” he looked over to Waco “name’s Gus...guess last names don’t count for much no more do they kid?”

“Waco.” he said quietly as he looked at the grasping hands out side of his door.

“Wacko? What the fuck kind of name is...”

“WACO!” the lad turned and frowned.

“Sorry kid, had to snap ya out of it, you were lookin’ a bit pale. So Waco, been lookin’ fer ya.”

“Me?”

“No, that other fuckin’ kid sitting next to ya.” Gus laughed “Yeah, you, I’ve been watching ya for a while now darting in and out of the same places I did. Never more than a glimpse, but the closest I ever got was leaving ya a note at the library.”

Gus smiled as he pulled out onto the road leaving a trail of broken and crushed zombies behind him.

“Saw the Happy Birthday message you wrote for yourself and am thinkin’ yer daddy and mommy would be damned proud of ya for continuing yer education...guessing yer up to what...first year of college now?”

“How...I mean what...uh, no, when...”

Gus roared with laughter “I left ya a few notes at the library with my location, but ya never came to where I was.”

“Never saw notes.”

“On the backboard in the children’s room where you worked out all your math problems.”

It was Waco’s turn to laugh “I stopped going down there after basic math. I wanted to learn stuff, but figured mechanics and electrical stuff, would get me further these days, so I never went back down to the children’s room...not for months.”

Gus grinned “And I thought it was ‘cuz I didn’t use deodorant.” a sad look crossed his face as he swung up onto the expressway ramp. “Can’t go back to...”

“Yeah, I know Gus, the zombies coming from Fowlerville, looked like fifty thousand or more. That’s why I came this far away from my home. Saw them from the water tower I used to climb once a week to see where the main bodies were located.”

## The Zombie Slayer

“So that’s where I lost ya...twice,” he looked at the lad “Tried to follow ya as I said, lost ya both times near the park.”

“Went to check horde locations.” The lad looked at the old man with his gray ponytail pulled neatly through his old worn blue baseball cap that had a huge darker blue, old English ‘D’ embroidered on the front. Gus was thin, but muscular and Waco guessed was better educated than he let on or appeared to be.

One thing Waco knew, this guy could sure scare the hell out of anyone that was riding with him. This happened time and time again as Gus slammed one car or another out of their way. “Old ZWAC ain’t gonna be hurt by the cars,” he muttered “gotta watch the bigger trucks though.”

“ZWAC?” Waco looked at old Gus who never looked away from the road ahead.

“Zombie Whacking Armored Car...ZWAC.”

Waco snorted a half laugh “Oh...ZWAC, gotcha.”

It was close to twenty-three miles to the next town and the armored car that Gus called ZWAC, was making damned good time. Gus slammed into cars at twenty miles an hour and although bone jarring, ZWAC flipped them out of the way as if they were made from cardboard, and the double safety harnesses kept them in place.

Now and then he’d slow to push something larger out of the way...or giddily giggle as he crushed zombies by the handfuls. But strangely Waco didn’t worry about Gus; Gus seemed to be truthful to a fault.

“Don’t worry kid,” he winked at Waco “I might be a little crazy...but I’m not insane.” he slammed into a half dozen zombies and crushed them against the concrete medium barrier with a sickening squish “Ok...maybe a little insane.”

Waco slid back into the seat and kicked his long legs up onto the dash and pulled his cowboy hat down on his brow.

“Insane helps these days.” he snorted in reply.

Gus turned slightly to the muscular lad sitting next to him and grinned. “Ya know kid, I think you and me are going to git along just fine.”

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*Chapter 19.*

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Waco and Gus rode together for years and would move to a new town once the zombies got too heavy or they raided what supplies they could. As they soon discovered other survivors had been scrounging as well, but sadly they rarely found any. The ones they did find were usually hostile or were terrified of strangers, so they'd leave...or fight to leave. Now and then they'd run across other small communities, some friendly, some not so friendly. But there were two smaller groups that mentioned some place out west that had a safe valley that they called Utopia, or Eden, but both men shrugged it off as nonsense.

By the time Waco reached his eighteenth birthday, Gus had figured that the lad had killed well over a thousand of the undead, and that was just since they had met. He had thought himself mad at times, but this lad seemed to be driven by the number of undead, that he put down.

Now standing six, foot four, and one seventy of pure zombie hating muscle, Waco dwarfed Gus, and the old grizzled mechanic and ex-armored guard still called Waco...kid.

By the time Waco had reached twenty-five, even the handsome zombie stalker had lost count, but not the passion. Not that he ever had counted, as long as the zombies were destroyed for good he was happy. Waco had also added to his arsenal of weapons. As the old man taught him what he didn't know, the blond crafted a longer, thinner, machete.

His second weapon was what he called his spike, but in reality was a twelve inch piece of stainless steel stock that tapered to a point on one end and a 'T' handle on the other. The 'T' handle allowed him to push the dagger deep into a zombie's skull and allow him to pull it out, and the round point always came out without binding.

Waco barely used his guns anymore, nor could Gus use his .50 as the last two armories had no cartridges for it. Of course they both carried knives and daggers, which had become indispensable for killing silently.

They had worked their way south along the Atlantic seaboard, and then back northward toward Tennessee. Gus had some major repairs to do and pointed to the map that they had been going by. He pointed at an old tattered road map.

"See here...some sort of military base kid. Hell, even if the damned thing was looted there still should be plenty of shit around to fix this creaky old bastard." he shifted the gears to slow and wished that he still had the automatic transmission that he burnt out a thousand miles ago.

"Can't make it out, maps too filthy...but can see the base and it looks big." Onward through Tennessee they traveled...and prayed their transmission would last to their destination.

Nearly a week later Waco was sitting in the passenger's seat with his feet on the dash and his hat pulled down over his eyes. Gus grinned...

"We're close."

“If ya say so Gus...now when you said ‘enough stuff to fix the old bastard’, you were talking about ZWAC and not you...right?”

Gus laughed and shoved his middle finger under Waco’s chin to make sure he saw it. “Smart mouthed kid...oughta turn ya over...” the ZWAC came to an abrupt halt and Waco sat up to see what was with his old friend. “Holy shit kid...I...know what...dammmmmnnnn.”

Waco looked at the old man as if he was crazy but Gus just grinned and slowly pulled up to the gate. Waco got out and shouted back that it was obvious that someone had put up on hell of a barricade a long time ago.

“Don’t see anyone...WAIT...yeah, a few rambler in uniform.” he pointed to his left “There’s a gate big enough for the ZWAC over there, Gus. Looks like it’s just locked.” Before Gus could tell him to forget it, Waco was over the barricade and over to a side gate and pushed it open with little effort.

Gus slowly drove through as Waco checked for anything sneaking up on them. There was little notice as they were well away from the zombies and behind rows of military buildings that hid the side gate.

Once closed Waco jumped back in and Gus proceeded to make a slow cruise of the huge facility. Now and then there would be a crunch as some rambler fell to the multi-ton ZWAC and paid the price.

Most of the time the zombies just tried to paw at the sides of the old armored car, but seemed to lose interest when they couldn’t get in and it left them behind.

“Well kid, if this thing dies now, you know we’re screwed.”

Waco grinned at the old man and chuckled “Nawwww, you’re screwed old man, I can out run ya.” Again Waco got Gus’s finger proudly displayed in front of his face.

Waco and Gus had devised a standard procedure for getting where they wanted to go. Once they found a series of buildings that were obviously the motor pool, Gus stepped up the speed and blew his horn. The trailing zombies fell right in behind Gus as they always seemed to do as the ZWAC led them to the other side of the large base.

Once there, Waco opened the gate they had passed and they led them out and a good mile down the road, before swinging around and locking the gate behind them.

“Well kid...that oughta cut the interruptions down.” Gus grinned as he pulled to the motor pool gate to see no signs of zombies inside the chain link fence.

After Waco climbed over and opened the gate that had been locked from the inside, they knew why there were no zombies...there were twenty-three bodies lying neatly side by side, each with one bullet hole in their heads. A quick search for parts, they found another seven bodies scattered throughout the motor pool.

“Guessin’ the ones on the ground are rambler the others killed. Whole area is concrete, couldn’t bury them.”

Waco nodded “So they stacked them together and...what, shot themselves?”

“Doubt it kid...by the looks of them, I’d say they probably were starving. Trapped in here and no way to get out...bang!” he put his fingers in the shape of a gun and pointed at his head.

“Why didn’t they run for it? I mean, Christ Gus, they have a freakin’ tank, armored vehicles...”

“Run where kid? Maybe they figured they were the military and they could see their comrades walking around...out there.” Gus looked sadly at the few remaining walking dead rambling around outside the motor pool fence “These were the people that were supposed to save us.”

Waco tossed Gus a wrench “So you said you knew this place?”

Gus laughed “Fix the goddamned truck first and I’ll show ya.”

“Where are we anyhow Gus, still Tennessee?”

Gus just smiled wryly “A bit north kid, just a bit north.” he chuckled and began to work on their old ZWAC “Crawl back up there and let me know what you see.”

Waco stood atop an old military truck’s roof and using the binoculars shouted back down to the old man “Hey Gus...I see some old brick building way out in the distance...uh...it has a fence around it and all open ground. Don’t see any stumblers or nothin’ only see one road.”

Gus chuckled and kept working as he recalled his friend to give him a hand. Three hours more and Waco was amazed what the two of them had accomplished. A new radiator from a deuce and a half truck, new skid plate under the engine that had been worn thin from crushing the undead underneath it for years, reinforcing their large steel bumper, and most importantly, they replaced their radio with a military multi-band short wave that could reach everywhere on Earth if the conditions were right.

They re-sharpened the front bumper that had been dulled by hacking zombies in half before they ran over them, and pushing vehicles out of the way.

Now driving through the gate Gus made sure it was working properly as he blasted through the few that had gathered to investigate what all the banging and grinding was all about.

Parts of bodies flew over the high hood of the ZWAC and loud crunches could be heard as the rest of the bodies tumbled underneath.

Gus puzzled Waco as he turned toward the building that Waco had seen earlier and away from the gate they had come through. Zigzagging through the streets of the base they crushed nearly a dozen more zombies until Gus stopped facing the chain link gate of the cleared area beyond.

Without power it took some effort to get the gate open and once through, closed, but he drove right up to the loading dock and they got out.

Inside was a different story as they stepped over several partially eaten bodies and slammed their weapons into the heads of those left stumbling throughout the building.

“Well crap kid...” Gus sighed as he pointed to a huge steel door that had been cut through with a torch and the tanks of the torch sitting just within.

Beyond that was an elevator and prying the doors apart Waco grasped his longtime friend's arm.

"Whoa...I'm not climbing down there Gus. I mean shit, we don't..."

Gus patted Waco on the shoulder, stepped onto the service ladder coming out of the concrete wall and vanished into the darkness.

"I gotta know kid, I gotta know."

Waco watched as Gus's flashlight beam got smaller and followed him into the shaft with a huge resigned sigh. At the bottom he found that Gus had already pried the door open and walked out to...

"Jesus Christ Gus...is that what I think it is?" the slack jawed young man stood there stunned.

"Well kid, welcome to the United States gold depository of Fort Knox." There in the flickering flares that Gus had thrown were mountains of gold and it went on all the way back into the shadows.

Gus grinned in the red light from the flares.

"Had to know, kid...had to see it." he slowly sank to a squatting position as he stared at the pallets of gold bullion "I had to see it...just once."

Waco looked around "Looks like someone got in here at some point, and left?" which came out as a question, rather than a statement.

"Why?" he slowly got to his feet as one flare burnt out "Why take it kid? Hell, that shit is heavy...and pretty much useless now-a-days. I think someone was just like me..." in the red light he winked at Waco. Slowly he turned as the last flare faded and flickered back into darkness and with a flick of his flashlight, began climbing back to the main floor and sunlight.

As they climbed back in the ZWAC Waco frowned "So we did that just so you could see that useless shit?"

Gus shifted it into gear and chuckled "If you were a bit older kid, you'd get it." Another chuckle and Gus began to head for the gate and the puzzled Waco gave him another strange look when Gus insisted they take the time to close the door behind them.

Gus looked back into the rear view mirror and smiled with a distant look on his face.

"Let's leave it for the next guy that comes along kid."

"I don't understand Gus."

"I know you don't kid, back then I guess everyone wanted at least five minutes alone in that vault back there...lot of gold."

"But you didn't take any." Waco replied with a confused snort.

Gus simply smiled "Yeah kid, but I saw it...I saw it."

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*Chapter 20.*

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Where they were headed neither knew once leaving Fort Knox, however that quickly changed as Gus played with their new radio while Waco drove. There was a lot of static, and then clear as a bell...

“Can anyone hear us?” a woman’s voice pleaded “Please answer if you can hear us. We are on the Ohio, Kentucky border. We don’t know exactly where, but on the old I-75.”

Gus keyed the mike “Lady, if you’re right on the border then we’re about an hour away.”

“Thank God!” she nearly shouted in her mike as the sound doubled and Gus had to turn their radio down.

“Hey where ya at and are there more of ya?” he replied.

“There are seven of us...we saw a farm about sundown last night and drove to it, you can see it from the highway. There’s an exit to the west and we’re just off that, keep your eyes open and look for smoke, we’re using a coal stove and will toss some old shoes on the fire.” There was a pause as it sounded as if someone added something for her to say in the background.

“We’re surrounded by about seventy zombies...they came in the night...please can you help? My friends said to ask you if you could either kill them or draw them off, there is only one road out of here and going across the fields is out of the question,” the signal began to fade “much too muddy to get out that way.”

“We’re on the way lady, hang in there.” Gus looked at Waco “Well?”

“I agree Gus, twenty years after shit hit the fan, who the hell traps themselves in that way and has survived this long.” Waco shrugged “Hell we know better...I knew better before we even met and I was twelve.”

Gus grinned “So we say fuc...”

“Can’t Gus and you know it. Christ, they could be from some place that’s been overrun and not used to being on the road.”

“Guess I could radio them and ask if they are some bad guys leading us into a trap.”

Waco snorted “Yeah, tip’ em off, right!”

It took a while to get to the expressway near the border with cars still being the major slowing factor and a few dozen zombies along the way. But even the determined Waco didn’t stop to kill them...at least what he couldn’t crush beneath his wheels.

Just after noon with the sun still high in the sky, Waco who was now watching through binoculars from the turret of the ZWAC kicked the steel wall to the driver's compartment and Gus came to a slow stop. Waco slid down and sat in the passenger's seat frowning and cussing furiously.

"Christ Gus...those fuc..." he looked to the sky "sorry dad...those people, sure enough have pulled into a farm with one road out. High grass and still can see huge puddles, large wet areas, and" he snorted a laugh "zombies stuck in knee deep mud. Gus, it looks legit. I looked around and there are two 4x4s next to the house, but closer to two hundred zombies 'tween them and the road."

"So we go and kill zombies, I mean swappin' that .50 out for that mini gun we got from the base and a truck load of ammo." Gus grinned gleefully "God how I want to shoot something up."

"Look Gus, with the redesigned turret, no one can see the mini and perhaps we should keep it that way. How about we take that stretch about a mile away from the farm and blow the horn, hell if we can lead those zombies off into the fields they'll sink to their knees and those people can drive out. Maybe the sun will dry the mud before they get out and...let 'em rot in the fields. Hell, maybe I'll come back here and use that old harvester and mow me some zombie heads."

Gus shrugged as Waco was always better at planning these things out and he was getting older. He shifted into gear and drove down the exit and over to a parallel road and blew the horn.

Within seconds some of the undead horde began moving toward the sound and Waco standing atop the ZWAC waving a white sheet. Soon the entire horde was following the rest out into the muddy fields. As soon as some got stuck, others would crawl over the rest and it would have been comical had it not been what it was.

Gus reached for the radio, but Waco shouted down to him that both trucks were on the move. "They were watchin' Gus. Here they come...and fast!"

With hundreds of zombies out in the muddy fields Gus swung the ZWAC around and after nearly sliding off the slippery shoulder of the road, headed toward the expressway ramp headed back south.

The mysterious humans were already ahead of them and moving as fast as they could in the southbound lanes.

"What the fuck are they running from us for?" Gus sputtered out "Talk about ungrateful."

"Maybe we scared them seein' how we're driving an armored car with a turret on top?"

"Yeah, maybe kid." Before Gus could say more he skidded to a stop and Waco stood up in the turret.

There in the road ahead were the two trucks blocked by a good half dozen cars that had most likely crashed the day of the storm. Now the rusted hulks blocked the trucks escape and there in the middle of the road stood three women with their hands up.

"Keep down kid," Gus shouted back to Waco "they said seven, I see three...hello!"

From the trucks walked two more women helping a third between them and a fourth stood in front of the three newcomers.

Gus pulled to about twenty yards of them and smiled as he climbed out of the cab. He shouted to Waco “Goddammit kid lookie that, seven pretty gals in short cutoffs...blouses half undone, looks like we lucked out this time.”

Waco stood and waved at the women as he shouted back to his friend “Hey...don’t give yer self a heart attack old man.”

Gus got to within about ten yards of the various aged women and waved as he shouted and smiled.

“Hi! Hey, there ladies, we aren’t gonna hurt you, matter of fact...”

The tall redhead standing in front of the second three women bent at the waist and covered her ears as the one that appeared to be wounded grasped the trigger of the AK-47 with a fifty round magazine on it. The others all drew weapons and spread out to form a line of fire.

Gus took several hits and staggered back as the rest turned their fire on the ducking Waco in the ZWAC.

Waco saw his friend fall and roll behind one of the old rusted hulks and he didn’t even try to remove the turrets tarp that covered the mini gun.

Fire erupted through the tarp and tracers flashed in the afternoon sun. The ground all around the women became a hailstorm of lead, concrete, and bits of rusted metal.

Some tried to hide behind the vehicles, but at that range they would have needed a tank. The tall blond in cutoffs was now cut off at the waist as Waco screamed at the top of his lungs as four more fell.

As the mini coasted to a stop as a red mist wafted on the afternoon breeze as Waco pulled his sidearm, but there was no need. Seven bodies laid upon the cracked and chipped concrete that ran red with the last trickles of their blood.

Waco jumped out of the turret and dashed over the roof of the cab and leapt onto the ground to see Gus pulling himself along the ground as he left a trail of blood behind him.

Waco slid on his knees and ignored the burning pain as his knees were ground by the weathered concrete, getting to his friend and mentor was the only thing driving him.

Gus rolled over on his back as Waco cradled his head, four holes were scattered throughout Gus’s abdomen and another in his left thigh. Waco knew as they barely seeped, Gus was not long for this world.

As blood trickled from his mouth he rolled his head to look at the dead women.

“Jesus Christ, kid...what a waste of good women...” he looked back to his friend and the man he thought of as a son “Make sure those bitches have a hole in their heads...” he coughed up blood “wouldn’t want them to fuck up some other guy after we killed them.” he looked up at Waco and grinned “...put one in mine too kid, don’t fancy the idea...of...” his eyes went blank and his head rolled to one side as tears ran from Waco’s cheeks.

Waco started to say something, but saw two of the women, one struggling to get to her feet another already rambling toward him, and a third that had been cut in half by the mini dragging

herself towards him.

Waco slowly got to his feet and walked over to the first and ended her crawl, the other two followed soon after. Checking the others he saw that the mini gun had taken care of the problem and turned to go back and...his heart sank.

“Gus...sorry old friend.” he pulled the trigger at the old zombie that was walking toward him, blank eyes staring through him. Waco had spent so many years with his friend and now Gus’s dead eyes no longer stared at Waco as he fell over backward...bullet in his forehead.

There was commotion behind the ZWAC and Waco tried dragging Gus’s body back to the rear so he could give him a proper burial. Instead he saw fifty or so zombies weaving along the path they had taken along the wreck strewn interstate, apparently not all of the horde had taken to the fields.

Rage filled Waco and climbing back into the turret, he was going to make them all pay...but realized that Gus never had the chance to show him how to reload the mini, and now he didn’t have time to figure it out. He looked down at the body at his feet and sighed.

“Well I tried old man...see ya old friend.”

Shooting a glance at the zombies he crawled into the driver’s side door and slammed it just as the first of the rambler reached the truck. Between the old vehicles and the slime that came out of crushed zombies, Waco decided that getting stuck and surrounded would just make old Gus turn over in his grave...had he been able to give him one.

He slammed the gear into forward and floored the ZWAC. It plowed into one of the 4x4s, pushed it into two of the rusted cars...and stopped.

He slammed it into reverse and crushed several zombies before throwing it back into forward. This time the pile of cars moved, but just a little. Time and time again Waco slammed into the rusted vehicles and finally as his tires smoked, broke free with a loud squeal.

Waco looked into the large side view mirror.

“Good-bye my friend...and thanks...for everything.”

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*Chapter 21.*

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Waco awoke with a start to see Chino standing over him shaking his shoulder. “Holy Mother of God, if you didn’t snore, I’d swear that you’d died.” he smiled warmly at Waco as he handed him a cup of coffee.

“I fell asleep?”

“Christ Waco, you died for a day.” Chino laughed “I know you didn’t get anything but naps for...uh, how long? I let you sleep, I mean it’s not like we’re going anywhere.” He sat on the desk and grinned.

“Got hold of the Brat Pack, they’re doing fine...oh forgot to tell you, I found a working radio and more papers. Think it was Lea’s dad that hooked a small wind turbine up on the roof, just have to pull a wire and it unlocked the blades, charged up the lithium batteries in about six hours. Then...signal didn’t last long, but let them know that we’re still alive and kicking.”

“Whoa,” Waco rubbed his face as he tried to focus from far too much sleep. “So...uh...”

Chino grinned “What’s next?” the nearly forty something Mexican pilot grinned “I found more papers. I know what ‘Newt’ is, I know what it all is now.” he looked out the window at the distant tower as he ran his fingers through his neatly trimmed black hair and sighed deeply. “But my friend, it appears that some assembly is required.”

The still groggy Waco rubbed his face again as Chino chuckled. It was as if someone had slapped Waco awake, he straightened and his senses kicked in and wanted to know more. “Ok I’m gonna suck coffee, you talk.”

The handsome Latino nodded and began.

“Well the thumper part we knew, however there was a second one south of here, about five miles or so from what I understand. It appears to be working ok. You see Waco, they work in sync, one thumps the other is off and visa-versa. This keeps the zombies that came in the area and not around one tower or the other.” he laughed “It’s just the newly arriving ones we have to worry about.

It’s the ‘Newt’ thing that has me worried, I mean the plan is brilliant, executing it might be a different story.”

“How so...better yet, what is it.”

“Waco, you said you were young when the storm happened, do you know what a nuclear bomb is?”

“Sure, I saw movies and TV when...” his facial expression went from curious to stunned “Holy shit! Chino, you tellin’ me that box on that tower is a fuckin’...sorry dad...nuclear bomb?”

Chino nodded “Sort of Waco. I remember back when I was working on joint exercises with your armed forces, I was an observer to your NEST...uh, Nuclear Emergency Support Team as their pilot. One day we were sitting around and they were chatting about the neutron bomb. It was supposed to be just as deadly and powerful as a regular nuke, but after it destroys everything I guess it left no residual radiation around.

Of course the world didn’t want anything like that and as far as I know it was never developed...” Chino nodded and smiled wryly “would be too easy to use. Imagine...drop a bomb, wipe out an entire area and be able to go in a few days later and start farming, building, whatever, without fear of radiation.

Your country agreed not to build it...I guess they sort of lied.”

“Sort of?” Waco finished the last of his coffee and started pacing “Not sure where this is going.”

“Well your country never build the neutron bomb, but it had the parts made for two of them...sort of,” he sighed deeply “but they improved on it...in ways I can’t understand completely.” Chino looked out the window at the tower “One of them sits out there, as you correctly guessed.”

“I guessed a nuke Chino, not some sort of super bomb.” he looked puzzled “Does it even work?”

“I do not know my friend, Lolli’s dad thought so, so did the rest. There were a couple of super brains in math that had figured the blast damage.” He handed a diagram to Waco that showed ground zero and from that were marked radiating circles extending outward in increments of miles.

“Jesus Christ, this shows all the way to...”

Chino smiled “Just shy of Alamogordo. I’m guessing no one ever planned to set it off until the Brat Pack’s parents got thinking about it. In one of the notes Lea’s mom said something about if they could get Lolli’s dad’s thumper built, they could use the bomb. That must have been a long, long, time ago, because the kids told me their parents and other survivors have been coming here for over ten years.”

“Does it work?” Waco asked again.

“It does my friend, it does...at least as much as they could determine on paper. They said it is built and ready to set off, but something happened to make them abandon the work on getting things up to the platforms. While you were sleeping, I climbed out of the skylight and used your binoculars.” Chino sighed “The bomb is in place, a big generator was installed, but there is a little generator and some smaller control panels that had been pre-wired. It appears that we’ll need to install those somehow.”

Waco snorted “We can try to install them you mean.”

“Oh, I can install them Waco; easily. I’ve read the schematics, notes, and manuals, I know what has to be done.”

“So...let’s get on with it.”

Chino walked over to the barely transparent window and pointed. “Everything that has to be installed is sitting on the ground covered with those tarps and my friend that winch over the third deck is broken. We’d have to create some sort of hand winch, install it where they welded that steel beam overhanging the second deck, hook up all the gear and get it up and running.”

Waco stood next to his friend and snorted.

“So what, you’re gonna let a few million zombies stop ya?”

Chino grinned “No my friend, I am not. It would have been so easy if this thumper still worked. I can only guess how many zombies are south of here that migrated to the second thumper, could be tens of millions, but that could work in our favor. There was a note that this one stopped sending signals to the other, but the other was still on and alternating the on off cycle. They sent a work party went to check on the other one but they found millions of zombies between them and the southern thumper and had to turn back. Guess they figured it was still working as it should, as more zombies were still coming. If we can get this thumper going, then the second one automatically shuts off and allows all the zombies to come here. This one was designed to stay turned on and turn the southern one off so Newt can do its job...that was the last entry.”

“Christ! Even if the crews here had fixed this turbine, a truck in the desert, the dust trail, Jesus...it would have brought the undead right back here and they’d been trapped here. Once a zombie sees movement and moves toward it, the rest will follow.”

“Si Waco, that makes sense. The have crew must have gotten back and told them. Rather than get trapped here, they threw a tarp over the stuff they hadn’t hoisted and scrambled.”

“Yep, and as they never returned, I’m guessing they met some of these giant hordes they’d been calling.” Waco pointed at the map that they had looked at the evening before “I’m thinking if they felt trapped, they might have headed toward this air base north of here. Maybe they thought that they could hide and wait for the zombies to pass.”

Chino nodded sadly “But remember their wind turbine was acting erratically and must have started up and just brought more into the area. Every undead walking north or...my God, the desert must have been full of them.”

“No doubt Chino, how long would it take for stumblers to pass that were a million strong...two million or more? If they made it to that base, and hid in an old hanger, they could have been trapped for weeks.”

Chino nodded sadly “They rarely took a lot of food as they had all these MREs here. Probably got them from the air base, so I’m guessing that water would have been the problem. They took plenty, but if all this happened close to return time they might have been extremely low.”

“They’d be out of water. I’m thinking that those other search parties that never returned most likely met the same fate. Saw one horde, turned to go back and ran into another as that thumper would run as long as there was wind and the batteries had a charge...no doubt the genny ran out of fuel a long time ago.”

“There is some fuel below...I hope. I saw one of the tarps had blown back partially, there are fuel cans. If not we can syphon fuel out of the truck and ride the cycles back.”

“What?” Waco asked “Through millions of undead?” he snorted “Wow, that’s gonna be loads of fun.”

“Now all we have to do is figure out a way to draw millions of zombies away from the tower so we can have time to get the hoist rigged up and lift all that stuff up to the second level...and then when we’re done, get out alive.”

“Jesus, Chino, you’re just so damned cheerful.” Waco paced the floor for a few minutes, stopped and sighed.

“Well, there’s always a little breeze, so once we’re up on the platform and living there for a few days heat could be a problem. Guess we can use that tarp down there for some sort of shade if we rig it to the frame work, plus it will conceal our movements from the zombies. However once we start that thumper, we’re gonna have to skedaddle before they close ranks around us.”

Chino nodded “Now that the big turbine is down for good we have to have enough fuel to run the generators. From the schematics it shows the big one runs everything, but they added a timer that is run by the small one...” Chino shrugged “Probably intended to wire everything into one circuit, but if the big generator ran out of fuel, or stalled...boom!”

Waco frowned “Well it seems that one man could rig up a pulley on that big steel beam and lift everything up top without too much of a problem, so let’s get over there and...”

Chino grinned “...and we are going to reach the tower how?”

Waco nodded toward the hall door “When it is clear enough, I’ll unhook my bike from the trailer and do a bit of hollerin’ and shoutin’, kick up a lot of dust and draw them to the southwest a bit. When I get the majority, I’ll do some big donuts to cover my escape and then do the same north of the tower. I’ll do both far enough away so when the first group sees the cloud of dust from my drawing the north hordes away, I’ll have time to get back and help you hook up the crap we need to raise...assuming that you aren’t already done.” Waco grinned “Of course you get to do the hard part, hook up the hoist and raise what you can.”

“Waco?”

“Yeah, Chino?”

“You ever hear of zombies climbing ladders?”

“Not sure, guess they might be able to if it wasn’t too steep. I mean they do pull themselves along the ground if their legs are broken...why?”

“That damned tower has ladder rungs built on the side of the tower leg closest to us and the first deck is only about twenty feet off the ground.”

“Ok then, cut them off with the torch that’s sitting under the tower. Then take some of that rope they have coiled under the tower and knot it every two feet, then suspend it where the rungs were.” he grinned “Never saw a zombie shinny a rope, but I sure as hell can.”

“Well then my friend, let us get started.” Chino pointed toward the door. They walked down the hall to the broken window and saw only a few undead wandering around. Chino grinned and patted his friend on his back and then gave him a playful little shove toward the window.

“Ok Waco go play with the undead and be home in time for supper.”

Waco looked out the window, not so much at the few rambles, but at the huge dust clouds that the giant hordes were creating. He looked at his friend and chuckled, “Now the fun begins... Oh, and don’t screw this up!” he winked “Did I ever tell you how much I hate zombies?”

Chino chuckled “All the time my friend...all the time.”

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*Chapter 22.*

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Waco slid out the window unnoticed and crouched between the trailer and the building. He managed to unhook his cycle without notice, but winced as he lowered the gate and it clanked a bit too loud upon hitting the desert sand. He froze, but only one zombie looked and soon went about its endless wandering.

Waco crept from around the side railing being careful that he didn't catch himself on Dag's sharpened spikes and blades that protruded from its sides. Staying low he scampered up the ramp, mounted the bike, and hit the electric starter...nothing.

He looked at the instruments and even in the near noon sun, he cupped his hand over the gauges and saw they were lit.

"Damned starter...again...seriously?" Waco flipped the kick starter out and it started on the first kick, which was good as the sound did draw the attention of several nearby zombies.

A screeching of his tires on the aluminum trailer decking drew even more dead eyes slowly turning to see what was creating the noise. Into the desert with a blast of sand and dust Waco zigzagged around the large buildings and back to where he started before the zombies could round the first corner.

Blasting his horn and doing an occasional donut in the dry desert sands he now had quite a following. Being careful not to send up too much dust to draw the attention from the distant hordes, Waco slid his rear wheel sideways back and forth...and more followed. He continued this half mile zigzagging to draw every zombie in the complex into following him.

For nearly an hour Waco led the undead away from the rows of old buildings, until it was just too dangerous for him to travel farther south because of the massive hordes.

He waited for nearly two hundred zombies to get within fifty yards of him and began to rev his engine as he sat and watched them rambling toward him.

"Now or never Waco." he muttered as he slipped the clutch and sent a rooster tail of sand and dust into the air. He noted which way the barely blowing wind was coming from and moved upwind as far as safely possible and waited...the wind stopped and Waco grinned. A roar of his engine and the first double donut formed a huge dust cloud that barely drifted in the now calm wind.

He'd go ten yards and do several donuts, and then repeat. Over a mile of dust billowed in the mostly still air as he zigzagged back through it...and nearly ran into several zombies that had been obscured by his own cloud of brown dust.

Choking and dodging Waco finally decided that was enough and broke out of the cloud. About a mile from the buildings he decided to make one more cloud as he passed the last of the undead he had drawn off Chino.

As he finished the second cloud he knew the first had to be disbursing. Satisfied that this one was sufficient to cover his path back to the building, he roared directly to it. He slowed as

he passed Chino and the truck.

Chino was watching Waco's handy work through binoculars and grinned as Waco passed by. "That takes care of the close ones, headed the other way, once I get them headed away, roll the truck toward the tower...see ya there."

Chino waved that he understood "GOOD JOB! The ones you led away haven't turned back in our direction yet...we..." Waco was gone and headed toward the larger packs between the building and the tower.

Getting the undead to follow was easy and Waco pulled donuts and kicked up sand to get the attention of the closest ones only. He'd run between the different packs of undead and draw them to the northwest, and wait for them to catch up, and then off he'd go again to draw more in his direction. Zigzagging for nearly a mile, he now had nearly two thousand zombies wandering after him and he kept one eye on the horde that he was working toward...that looked to be a few hundred thousand strong.

Now by driving slowly he managed to get the various packs into one large horde that followed him without pause. The problem was they were over a mile wide themselves and he had to get them together so he could pull his cloud trick.

He'd move to one end of the horde and slowly move toward the center keeping barely a quarter of a mile away. An hour more and he had them where he wanted them...and he had been noticed by the massive horde to his northwest as well. With barely a mile between hordes, he knew there'd be no first cloud as before, no time. The other contributing factor was the fact that he had succeeded to draw the outer sides of his horde toward the center, where he was now.

Five miles from the tower he could see Chino had reached the tower, put up a tarp to cover their activity from two sides at least. He tucked his binoculars in their holder on his belt and took a deep breath.

"Well this is gonna be more fun than I can stand." he snorted as he shifted into gear and threw up a rooster tail of dust...and aimed toward what looked to be the thinnest line of undead. At ten yards he skidded sideways and threw a cloud of dust at the horde, spun away from them and as the cloud slowly drifted to the south, he shot into the midst of the cloud to where he had been watching.

It worked! Waco sped by a couple of dozen zombies before they could even see him, let alone try grabbing him. This was another story once he cleared the cloud. Bony fingers grasped and slapped his helmet and leather jacket as he aimed for spaces between them. He laid flat on his fuel tank to make himself a lesser target. Mummified hands rasped over his leather, bounded off his helmet, and slammed against his windshield and he'd prayed that it wouldn't come off.

Waco had fixed his windshield years before to break off in case some undead limb hit it, thus allowing it to cleanly break off instead of dumping him on the ground. However the zombies seemed confused as they grasped for him, he peeked to his left to see he was in a rapidly enclosing cloud of dust...the wind had picked up and changed direction. He slowed

slightly as hands grasped at his clothes and the cloud engulfed him.

Waco slammed into two zombies that nearly caused him to spill, but a kick to another was all he needed to get himself righted once again and back on course...the wind died again and he could see light ahead as he broke out of the cloud.

A good four and a half miles the tower was before him, a quarter more and he began his cloud making. A quick burst of speed, and he was back at the tower, the horde completely confused as to Waco's whereabouts.

He waved at Chino and carefully laid his cycle against the wide trussed leg of the tower so both bikes were aimed in the same direction.

Up close the tower looked like a smaller version of the Eiffel Tower structure wise and had plenty of room to move Chino's cycle to the other side of the same leg. He wondered just how many years it had taken the Brat Pack's parents to build this.

With that out of the way, he turned his attention to the gear stowed below. Waco had taken nearly three hours to draw the few thousand undead away from the tower and Chino had used it wisely. Gone were the tarps, gone were the control consoles, the only thing left was a moderately sized generator.

"WACO!" he looked up to see Chino leaning over the edge of the deck twenty feet above. "The genny up here is done for unless we can fix it, that's why the one down there." He tossed Waco a rope and within minutes he had managed to drag the smaller generator out from in under the deck to just under the hoist.

"Climb up the tower leg, need help on the hoist."

Waco ran to the leg and climbed about half way up and looked in all directions. There were some packs of undead walking toward the tower or the buildings, but nothing like he had thought, his plan had worked. Most never saw him come back and those that did were far enough away from the massive horde as not to draw their attention.

He finished his climb.

Once on top of the deck they managed to pull the generator up to their level and Waco snagged a rope on it and pulled it toward him as Chino slowly let the hoist slacken. Using a come-along, they got it where they wanted it. Cutting the tarps in half, they managed to string a half-wall on some rope so the undead couldn't see them as they walked below or around the tower. As Waco reminded Chino, "Zombies never look up unless something draws their attention." So they were as quiet as possible, but at least now they had partial cover on all four sides.

For two more days the undead walked below. Entire hordes wandered below and none the wiser of the two men working feverishly above them as they came and wandered off in another direction. The guys figured that the southern thumper was still working it's on and off schedule.

Chino hooked up the last of the consoles that had already been wired. All he had to do is hook the correct 'cannon plug' to the correct plug already wired to the tower.

There was a small wooden shack on the deck that held their radio that Chino had taken out of

the truck and hooked it to an antennae that had been installed by who he assumed to have been the parents some years ago. They also saw why there had been no communications to the hospital, while Newt was protected from lightning, the parent's radio was not.

It was nearly sundown and the two men finished the hookup and knew that the Brat Pack monitored the radio about this time of day.

Waco put on the only set of ear phones they had and locked the mike to open, so Chino could speak as well, but only Waco could hear through the headset.

"Hey Brat Pack, ya out there?"

After several minutes of calling a tiny voice replied...

"Waco? This is Twig, the rest are coming to the radio room, are you ok? Is Chino ok?"

Another voice replied "Thank God you two are ok." Lea's musical tones almost made Waco forget that they were nearly surrounded by millions of undead.

For nearly a half hour the men filled the rest in on what had transpired so far and that they would activate their parent's plan the next day and flee on the cycles.

"Sorry Dag, but there is no way we can get out of here in the 4x4." Waco bemoaned.

Chino nodded "We'll be lucky to get out using the cycles, but it's our best chance. They're fast and maneuverable...we have a good chance."

"Roger that." Carl replied "What about the zombies? Mom and dad always said for years that they would take care of them."

Waco grinned "Oh we'll do that alright, we'll tell ya about it when we return. Chino says we'll be done late afternoon tomorrow, I figure we'll probably have to leave separately." he looked at the nodding Chino "Chino will leave about a half hour before I will. The controls will be set and the rest will be up to what your parents have done."

Chino sighed "Still no sign of your parents other than their notes and stuff. I'm going to head north through the air base if I can to see if I can find anything, but I have to warn you kids that I'll have to keep moving, I will not be able to stop for long to search."

Again there was a sad reply that they understood and even pleading with the two men for a description of what was about to occur. As they were signing off Lea's voice came back over the radio.

"Waco...you come back to me in one piece."

Chino winked at his friend and chuckled "HEY! What about me?"

There was a soft musical chuckle "You too Chino...Brat Pack out."

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*Chapter 23.*

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Exhausted from the prior day and the stress, both men overslept. Safe on the tall tower and out of the reach of the undead that wandered haphazardly below they didn't have a care in the world, until...the sun peeped over the tarps that they had hung and after a few squints...they awoke with a start.

"Holy shit! Chino get your ass up and get moving!" Waco shouted loud enough to give Chino a start, but not be heard by the zombies below."

Chino leapt to his feet and began to finish up what work was left as Waco tried to think of some way to get their asses out of there when he was done.

The day before when they had decided that Waco would leave last because he was the better cycle rider and would have to deal with the zombies that were stirred up by Chino, Waco now had to figure out some way to get Chino out of there first.

The plan was Chino would leave and Waco would wait a half hour and start the thumper after setting the controls for the countdown. They figured many of the zombies would try to follow Chino as he left, thus Waco would have time to set the timer. He would then slide down the rope where the ladder rungs used to be and drop onto his cycle before the zombies could get back to the tower after feeling the thumper...that was the plan anyhow. Somehow the undead always seemed really good at screwing up Waco's plans.

After he had lost Gus, Waco headed north but was turned back by hordes of zombies. He'd been east, so he figured he'd try south as cooler weather was soon to come...again zombies. So he headed west and soon found the small walled community where he met Tom and the others. Twice he tried to leave and both times was turned back by hordes too large for him to handle or take down. On the other hand he spent several years living there and doing something he swore that he'd never do...make friends. The last thing Waco wanted was to make friends, friends died on him, but again the zombies had forced him to stay when he wanted to go.

He looked at Chino and snorted quietly to himself "'nother fuc...sorry dad...freakin' friend. Don't want to find him half eaten somewhere along the road."

"What was that Waco?"

"Uh, nothing Chino, was just thinkin' aloud."

As the day passed far too quickly, the job did get done. During that time Waco came up with a plan, but it would have to work the first time because that was all he had. The 'had' was one lone rifle grenade and that would only work if the zombies got to a spot where they would have a chance to slip through, or at least Chino who was the least experienced rider of the two. With everything set for Waco to activate, they watched the zombies come and go until nearly until sunset. Neither wanted to try escaping after dark, but with the sun on the mountains to

west of the Tularosa Basin, the undead packs and larger hordes had finally managed to wander apart so there was a gap to the north. It was small, but present. Waco nodded to Chino and he climbed slowly onto the trussed leg of the tower to just above where his cycle sat twenty feet below. Keeping as flat as possible to the tower's leg he lowered himself, and prayed.

Waco looked over to Chino "Forget the flare gun so you can find me when I get clear, just head on back to the hospital." He loaded the grenade into his rifle's barrel and braced it so it pointed to the southwest.

"NO! Keep the flare..." Chino tried to tell Waco, but Waco fired the grenade and it sailed nearly one hundred yards and exploded in the middle of a large pack of undead. The zombies to the south and southeast instantly began wandering toward the explosion. Spinning Waco cocked his flare gun and fired their only flare to the northwest and drew more away from the tower...the huge sea of undead had split. Chino gave Waco a frustrated look and climbed down the tower leg, kicked over his cycle and blasted across the desert in a cloud of dust.

Two zombies reached for the middle-aged Mexican pilot, but Waco put two clean head shots on the mark and they fell. A dangerous slide sideways almost sent Chino tumbling in the sand. Managing to stay upright he veered east and then straight north through the last visible horde of zombies.

Waco knew Chino would head more west and then north to avoid the massive horde they had seen before arriving in Tularosa, and then head for Holloman AFB so he could approach from the west.

Waco watched his friend through the binoculars until his dust cloud vanished from sight and Waco knew that was the sign that Chino had slowed down so as not to draw other approaching hordes.

The shadows were long now and Waco looked down to his bike. What zombies he had drawn off with the grenade and flare, had kept walking in those directions. The rest had taken off after Chino's dust cloud, and there to the north east, back the way they had come, was the prettiest gap in the hordes he had seen since they arrived.

The generator had been running so the undead could get used to hearing it, rather than Waco starting it and have them take notice of a new sound. Walking over to the control for 'Newt', Waco pressed the timer and walked over to the other control panel and pressed the 'on'. He could feel the vibrations of Lolli's thumper and grinned as he sprinted toward the leg of the tower.

The twenty feet down to his cycle took only about four steps as he nearly jumped each time. A crotch slamming leap onto his Harley brought tears to his eyes as he kicked the cycle over and shifted into gear. He aimed his front wheel due northeast and sent up a plume of sand and dust as the sun completely vanished to the west.

As what little light there was began to fade as Waco screamed across the flat desert toward the first small hill he could see. The hordes began to close in and finally as bony fingers grasped at his tightly zipped leather jacket, he broke through the last of the zombies and into dark desert.

Years before Gus had shown Waco how to make a custom headlamp that lit his way, but was covered from view except from directly in front of the bike. So either the zombies would have to be looking at the ground, which they rarely did, or standing in front of him. Waco's headlight couldn't be seen from either side and the tightly focused beam lit only a small area in front, so Waco had to stay on his toes, or spill and the latter was unacceptable.

Waco screamed over the first hill and eased the throttle so he wouldn't send up anymore dust, assuming zombies could see the dust at night.

It was about then that he noticed two things...

First, a full moon crept out from behind a cloud in the sparsely clouded sky.

Second, he skidded to a stop...something wasn't right, something didn't feel right.

Atop the higher, second hill where he had stopped, he could see the moonlit sea of undead. A sea of undead that should have been walking toward the tower.

*"Why are they not walking toward the tower?"* he asked in his mind

"Christ Waco, why aren't they headed to the thumper?" he muttered aloud. His shoulders slumped, his head lowered "Gotta be..." he looked at the sky "...sorry dad, but you raised a fuckin' idiot." One more forlorn sigh and the Harley screamed back toward the tower. Talking to himself all the way, Waco knew or at least had an idea what was wrong and kicked himself mentally for not checking the fuel tank before leaving. The generator had run nearly two days and neither of them had checked the extra fuel tank that fed the small mounted tank. He looked at the sea of undead in the silvery moon light and braced for the worse.

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His mind snapped back to the present. Waco laughed into the mike and looked over the surrounding desert.

"And so kids, there ya have it...assuming of course, that I even got through. Some desert crawler is walking around holding my headset about now and I don't know if anyone even heard my last thoughts.

Oh hell, guys, I just hope good old Newt succeeds better than that I did or we'll both rot out here in the desert.

Jesus, I sure hope Chino didn't dally too long at the air base, or he's gonna get nuked too."

Waco pulled out the diagram one of the parents had sketched on a smaller map.

"Ok kids, it's like this; Newt is on a small booster rocket that'll put it up about one hundred feet over the top of the tower...then boom!

Everything for a half mile around will be nothing but a crater your parents thought will be about one, to two hundred feet deep. Nothing within eight miles will exist, poof, gone, vaporized. Fifteen miles, all will be flattened and burnt. All within twenty-five flattened, from then on it will depend upon structure..." he paused as he stared at the locked down mike button "You all should be safe, but for sure, will feel the blast.

Kids...everything within a circle of sixty miles, just short of where you are will get a blast of neutron radiation that will kill every living thing and even the dead, so to speak.

You all are safe, but according to Doc's dad, every zombie within a hundred miles of the blast

will cease to exist. It seems that these parasites that rode in the storm are hyper sensitive to some forms of radiation. Looks like your folks had captured a few zombies and experimented on them. Anyhow, there was a note stating that the second bomb was shielded and broken into three parts, but not where. If Chino gets back he knows what it should look like and has the plans to build more...and some kind of prototype neutron gun.” Waco paused not wanting to say the next part, but knowing he had to, so slowly the words came out.

“Lea...Carl...if something happens to me...us...” he sighed so hard he realized the Brat Pack could hear him if they were listening “Someone has to come out and try to find where your parents put it...and find Chino. Kids, that prototype could be mankind’s salvation, you’ll have to risk it... Waco out... No wait!” Waco looked out to the rising sun and sighed “Tell Lea...well, tell her...aw, nothing. Find some fuckin’ guy that isn’t dead.” And with that Waco closed the mike and frowned.

“Oh nice going...you dumb fuc...sorry dad.”

Waco slowly got to his feet and walked over to the generator’s fuel tank and knocked on it with his knuckle.

“Not a lot of go juice left in ya.” he chuckled over the wind that had now kicked up from the southwest “Guess that goes for me too. Wonder if sittin’ under a nuke that goes off will hurt?”

Waco walked over to the south side of the platform and dangled his legs over the edge and cut the tarp loose to let it flap in the wind, but it blew back onto the deck, so he just pulled it free and tossed it behind him.

There was a strange calm that overtook him and Waco began swinging his legs and humming a few bars from something he had heard when he was a child.

He stopped and looked down at several zombies that had stopped and now were looking up at him.

“Hey down there...” he waved a little three fingered Boy Scout salute “Are we havin’ fun yet? No? Just wait...” Waco looked at the generator to guesstimate the time left “not long now I guess.”

He smiled softly and whispered wistfully.

“I sure wish I could have gotten to know you better Lea...well, longer anyhow. Guess I got to know you pretty good...” Waco closed his eyes and his mind seemed to race through the years, back to the times he had with his dad, the loneliness, then Gus, and eventually Dag and the rest of the compound group. But the Brat Pack was the fondest, the kids, Chino...Lea...”

The generator sputtered a few times and then purred. Waco with his eyes still closed sighed deeply “Bye kids.”

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*Chapter 24.*

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There was a strange sound completely unlike what Waco had dreamed the rocket would sound like as it fired...but the generator still could be heard. Without opening his eyes he prepared for the worst.

**“HEY YOU DUMB FUCK...YOU GOING TO LIE THERE ALL DAY, OR ARE YOU GOING TO GET YOUR LAZY ASS UP!”**

Waco sat up in such a startled hurry that he almost fell off the platform. As he pulled his dangling feet up and rolled back onto the deck, an old military helicopter screamed from around the other side of the tower.

**“DON’T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER THIS RELIC WILL HOLD TOGETHER, SO GET YOUR ASS UP AND BE READY TO GRAB THE ROPE!”** Chino shouted over the loudspeaker mounted under the nose of the white helicopter with the faded N.E.S.T. markings on the side.

The chopper did a quick banking turn and Waco saw a twenty-five foot rope dangling from a winch mounted above the open side door of this relic that he’d only seen on TV as a kid. It didn’t take a genius to see Chino could only get so close or his rotor blades would hit the tower.

“Crap...that would be bad.” he muttered as he pictured them both dying in a fiery crash. Then he saw Chino rock the chopper side to side as the weighted rope swung precariously over the horde of zombies below.

Since dawn he had never really noticed that the zombies had now packed in and around the tower so tightly that they had actually crushed several against the steel legs of the tower.

Another thing he noticed was that he no longer could see the desert floor because they were really packed together that tightly. Lolli’s thumper worked like a charm. Another glance at the swinging rope, and Waco decided that missing it and falling into the writhing mass below would also be a bad idea and waited for the rope to swing out and back one last time.

With a deep sigh Waco took a four step running jump and flew out into the warm morning air. His left hand was the first to contact the rope, and the rope flexed out toward his right hand. He swung his hand around to grasp the swinging rope and missed. Waco wanted to cuss, but the lower part of the rope hit him in the face. He frantically wrapped his arms around, grasped, and concentrated upon entangling himself in it, he wrapped his legs around it as well.

Now swinging barely ten feet over the sea of undead, Waco slid down the rope until his wrapped legs hit the round steel weighted ball the rope was attached to. His tightly wrapped feet slipped over the ball, but he finally stopped as his groin hit the ball.

The funny thing was that Waco knew it hurt, but all that he felt was relief. His dangling feet barely far enough over the sea of zombies that if they could jump, he’d be dead. As the rope’s swinging slowed Waco began to look the situation over. First thing he noticed was that

Chino had tied the rope on an old power hoist affixed to the side of the chopper's door opening.

"Ok, the hoist doesn't work," he muttered "great!" The next thing he noticed was Chino was holding the chopper steady as he could so the rope could steady and he could climb up; Waco began the long climb up the rope.

The third thing he noticed as he neared the door, was the steady trickle of oil coming from the engine compartment. He took a deep breath, kicked his legs up and rolled into the open chopper door.

Panting and near exhaustion Waco crawled along the rough metal floor of the chopper and in between the front seats, he nodded to Chino to go as he had firm hold of a seat. With that Chino sharply banked around the tower and headed northeast as fast as he dared push the antique chopper.

Waco sat in the co-pilot's seat as Chino handed him a headset.

"Waco, you're one lucky cuss. I stumbled across this in the first hanger at the air base. The doors were open and it was covered in an old tarp..." he looked at Waco sadly "I think the kid's parents prepped this chopper within at least eight to nine months ago. Didn't see any live humans and if they heard me, I know they would have come running. I was running the engine to warm it up and do my preflight..." he grinned "had been a while. I heard the radio, and you telling your life's story." he nodded back toward the base "the hangar was all fenced in so that was the only one I checked out. Climbed over the fence, found the chopper, and as I flew back over my cycle, it was surrounded by the undead..." he chuckled "Good thing this this mother flies or I'd been trapped at the base when junior goes off."

"And you came back for me?" he sighed "And you called me a dumb shit? What part of the bomb goes off when the genny runs out of gas didn't you get?"

"If the bomb goes off, I remembered these NEST choppers are all protected against EMPs."

Waco looked over at the smiling pilot "Yeah, but we aren't from radiation."

Chino grinned again and pointed at the instrument panel and the gauge that showed low oil pressure "Don't matter my friend, we'll probably die in a horrible crash when we run out of oil and the engine seizes up."

"That's pretty much what I thought when I saw the oil running out of the side."

"I figured that's why the kid's parents didn't try to fly it out...and why they kept telling me I was too important to go with them until they were ready."

Waco looked at the pilot and nodded "Why risk you until they were ready to put things in motion, makes sense. Try calling the hospital and hope the kids are listening."

"Agreed, I know some about the workings, but Twig's dad was an aircraft mechanic before he completed his engineering degree..." he keyed the radio and slowly, carefully spoke. "Hey kids do you copy?" after several tries the radio crackled with static and then...

“We hear you...where are you...who are you? This is Eden replying to your...” the static was so bad neither of the men could understand what was said, and then it cleared slightly...ome Idaho in... ca...ou...derstand...” and the signal vanished with loud burst of static.

Waco looked stunned, but managed to stammer “I heard Idaho?”

“Yeah, me too...thought it was a myth.” Chino shrugged “Maybe they heard us due to signal bounce.”

“Huh? Oh I get the signal bounce thing, but why up here?”

Chino opened his mouth to say more and alarms started blaring and the ‘low engine oil’ flashed.

It seemed that the whine of the jet engine decreased slightly as Chino pointed toward the northeast.

“Tularosa!” he shouted over the headset at the sky behind them caused everything to ‘white out’.

“Close your eyes and count to thirty.” Chino shouted as Waco followed his orders.

Waco got to twenty and Chino shouted “Think we’re out of the danger zone?”

Waco shrugged “Is there going to be some sort of blast, or sound, or something?”

Chino’s face went blank “Shit!”

“Uh-oh, I don’t like to hear the word shit, oops, lookout, or uh-oh in any sentence”

Chino dove toward the desert floor and as it rushed toward them, the handsome pilot looked at his friend.

“I said shit because, I completely forgot about the shockwave...oops, lookout.”

Waco frowned “I thought I told you that I don’t like...”

There was a tremendous rumbling sound that Waco could feel more than hear, within a second of that the chopper was sent flying sideways and flipped nearly completely over as Chino fought the controls. As he barely got control of it, the engine cut out and another shockwave nearly flipped it end over end.

The desert that was rushing toward them could no longer be seen, all that was below, around, and over them was a dark brown cloud of sand and dust.

“Don’t worry Waco, there’s this thing called autorotation where the blades spin even after the engine quits, it’ll be a hard landing, but we have a chance.

No sooner than Chino finished, the chopper’s two rotor blades flew by the window...and the chopper only had two blades. To make things worse, the engine fell completely silent. The ashen faced Chino looked over to Waco... “Oops.”

Waco sighed “Uh-oh...”

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*Chapter 25.*

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“They’re in the atrium!” Twig shouted as she ran past the radio room “Came in from the basement. One of the raiders must have opened the door before Waco came to us and killed them.”

Lolli and Carl were sitting in the radio room waiting to hear from the men. Carl looked strangely at Lolli “Jesus, it’s been a week or so, I never checked...no one checked we all got so wrapped up with Dag and Waco. They could have been filling up the basement all this time if the service door was open.” He slapped his forehead “Christ!”

“What?” Lea asked.

“I went down this morning to look for spare crates...” his shoulders slumped and a forlorn look appeared “and unlocked the lower door, but then Doc called me...shit!”

Lea ran past holding the katana that her dad had brought back from one of his trips when she was young. In her other hand she held her eight inch dagger that she had fashioned after Waco’s ‘zombie sticker’.

“Who cares now? Those bastards are flooding the lobby. One of them must have bumped up against the emergency open down in the front door area.” She regretted having the barricades removed once she heard that the guys were coming back.

“Get off your ass and...” she was gone and Carl leapt to his feet to join her as she headed for the winding ramp up to the mezzanine.

Lolli glanced once at the radio and sadly gave it one last listen, nothing. She turned and pulled her machete and vanished out the third floor radio room door to join the others.

As she reached the walkway toward the elevators, east stairway, and ramp, Lolli looked down to see about two dozen zombies in the atrium and knew more would have to be close as the undead always seemed to hang around.

They had heard some of Waco’s broadcast, but nothing since late morning. Chino had tried, but they had never heard, now no one was there if they called.

She had just looked toward the stairs when it seemed that she had gone blind as everything had become blindingly white. Through her squinted eyes and parted fingers that she had thrown over her face, she could see the rest were doing pretty much the same. There seemed to be a blinding light coming from the huge skylights overhead and then it hit...

The kids knew this hospital was something their parents called ‘shielded’ and a FEMA emergency base when it was built just before the storm hit. The building shook and the heavy shatter resistant glass blew from the panes and rained down on the zombies. One large unbroken pane fell as the surrounding frame collapsed and crushed four zombies below. The kids were all knocked off their feet and luckily never got to the main floor as now the entire

system of skylights now came tumbling down as the entire building shook violently. The atrium was filled with raining glass as the rumbling seemed to go on forever. When Lea looked over the railing of the mezzanine, the shattered skylights and bomb had done their work. She gasped at the number of zombies lying on the ground.

“They did it!” she screamed to the rest “Whatever that was, most of the zombies out there are dead...we must have been on the fringe of...”

Twig’s tiny voice screamed back “Forget outside!” she was pointing at the ground floor and to the inclined ramp that led up to their level “They’re coming up the ramp!”

“The hospital was shielded,” Carl shouted as he ran for the ramp “I remember mom and dad telling us that years ago. The skylights are too high up and had no effect on the zoms, so get your butts over here.” With one huge swing he took down the closest zombie and as its head rolled haphazardly down the incline bumping feet like a pinball machine as it rolled... another quickly followed.

Twig who was just too short at ten years old, swung her machete at one zombie’s legs and severed it just above the knee. When it fell to the floor, the second swing ended its existence. A third swing proved to be poorly chosen as her machete slammed into the spine and locked tightly in bone.

“CRAP!” she shouted and ducked its grasping arms, rolled on the floor and pulled her dagger to see the zombie fall backward.

Lea ran past Twig and frowned “You know better, limbs or neck, you aren’t strong enough.”

Twig stuck her tongue out at Lea and placed her foot on the dry leathery body and freed her machete with a few quick wiggles of the handle.

By now the entire Brat Pack had worked their way down the ramp and made it to the main level and at least ten undead had died on the way.

Carl swung around to the rest “Where the hell are they coming from?”

Doc shouted and pointed to the large double doors to the cafeteria where the window barricades had been broken out by the raiders, and the kids had tightly chained the doors using the handles. The handles on each door had broken free on the bottom which allowed a gap for the zombies to squeeze through as a mass of undead behind them pushed them under. One unlucky zombie was nearly cut in half by the chain and dangled inverted as it grasped at nothing but air.

No sooner had Doc brought it to their attention, the left handle snapped and a flood of undead poured into the main lobby. The only saving grace was that it happened so fast the zombies in front fell and the rest began piling up on them as the flood surged forward.

“Top of the ramp guys, find any furniture...anything to block it off.” Carl shouted as he and Lea made a slow retreat up the ramp while the rest ran ahead and began sliding rows of seats toward the ramp. Doc and Carl managed to get three more and as the rest began picking themselves up off the floor, they turned and dashed up the ramp to join the others.

By the time the rest reached the curving ramp's top, there were seats sliding toward them from the waiting areas. Carl, Doc, and Lea were the biggest and began wedging the sets of joined seating into the railings and piling it on top of what was there. As soon as they got one piece up there were two more waiting.

Finally upon getting the barricade a good five feet high, and at least four feet thick, Lea began lining the seats against the wall and then sliding the next row against that, until she reached the barricade.

Carl smiled at this ingenuity, Lea had braced the entire barricade against the wall and they knew that no zombie was going to push through that.

Lolli came running with hands full of extension cords "Tie everything together."

Struggling to reach through to the forward seats, they wrapped the cords to the railings and the seats that were farther back. Now and then a bony hand would grasp the tiny hand, but the kids helped one another as they beat the grasping hands back.

"How many?" Lolli asked as Carl walked around to the railing so he could see.

"At least two dozen. Must have already been inside." He shot a glance out the window into the parking lot. "HOLY SHIT! ...DUCK!" The kids had been drilled and obeyed instantly as there was a horrible crash out in the parking lot.

"It was a helicopter like your folks showed us." He started to get up but there was a tremendous explosion and everyone dropped to the floor again.

Tears formed in Lea's eyes as she blurted out "Noooo...it was Waco, I know it." She struggled to get to her feet.

With the kids on the floor and the din outside, the zombies now turned their attention to the outside, but the main door had closed and worse yet, in their rambling to the door, they had pushed the barricade back against the double entry door. There was a loud sound of banging on the doors with something heavy, a long pause, and as the undead clawed at the blockade in front of the door, another tremendous blast rang throughout the hospital. This blast however, was directed toward the inside and as the kids ducked zombies flew toward the middle of the atrium and the hall to the cafeteria that they had just come from, this time they returned in pieces.

Through the smoke and dust two men walked into the lobby and began to spike the undead that were still undead.

Chino who was covered in dust and blood looked up at the kids and shouted for them to stay put while he and Waco checked the rest of the hospital's main floor.

Waco ran out and drove back in with one of the trucks the kids used and as Chino closed the double doors, Waco snapped off the driver's side mirror with a crowbar and a loud scraping sound echoed as he pulled tightly against the doors and wall.

As the kids watched from the windows, the two ran out and got the large truck they used for supply runs and drove it under the hospital's covered entrance. Soon both men appeared and

slowly walked up the ramp, they had blocked the entrance doors below with the truck. Once again the hospital was safe...at least temporarily.

“Leave everything in place kids.” Waco barely mumbled from his dirt and blood covered mouth.

Their clothes were torn and singed. As they walked it was obvious that both were in pain, and injured. By the looks of them the kids began to wonder how they lived through the chopper’s crash.

As Chino climbed over the railing he slid to the floor wrapped in tiny arms that hugged him. The fifteen year old Doc waved them off and shouted orders to get his medical kit. Waco followed Chino and nearly fell to the floor as Lea caught the beaten and weary man. She slowly eased him to the floor. She wanted so desperately to kiss him, but there was not one spot on his face that didn’t seem to be cut or burnt. Hugging was out of the question as what clothes he still had left that wasn’t shredded, instead trickled fresh blood. Her hands sought anyplace to hold him, but pulled back in fear of further harming him. Tears filled her eyes as she looked so helpless.

Waco reached out and grasped the nape of her neck and pulled her close while with his other hand he slid what was left of his sleeve across his lips and pulled her close. As their lips met there was a chorus of giggles from the younger kids. Waco let her go as Lea forced a smile. He looked over to his friend Chino and with a blank face snorted...

“Well, I’ve had better days...how about you?”

Chino rolled his head around to look at his friend “We’re alive...that’s something.”

“When’s the last time we’ve slept?” Waco asked the battered pilot.

Chino snorted a half laugh “What day is it?”

Waco slowly closed his eyes as he laid his head on Lea’s soft breast.

“Who the fuck cares?” one eye popped open and looked at the sky through the broken skylight

“Sorry dad.”

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*Chapter 26.*

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“You’ve been out over a week my love.” Lea’s soft voice reverberated through Waco’s foggy dreams. His eyes slowly opened to see the lovely raven haired leader and medic standing over him...the woman of his dreams, literally.

“I was just dreaming about you.” he smiled weakly “How long was I out?”

“Both of you had serious concussions...” her eyes were still red from crying “we thought that we’d lose both of you, but Chino awoke yesterday evening and then as it looked so bad for you...” she sniffed “you came back to me.” she smiled a smile that melted Waco’s heart, she loved him that much, and in such a short time.

“I’ll go get Doc...don’t go anywhere.” Waco smiled knowing the way his head was spinning that he’d most likely fall out of bed if he moved.

It had hit Waco that for the first time in as long as he could remember he had actually loved someone back in return. Lea was more than a romp in a hospital bed, and it bugged the hell out of him. He thought the world of Gus, but Gus taught him, loving anyone will get you very dead. Loving allows you to lose that edge you need to stay alive, loving causes you to go back when you shouldn’t ...in a world of undead, loving is against all survival instincts. Now Waco had thrown all common sense out the window...something that Gus had teased him, ‘about the lack of common sense’ and then proceeded to tell him, “*Someday kid you’ll meet some gal and fall in love. When that day happens, figure on loving her with all yer heart, ‘cuz ya won’t be around long.*” Waco grinned as his memories of his longtime friend and mentor passed into obscurity and then the beautiful Lea hurried back into the room dragging Doc behind her.

Waco managed to get to his elbows before falling back onto the bed as Doc checked his pupils.

“Dag? I didn’t see Dag during the fight.”

“Easy baby, Dag took one of our trucks yesterday. He and Carl headed back to his compound. During the fight Dag was covering the other stairs just in case. A few days ago we were talking about his past and he mentioned the guy that taught him about mechanics,” the pretty brunette smiled “seems it is our second cousin and he had a baby girl according to Dag. Carl wouldn’t leave until he knew you were safe...” she laughed “He saw your beautiful landing in the parking lot, the explosion and the two of you jumping just before the chopper hit the ground. He said he didn’t think you’d get up after bouncing off that parked car and then Chino slid into you, but those cars in the lot probably saved you both from burning alive.”

Waco frowned “Can still feel the side of the freakin car as I hit it. Think my face hit the quarter panel and...”

Lea cradled Waco’s face in her hands “I love your face, even if it’s a rainbow of colors.”

Waco looked puzzled and then with a staggering leap managed to get over to the bathroom and look in the mirror.

“Jesus Christ...did I break anything?” he played with his jaw, and probed his cheek bones as he teetered on his feet.

Doc hurried over to steady Waco and chuckled “Nope, not sure why not, but, nope.”

After a few more hours Waco felt steady enough to head on into the small luncheonette off the main waiting room on the top floor and already there was some good old New Mexico dust blowing in through the shattered skylights.

“You know this place is done for, right?” Waco nodded to the drifting dust filtering through the scattered sunbeams that lit the atrium “Sure it could be fixed but, we heard...” he rubbed his head “something...Eden I think.”

Lea put her arm around Waco’s shoulder “Chino told us all about it, we’ve been packing everything near the doors in secure maintenance rooms on the first floor. All we have to do is find something that will get us there. We have fuel...sort of. It’s reconstituted but is nearly as good as the old new fuels were. We even have many batteries that we’ve collected and rebuilt over the years, should fit anything you and Chino find.”

Lolli nodded as she joined the two “When Twig gets back, maybe she’ll have an idea where you can start.”

“Start? Twig’s back...from where?” Waco asked in a puzzled tone.

“Why looking for a suitable vehicle of course.” Lea replied, puzzled by Waco’s strange reaction.

“WHAT!” Waco stood and looked over the railing to the lobby below “She’s outside?”

Lea gently grasped Waco’s arm and sat him back down and then smiled confidently. “Baby, she’s fine.”

“She’s ten years old.” Waco sputtered back.

“And how old were you when the storm hit? Ten you said.”

“But I had my dad to help me.”

“Ten, twelve...” Lolli smiled “she’s the best scrounger we have. You see, her dad took her out with him when she was only five or six and she’s been going out ever since...” Lolli looked at Lea “well, ever since she came back the day her daddy was killed by zombies.”

Lea nodded “They had been two days overdue and some of the adults were about to go find them and the other man that was with them. We always give two days because sometimes we have to sit and wait out a passing horde. So they geared up and as they removed the locks from the side door, there came Twig carrying the medicine they had gone after...” Lea looked at Lolli “Think she was eight at the time...or just about to turn eight. She told us of how her daddy had been killed. The other man who was with them, pushed her up into the framework in

the drugstore and as he was taken down, he tossed her the two bags of medical supplies. She crawled to the air conditioning vent, pried it off, and scampered onto the roof through the ductwork.”

Lolli nodded “Her daddy taught her well. She’s been going out ever since.

Lea smiled “She’s small, fast, and can climb better than any of us.”

Waco stood and frowned “She’s still ten!”

With the girls running behind, Waco headed to his room and put on his leather vest and strapped on his belt that held his machete, zombie spike, and pistol with the spare ammo. It was an old modified policeman’s belt that he had taken off another friend years before. Waco was not going to leave another friend behind or in trouble, and all of the Brat Pack were his friends now.

With the majority of the Brat Pack behind him he headed to the lobby and the side door they all used that was easily secured and removed the braces, turned the locks, and opened the door...only to be slammed into by the tiny Twig.

“I was about ready to...” the tiny girl threw her arms around Waco’s waist and held onto him for dear life.

“Close the door...NOW!” her tiny voice commanded and as Waco picked up the trembling lass in his arms the rest ‘locked and blocked’ as they called it. The tiny Twig looked behind Waco at her family and shouted.

“NO YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND...YOU HAVE TO DO IT BETTER!”

Chino who had been in the shower and still sopping wet had dressed in a hurry and now slid a large weighted rack against the door as Waco turned. With Twig still in his arms she took a deep breath...

“I found something for you two to go after...I also saw a dust storm coming. From the roof I used my binoculars and saw zombies from...” she looked for words, but couldn’t find any, so she swung her arm from as far left as she could in Waco’s arms, and then swung it back to the right as far as she could.

“And they’re all headed this way, well sort of. We really need to hide...oh my, we really need to hide.”

Lolli looked sadly at the rest “It would seem that my parents were right.”

Chino nodded “Zoms always seem to head in the last direction they were headed, unless something else draws their attention in another direction. But my friend, we cannot hope to draw a horde that size away.”

Waco turned and with the rest following began thinking as he talked, something he seemed to be doing a lot lately instead of the other way around.

“Ok you all said you’ve lasted them out before when you were thumping them. We have enough food and water that’s left after packing, so we just sit and wait.

Lolli, get the radio up and running, see if you can get hold of Carl and Dag, fill them in and say

we'll hold out here at least another week or two, so don't give up on us. Chino, you and the rest make sure anything we have left to stack is stacked up against the doors just in case some of them make it into the broken windows of the cafeteria." he looked down at the still trembling Twig. "How long do you think?"

"We have about a day, maybe a little less."

"Good, ok kids, after everything is shored up, bring all our traveling supplies that won't fit into the two janitorial closets back up to the second floor...just in case."

Waco put the small lass down onto the floor "And you go up and make sure everything is ok on the top floor. The gang needs my help."

"No way!" Twig asserted loudly "I can help too."

Chino crouched "We know you can sweetie, but we really need you to go up there and keep us informed on the zoms. Check out all windows in case they split up when they enter the city. You know their movements better than anyone other than Waco here."

Waco smiled "With me down here, we need you up there. You can see everything from the roof, just stay away from the edge."

Twig put her hands on her hips and frowned at Waco "I know better than to fall."

Waco turned her in the direction of the stairway.

"I know you do silly, I don't want any rambler wanderers around in the area to see you from the ground..." patted her on the fanny to get her started "if they see you, then when the horde gets here, they might wonder why the others are gathered around here and come to investigate."

A tiny smile broke out on her face "Ok, you got it boss." She gave Waco a snappy salute and ran to the steel door of the stairwell.

Waco turned to Chino "Move the truck and get that portable welder out of the cafeteria hall and weld everything shut, but that side door. When that's done, I'll help ya drag it up here and we'll put the seating back on the ramp and weld them in place, maybe weld a gate out of the frames of the seating."

As Waco climbed into the truck in front of the double doors to move it he shouted out the window to Lea and Lolli "You two get down to the basement and bring up a couple of those rolls of chain link fencing."

Chino smiled "Good idea my friend, we can weld it across the bottom of the ramp."

Waco shifted into gear "Naw, I want it laid on the floor of the ramp." That got puzzled looks from all that heard, but Waco knew a lot about zombies, so no one questioned his orders.

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*Chapter 27.*

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The horde came a bit earlier than Twig had estimated, but the hospital was locked down as best as they could. The one weak spot was the cafeteria's five broken windows and they were facing the direction the horde was coming from. The big problem was the truck and the double doors. The doors swung both ways and with no longer having handles, Waco hoped that no unforeseen occurrence would cause the zombies to swing the doors inward toward themselves. The undead usually just piled up against something, and in this case it was a three thousand pound truck on the other side of the doors. Several long screws and some rope held the doors as tight as possible against the truck... Waco stood there and slowly shook his head as he looked over to Lea.

"I just know something is going to go wrong with this friggin' set up...always does." Waco held out little hope that the horde would pass it by, there was always some zombie that would wander into an open building and where one went more would follow.

For nearly a week, the horde passed through the city. The endless moaning and scuffling feet nearly drove them crazy as it went on night and day. After the fifth day it began to lessen, but no one dared doing more than peek through the small peep holes they had in the blacked out windows. With no concept of depth of area, Waco could only guess how far the massive horde had progressed, but to chance being seen from the roof, wasn't worth the risk.

By day seven the moans had been gone for hours and Waco and Chino climbed through the roof heliport door that was well away from the edge. Crawling on their stomachs, each went to opposite sides and then met back in the middle.

"It was clear on my side Waco, but to the west I saw two more massive clouds all heading back to where the tower was."

"Yeah, same here. The horde that past us, must have been nearly a half million strong. Another cloud much larger was to the east, and they were headed where this horde was. The strange thing is they seem to be headed a little more to the west than where the thumper was."

"So, they're all going to wind up near were the tower was?"

"Not sure Chino, unless something distracts them. Looked like two more clouds of dust far beyond them...the hordes we didn't get."

Chino gave Waco a half grin "Oh man, I sure wish we'd found that second bomb that they mentioned in the notes. We could have eliminated a few more million zoms from the world."

Waco grinned and nodded toward the door down.

"Yup, but now we need to deal with however many zombies crawled into the cafeteria. We all heard them banging around in there. I fear if we leave them, they might work their way out and

hit us when we're loading to leave." he grinned "Assuming we find something good enough to leave in. Looks like you all got pretty much everything that runs and parked it in the parking lot. With Carl and Dag taking the only really good vehicle..."

"Don't blame them Waco, they couldn't have known the shit that was happening."

Waco smiled as they headed toward the now open stairway down "I don't my friend, I just meant we need to find something and leave before something turns one of those giant masses of undead out there." he snorted as he glanced over his shoulder to the last of the sea of zombies that had passed "If those things ever come back to stay...naw we need to find something that runs and will last a long trip."

Chino nodded and sighed "Si, and then we can get the hell out of Dodge."

Waco looked at Chino strangely "Was an old cowboy movie expression...you know to leave in a hurry."

Waco shrugged "Ok pal, if you say so."

Everyone could hear the undead moaning and bumping into things behind the double doors that led to the cafeteria. They double checked the welds on the seats at the top of the ramp to the mezzanine. Twig kept pulling at Waco's leather vest, but he'd smile and tell her later. He looked at Chino, took a deep breath and leapt over the barricade.

Against Lea's protests, Waco ran down and slid into the truck, moved it, jumped out and stepped back as he pulled his sidearm.

The door burst opened and only three zombies ambled forward. Waco shot a glance at the three, over and up to everyone looking down from the mezzanine, shrugged, and fired three shots to the heads of the zombies.

Waco looked down the long hallway...

"Ok guys, that did it." he holstered his automatic and shrugged "Thought there would be more."

There was a loud crash and down the hall rambled at least two dozen zombies and they were headed right toward him. Waco spun and dashed to the foot of the ramp. Stopping to jump up and down as he shouted for them to come get him.

"As if they need coaxing" Lea muttered "Get your ass over the barricade!"

"In a sec honey." he swung his arms and shouted again.

When the closest few got to within a few yards, and to Lea's frantic shouting not to be stupid, he spun and ran up the ramp, climbed over the steel railing at the top and continued shouting as the undead began the climb up the ramp.

"Oh baby..." Lea grinned "now I see why you had us lay the chain link fencing on the ramp floor, they're tripping and falling all over and will be easier to kill."

Chino chuckled "You mean once they manage to get up to us." he laughed as zombie after zombie tripped and fell, and then struggled to climb over the others to get to the prey at the top

of the ramp.

It took nearly twenty minutes for the crawling pile of undead to near the ramp and just as the rest raised their weapons to begin the slaughter, Waco held up his hands.

He walked over to the arc welder and grabbed the two leads, he attached one to the metal railing and carefully reaching through the railing, attached the other to the chain link fencing on the floor.

Chino was way ahead of Waco and stood next to the generator.

“Ok, everyone stand back.” he shouted above the moans of the undead. The kids stood back near Chino and Lea moved to Waco as he nodded to the man that had saved his life. Chino grinned and started the large generator-welder and when it hit speed, threw the ‘on’ switch.

There was a horrific sound of arcing electricity and the smell of smoldering flesh. Smoke arose from the heap of undead crawlers as they fell silent and still. A few remaining rambler stepped upon the fencing and made the mistake of bumping against the railing, they joined their brethren on the still heap of corpses.

Waco’s hand was still in the air so Chino kept the juice flowing, until small flames on rotting cloth could be seen starting to flare up throughout the winding ramp.

“Ok Chino, that’s enough.” Waco dropped his hand and the pilot killed the power and motor. Waco walked over and disconnected the one clamp and leaned over the railing. He raised his pistol and fired a few shots into the couple of undead that still had escaped the electrocution. He turned to the rest as he put his arm around Lea.

“Ok gang, Twig will take us where she said she found something for us to drive. Get the supplies that aren’t down stairs, down there, Lea and Doc get the fifty-five gallon drums ready to load, when we get back. We’ll fill up, take what we can, and then come around to the side to load the rest.”

Runt looked at the steaming mass of zombies lying on the ramp and laughed.

“We’d better use the stairs unless we want squishy feet.”

Chino laughed as did the rest and then smiled at Runt “I’ll just hook the chain on the fence and drag them out into the middle of the atrium, then we can use the ramp little one.”

Lea nodded and the others began heading for the stairs. Chino shouted after them...

“And make sure there are no more zoms around before you go.” he looked at Waco “With the fuel that’s left, looks like we’ll need a couple of trucks and we need to replace our cycles, and a trailer to...”

Twig giggled like any other ten year old girl that had found the adults so amusing.

“Before you all make plans, let me show you what I found.” She grabbed Waco’s hand and then Chino’s as she walked between them.

“There has always been one part of the city we couldn’t go, bad men lived there before the other bad men came here,” she looked up at Waco “and you killed them all. Then there were so many of the scary zoms, I never dared going that far out, but Lolli’s thumper called most of

them away. That thingy you did with the bomb, killed most of what was left.” she giggled again “I barely had to hide most of the time and only had to kill two all the way there and back.

Waco opened the door to the stairs and they proceeded to the main floor and the trucks the Brat Pack had at their disposal.

“So what is it you found Twig?”

She looked up at Waco and shrugged “Don’t know, but it’s cool.”

Sitting between the two men in the battered truck Twig pointed out the directions and Waco steered toward the area Twig wanted them to go. He crunched two wanderers beneath his tires and was amazed at the amount of still corpses lying around the roads and fields. The radiation had done what the kid’s parents had said in the notes. He figured that the few still walking around, had been in somewhere that protected them. On the other hand the sound of the squishing and popping of those that laid where they had fallen, was almost as bad as fighting them.

Waco also knew he still had to watch for humans as well. As the parent’s notes had said, even outside of the well protected hospital, the radiation this far from the blast should only effect the undead. The last thing he wanted was to be shot by some raider, if any were left.

Finally getting off the expressway they swung west several blocks and Twig pointed toward a series of what appeared to be warehouses surrounded by a twelve foot chain link fence topped with three rows of barbed wire.

“The fence isn’t broken anywhere.” Twig reported “It’s locked up and there are still some zoms walking around in there, I saw ‘it’ from this side of the fence around back.”

Driving around back was out of the question, so Waco parked along the side of the fence. The kid’s 4x4 was tall enough for the men to climb atop the roof and lay a tripled tarp over the three strands of barbed wire.

“Careful guys, not sure if the barbs will come through or...” Chino looked down to the tiny Twig who had climbed into the rear bed of the 4x4 and was holding a pair of wire cutters up to him.

Waco rolled his eyes and silently cussed himself out for not thinking about the tools in the rear of the truck. Neither did Chino as he sheepishly grinned and carefully clipped the barbed wire as Waco held each strand so they wouldn’t make too much noise.

With Chino over the fence Waco lifted Twig up to the top and she slid into Chino’s arms. They crouched behind one of the warehouses as Waco dropped to the ground and joined them.

Keeping low they’d dash from one building to another until Twig peeked around one corner of a warehouse in the middle of the other buildings and grinned at the men. Her tiny hand pointed to the corner.

“That’s it...around there.”

Waco carefully looked around the corner and came face to face with a rambler and as his heart jumped to his throat, his training and reflexes kicked in. As he spun out of the way, his left hand went to his zombie sticker and, with a full spin caught the intruder in the temple with

the spike. As it went to the ground, he stepped over the zombie, wrenched the spike free and spun to meet a second rambler through the right eye socket.

Chino's machete, took down the third, and Twig took down the fourth with a steel ball bearing and her slingshot. Both men looked at the lass as she stuck the slingshot into her rear hip pocket.

She smiled sweetly "What? I've been practicing..." she spun, grabbed both men's hands and led them toward the end of the long warehouse.

There weren't any more zombies wandering around, but neither man took more than a glance as Waco muttered...

"Holy shi..." looked at the sky "sorry dad...holy crap." Looking at Chino, Waco grinned from ear to ear.

Before them, sitting behind one really long warehouse that faced in a different direction, sat two motorhomes. Not the standard run of the mill motorhomes, but ones built on bus frames. Not only did they look alike, they had to have cost a million or more, but someone had obviously modified them since.

Both buses had been painted camouflaged green, black, and brown, both had been protected against zombies. There was shielding around the areas that people would live in, steel guards around the wheels for protection from side damage. Huge steel bumpers front and rear protected the frame and engines from damage and extra tanks sat upon the roofs so that meant that these motorhomes had extremely strong frames to hold all that weight.

Waco held his arm out to stop them from moving into open ground.  
"Look guys, someone spent a lot of time and effort on those. First we need to know this isn't some sort of trap, and secondly why two armored buses are left sitting in the sun. Those things aren't too dirty, that means someone cleaned them say within the last few months...we use caution." With that Waco crouched and sped toward a truck that was sitting mid-lot. He checked all directions and waved for his friend to follow...and Twig ran after him.  
"I told you to stay there." Waco scolded Twig.

Her tiny face scrunched up into a tight puckering frown.  
"My mommy and daddy taught me to listen to adults." she looked around "But if you think I'm stayin' back there, you old men are nuts."

Chino frowned "Old man?" then he grinned "Ok, to you I guess everyone is old, you win."

Waco shook his head and snorted "Boy oh boy, you sure told her off." and with that he was off and running to rows of pallets that held four fifty-five gallon drums each and stacked in places three pallets high. They formed several rows of cover all the way to the building that shielded the buses from view of the main road. Checking carefully he slipped out of view and reappeared a minute later to wave the two over to him.

"Checked all around the buses, no rambler." Waco slowly walked toward the first bus and pointed to the door that was open a crack, but held closed by a small chain. He reached through the opening and slammed the flat of his hand against the back of a seat several times.

“Well, don’t hear nothing,” he pulled his hand out and wiggled his fingers “still have all of these.” He put both hands on the door and pulled...the small chain held.

“Well, hell!” Waco reached for his spike, but felt a tug at his leather vest.

Standing there with the pair of wire cutters in her hand was the small, but obviously better prepared Twig.

Waco took the cutters and with some effort, managed to cut the chain. Slowly he climbed into the bus sized motorhome. He wiggled his hand frantically back through the doors.

“Holy shit guys, you gotta see this! Sorry dad.”

Chino climbed into the bus...his jaw dropped.

“Holy shit!”

The frowning Twig climbed in behind them as she squeezed between the two men...

“I thought you guys said never to...holy shit!”

Both men snapped their heads toward tiny ten year old Twig.

“TWIG!”

She looked down the aisle of the motorhome... “HOLY SHIT!”

“**TWIG!**” both men reiterated as the playful Twig simply replied...

“Sowwy.”

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*Chapter 28.*

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Before them was something they could have only imagined in their wildest dreams. Light oak cabinetry, marble countertops, and all wood trim. Luxurious leather cushioned seats and the few open cabinets were crammed full of military MREs as well as packs of dehydrated food, canned food, and medical supplies. As they moved along toward the rear they noticed there were pull down single beds that folded up against the wall. They also found another bed under one of the kitchen table bench seats, this bus was meant to sleep as many as ten people. There was a small but much needed shower and tucked in next to the tiny cramped bathroom was a refrigerator sized area that was marked “Water Purification” on/off/recycle filter. Below was another series of gauges and buttons “Desalination” Waco looked at Chino and grinned. “Well guys, whoever built this thing, sure meant it for an apocalypse.” Just above all that neatly paneled in gear were several lines going to the roof with labeled shut-off valves. Gas/water/oil/hydraulic. To the right was simple enough, turbine lock down, unlock, and solar on/off. The guys were stunned.

Another quick check for zombies and they moved on to the second bus. It was as expected as they both appeared to be the same model, just different things stocked its shelves. Other than that much, all the systems were identical. Waco walked back toward the front to join the others.

“Well, I have an idea what happened to the owners, found some blood traces and a few bullet holes. Looks like someone cleaned up, but didn’t get everything. I’m guessing, but I’ll bet that bastard I killed and his gang must have lured them in.” he nodded to the empty barrels stacked next to the building “Probably told them they had gas, made friends and once he had their confidence, murdered them.” he nodded to the rear “There was some sort of struggle back there, put a hole in the wall that’s about head sized and a bloody handprint. Soooo, I’m guessin’ that something interrupted the cleanup.”

Chino nodded “Might be why they decided to finally attack us, all we have to do is find out why.”

Twig pointed to just below the dash on the driver’s side. The fuse panel was open and two large fuses were missing by the looks of the fuse holders. A quick check to the other bus found the same thing.

“Well crap!” Waco said as he slowly sat in one of the two plush Captain’s seats at the front. “Well now we know why the raiders didn’t just take off. Guess they didn’t trust those bastards...sorry dad...and hit the fuses.”

Chino smiled “And now we know why these are sitting here and Wade didn’t leave. One of Wade’s men must have seen one of the escaped owners of the buses heading toward the

hospital and just figured that he'd made it, along with the fuses. But as no one ever showed up in the last year, I'm guessing that some zoms got him first."

"Could be Chino," Waco replied "probably figured he'd suffer losses, but to get these babies running it'd be worth it."

"But no one came to see us." Twig added sadly.

Waco sighed softly "It was just enough to think they did honey." he shrugged "Chino, any chance that any of the truck fuses will work?"

"Si...maybe...I'll check." Chino headed out the door with Waco at his heels. Chino pointed to the handle that closed the doors.

"And you little lady, shut the doors and wait here. You know we haven't checked every square inch of this complex, could be something lurking around another corner."

Twig sighed and nodded that she understood as the men dashed around the building. It wasn't more than a few minutes when Chino came running around the side of the warehouse waving a hand full of fuses, motioned for Twig to open the door and dashed in.

"Found a truck on the other side of those fifty-five galleon drums," he grinned "pulled them all." He ducked between the driver's seat and the wall, one by one the fuses flew over his shoulder and Twig caught them and tossed them onto a small seat on the other side of the door. There was a loud 'snap'...

"Madre Mia..." more tinkering sounds and finally "That's the one, got them both in, have to go tell Waco what we need."

"Maybe he'll do the same thing you did?" Twig asked.

"We need a bigger truck like the semi I found, honey. Something that has a larger electrical bus." Chino got into the driver's seat and looked over the controls for the first time.

"I'll be damned this thing is a gas turbine, that means the other one is too."

"That good?" the tiny lass asked with a frown and Chino knew she hated not knowing things, so he made it brief.

"It means we can use just about any kind of fuel in it honey. Gas, vodka, rubbing alcohol, things like that." he laughed "Even some of that horrible stuff that Carl brewed up last year. Now I have to tell Waco...think there were some semis parked on the other side of the street." Chino worried about crossing the five lane highway that ran through the business section of the city. It was mostly new construction, or at least was twenty years before, and those delivery semis, must have been operational to get to the loading docks.

Chino grinned, warned Twig to secure the door, and headed off to get Waco. As he rounded the corner she could see Chino waving to wherever Waco had been searching and vanished out of sight.

Twig waited for what seemed like hours, but knew it was only about ten minutes and that the guys would have to be careful not to be seen as they crossed the highway that was out in

the open. The raiders had done a good job of clearing vehicles from the highway around their compound, maybe a bit too good. She had heard the guys talking about how they were on the fringe of zombie killing radiation and knew more would be coming through, so she didn't panic.

"They'll be fine." She tried to reassure herself.

After nearly twenty minutes, Twig began to get nervous and began to pace. At twenty-five minutes, Twig frowned, took a deep breath and opened the door. She looked in all directions and headed to the corner of the building.

The tiny lass clamped bath hands over her mouth as she saw what looked to be fifty or more zombies milling around in the wide divided highway. The gates to where she was were still locked and chained, 'good', she thought.

Then her eyes noticed something across the road, almost out of her line of sight. Twig gasped again in her tiny voice.

There was a small guard shack and atop the roof were the two men lying as flat as they could while below them the undead stumbled around. Twig climbed on top of the rows of drums to get a better look, and unfortunately it didn't get any better. Waco and Chino were surrounded, not by the fifty she thought, but by what had to be hundreds. The undead flooded the streets, the parking lot, and in and around the warehouse the men were at. Chino waved as high as he dared, and fearing a zombie might see him, she waved back at him. Chino also waved for her to get back into the motorhomes that Twig had started calling the buses.

Knowing that at some point they'd move on, she relaxed a bit, wiped her brow and looked at her hand...it was dripping wet. Her vision quickly moved to the cloudless sky, and the searing mid-afternoon sun and remembered her training about sun stroke. The tiny girl looked at the sky, back at the men that had to be nearly dying from heat exhaustion, and sadly looked at the bus. She had to return to its safety, if she passed out...

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Waco leaned next to Chino and whispered "You know we're screwed, right? If the zombies see us, they'll mob this little shack and there's enough of them to collapse the walls. If we jump down, as thick as they are, we're toast. If we stay up here ten more minutes, neither one of us will have the strength to do squat if we do figure out a way to get down."

"I seemed to have noticed that my friend." Chino slowly wiped his brow to get the stinging sweat from his eyes "What do you propose?"

"Well, I'm younger and faster. I'm going to jump down and head back to the semi that we left the door open on after we pulled the fuses. I can get in there while you..."

"You'd never make it more than about twenty yards before they mob you." The concerned pilot muttered softly as it seemed like a couple of zombies may have heard him and wandered closer to the guard shack.

Waco lowered his voice to a whisper as he nodded toward the semi cab they had left open. "We don't have a choice. If I can draw enough of them to me, you might be able to reach that

power truck near the fence. Stay low and once on top, climb over and hit the street running. Looks like the zombies are spread apart out there a lot more than in here. If you can get to the gate and climb it before they get ya...get in that jet bus or whatever you told me it was and get the hell out of..."

"Dodge?"

"Yeah...Dodge." he looked at his friend sternly "Whatever you do, get Twig back to the rest. Don't worry about me, even if I make the semi cab, remember how hot it was in there?" Waco smiled that infectious smile he always had when stuff was about to hit the fan. "Rather go of heat stroke, than be ripped apart."

Chino softly snorted "Yeah gringo, like you really will get that far."

Waco slid his hand over and grasped Chino's collar "You don't have a choice damn it, you fixed that chopper, you can fix that turbine thing if it needs it..." he raised slightly to look around and sighed one long sigh as he laid his head on the hot roof...and then jerked back up as he rubbed his cheek. His eyes drifted toward the sky. "Well dad, gonna be seein' ya soon."

"Roll off the roof behind you and that should give you another five yards."

Waco grinned as he glanced back toward the rear "Hell, ain't gonna make it anyhow..." keeping low he got to his knees, took a deep breath "well, here goes noth..."

There was a horrendous crash and the gate across the street burst open as it flew into the street taking down a dozen or more of the undead. The buses turbine screamed as its high steel bumper ripped through the zombies and sent them flying. Blood burst from under the wide tires and the sound of breaking bones and squishing bodies filled the air. It slammed into the zombies, nearly became airborne as it hit the small medium that separated the west and east bound lanes, and bounded back to the ground as it crushed more of the undead. The bus slid sideways and mowed down another dozen or so before managing to stop the skid in the blackish ooze that plastered the tires. Another slight course adjustment and the steel behemoth headed toward the warehouse's half closed front gate.

As the bus straightened they could see the tiny little head of Twig bobbing side to side as she frantically struggled to steer the huge wheel back and forth.

With an ear shattering squeal, she sideswiped the gate post and bent it to a forty-five degree angle as the bus's steel side protecting steel bars pushed it over even farther, but somehow the tiny lass steered through and with a squalling of tires stopped next to the guard shack so tightly that not a zombie could fit in between.

Chino got to his feet and helped Waco up.

"I think by now, they have taken notice of us."

"Pretty much I'd say." Waco chuckled. As the men looked at the roof of the bus he pointed "Hey, a skylight."

## The Zombie Slayer

“I think it’s more of an emergency escape skylight, they must have put in.” Chino jumped over to the bus roof and bounced up and down.

“Strong too, this baby is built.” Waco joined Chino and as he stooped to bang on the skylight, it popped open to reveal the tiny miss, standing on the counter top that she had climbed on. She had used the cupboard as a step and flipped the latch on the underside of the skylight.

The men jumped down to join the tiny lass on the floor who was standing there with her hands on her hips.

“Before you say a thing, my daddy taught me how to drive a semi, not this bus thingy. I did the best I could and hope I didn’t break anything.”

Ignoring the bony hands thumping on the side of the bus, the two men hugged the giggling girl as she reminded them of the danger outside; and finished by saying...

“Good grief! Do I have to do all the thinking for this outfit?”

Waco sat in the driver’s seat and chuckled “Now let’s see if I can turn this bus around without hitting a zombie.”

Chino grinned “Really? Bet you can’t hit one.”

There was the sounds of crushing zombies as he threw it in reverse. Twig giggled...  
“You both lose!”

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*Chapter 29.*

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With all the commotion, not one zombie had wandered into the other warehouse where the second bus sat waiting, and Waco pulled close as Chino jumped out. After a minute, the turbine screamed to life and Chino nodded he was ‘good to go’.

Waco looked over at the lass who had belted herself in the Captain’s chair next to him and smiled.

“Now comes the fun part.” He threw it in reverse and mowed down zombies all the way back to the gate and into the road as he backed, shifted into forward and headed east back toward the exchange that took them to the hospital. Chino was on his tail and all three of them knew they would be well out of the view of the undead by the time they reached their destination.

The buses were somewhat wider than the huge 4x4 they had come in, but they pushed whatever vehicles they encountered easily out of the way. The heavy steel, slightly wedged shape bumpers, did what they had been designed to do...move things out of the way with little effort.

Upon arriving back at the hospital the Brat Pack was ready and a flurry of activity began once they told them of the horde that no doubt would be ambling along from the direction they had come. Behind each bus was a steel rack to hold cycles if they ever found more, but for the present they held all the extra drums of fuel that couldn’t be pumped to the top storage tanks. Once filled with fuel and water everyone was ready to go.

The men were also greeted by more bad news.

Lea pulled Waco aside with a concerned look.

“Just after you all left Lolli got a weak message from Carl and Dag. They’re at the compound where you lived at for the last few years. They’re headed north and then are going to try to head west and try to find some sign of us, or locate this Eden you told us you heard the radio message about.” Waco could tell she was worried that she might not see her brother again as she spoke.

“Dag said they encountered a massive horde that seemed to be wandering southwest, but so slowly that it could take many months to be able to head back here. Lolli told him about Eden and he said everyone at the compound was getting ready to leave as well...another massive horde of undead was coming from the east. He said Tom’s scouts had said north was the way to go. Told us every horde seemed to be headed in our general direction and he was glad that we were leaving.” Lea spoke quietly “We said our farewells and told each other to be careful and with a bit of luck we’d meet again...”

“And?”

“When Lolli tried to reach them a short while ago, nothing but static...I...think...”

“They’ve gone baby.” he caught himself “By gone, I mean Tom always had a quick evacuation plan.”

Lea looked at Waco with hope in her eyes “And you know this how?”

“The whole compound had emergency drills, they could pack up their vehicles, take down the aerial, get what livestock they could take in the cattle truck, and leave within two hours. I’d stake my life on it, they’re on the road north.” Waco grinned “And the road they took, goes northeast a bit, and is cleared for fast travel, I know, I cleared it over a year ago.”

Lea hugged Waco and gave him a quick little peck on the cheek as she hurried off to help load. Great care was taken to load the various seeds for the plants they hoped to grow upon finding Eden or where ever they wound up. What fresh produce they had time to harvest was taken and everything split evenly between the two huge motorhomes, everyone now was calling them buses.

The entire group stood in front of the hospital as the little ones sobbed. Chino hugged Twig with one arm and Doc with the other. Lea laid her head on Waco’s shoulder as a tear trickled down her cheek and Lolli hugged her brother Pete. Lolli looked at the rest. “I did as mom and dad instructed us to do...*sniff*...just in case they are still alive and return. I left detailed instructions in our code on our planned route and destination, what happened, and...*sniff sniff*...everything.” She looked at Waco “And I told them of Waco and how he and Chino got Newt to fire and that they would take good care of us.”

Lolli sighed “this has been the only home we ever knew. Bye hospital.” She turned and climbed onto one of the buses.

Waco, Lea, and Twig, climbed into the first bus and Chino, Doc, (Kirk) joined Lolli and her brother Runt (Pete), as they climbed into the second bus. The did a quick check of the radios at the driver’s stations, and without anyone looking back, Waco headed back in the direction they had come and past an old highway sign that read ‘54’. Nearly to the tip of the Tularosa Basin Lolli shouted over the radio to stop. Waco had been watching and from where they were, saw no threat, so he did. The kids from the second bus hurried out carrying a long box and sealed backpack. As those in the first bus joined them Lea absentmindedly muttered... “Holy crap! I nearly forgot.”

“Huh?” Waco asked.

“Our parents told us if we ever had to leave without them...” the kids opened the long slender crate to produce a long rocket.

Lolli nodded as the rest set it on a level spot in the road. “There is a small box canyon on the western wall of the basin. They had something setup there and told us to just set up this rocket when we got past a point a mile back...” she smiled “and fire it.”

From her backpack she pulled a remote and as everyone stepped back, she fired the four foot

tall, solid fuel rocket. It quickly flew upward about one hundred feet, rotated on its axis and veered to the southwest.”

Waco grinned at Chino “Ok, was impressive, now what?”

Chino shrugged “Hell if I know my friend.” He looked at Lolli and Lea who both shrugged.

Lea walked over to Waco and put her arm around his waist and smiled.

“Our parents tried keeping things from us. Just told us enough in case...well, of...something like this. Mom and dad said they had programmed ever...”

Way in the distance the sky became white and everyone was forced to look away as Chino shouted for everyone to get back in the buses. The second one was the closest, so that’s where they all wound up and as the shockwave hit them, it barely rocked the bus more than a few times. Chino got to his feet and looked out of the windows toward the mushroom like cloud. “Madre Mia look at the size of that cloud.”

Waco looked through his binoculars “That cloud’s base is on the basin wall, not in the basin.”

Lea snuggled into her love’s arms and smiled softly.

“My love, I think that is Newt. What you and Chino set off was Newt’s predecessor.” She gently took Waco’s binoculars and swung them toward the north to one horde they had been keeping an eye on. Slowly she swung them back toward where they had lived.

“Just as Carl and I suspected, our home no longer exists, or at least it doesn’t look like it.” She looked up to her new love and smiled softly.

“Mom once told Carl and me that if we ever had to leave, well, once we got to this point that we’d not have to worry about zoms for at least seven hundred miles from that little box canyon. Now I know what they meant.” She looked at the rest of the Brat Pack and smiled. “Don’t you see guys, that’s why they took the new things they had Lolli working on, it was to build the second bomb.”

Lolli nodded “Makes sense now. The second repeater circuit, primer...” she slapped her forehead and snorted “I should have known there was a second...uhhh, something.”

Chino sat in the driver’s seat and nodded as he looked at the now dark mushroom that had bloomed in the desert.

“It would appear they accomplished what they wanted. The shockwave couldn’t be more than twenty miles and from that dead horde to the north...” he grinned “and the fact that we’re still alive, I’d say Newt sent out zombie killing radiation...some different kind of radiation that isn’t harmful to people and animals.” He nodded back to the cages of chickens that were still clucking away.

Waco looked at the crate full of the Brat Pack’s, parent’s life work.

“And this means that that crate is the most important thing on this planet right now.”

Chino looked puzzled “We can’t go around blowing up the planet.”

Waco laughed “No we can’t, but if their parents have found a form of anything that kills zombies and not people.” The smile left his face and he became the dead serious man they all knew “Then maybe someday someone much smarter than we are, can find a better way to kill those bastards...sorry dad.”

“Maybe Eden?” Kirk asked.

“Maybe.” Chino muttered “At least it’s a start. They might have someone there that can. But as it also had plans for the bomb, we have to make sure that crate goes to the right people.” He shrugged and looked at the rest.

“You know we had a few people that came and went, traveling to God knows where. People survived, there are bound to be others. Maybe even whole communities.”

Waco nodded “Agreed, we’ll find somewhere in here to hide the data. Someday, we’ll find somewhere safe to store this while we hunt for Eden...” he smiled “or wherever we feel it’s safe, and then we can come back and retrieve it at a later date.”

Chino nodded in agreement and added “Maybe two places? This way if one gets found, they won’t have everything.”

Waco paced the floor for a minute or two and sighed “No...” he looked out the window to the road as it rose from the floor of the basin to the lands unknown.

“If something happens to us, then maybe someday people will find it and find a way to kill the undead...” he added with a wry smile “again.”

Lea wrapped her arm around his waist and looked at the road ahead.  
“So we are the guardians of the future?”

Waco looked at the lovely brunette and put his arm around her.  
“Somehow I think all survivors always have been. There are a lot of mountain lakes and rivers, many places where civilization can grasp a foothold again...maybe already has.”

Lolli joined them at the front of the bus and soulfully looked back out the side window and the mushroom cloud in the large side view mirror.

“And our parents? Do you think...” she couldn’t say more.

Chino nodded as he put his arm around her and Runt.  
“They might be...never found any trace. There is always hope my friends, never give up hope. Stop and think about it logically. If they went to get Newt up and running, and obviously did, then they would have been cut off by the sea of zombies headed south.”

Waco nodded “Could be until the bomb went off, they couldn’t even think about heading back to you all. Ok, kids look, this is probably a long shot, but that blast was different. I mean look at the horde of zombies to our northwest we’ve been watching, they’re dead from radiation. Some new kind of radiation that did affect us. If what Chino read in the notes is correct, then that blast should have killed zombies for the next hundred miles or so in all directions. If they are alive, they might now that they know both bombs have been detonated.”

Lea nodded “They did tell Carl and myself to be in charge...maybe they knew there was a good chance they couldn’t make it back, I mean not make it back like in ‘can’t’...not dead.”

Waco nodded “Sure guys. Look, if they are alive, they would have gone somewhere north, out of the blast zone, in case you all had to leave and there they would have waited... Hell maybe even went to find this Eden to go get help, to come back.” he smiled “There’s always a chance, never give up.”

Twig squeezed through the group of hugging people, turned and looked at them all. “And so are we just gonna stand here and chew the fat, or are we gonna find our new home?”

There were a few smiles and chuckles as the group broke back up into the two buses. Once in the buses they slowly headed toward the unknown.

Lea reached across to Waco and grasped his hand.

“What about my brother Carl and your friends?”

“We’ll leave the coded messages along the way, there are still a lot of old billboards and we have paint.”

Waco nodded “You know there is a slim chance that maybe some of your parents are still around to the north. I mean there was no way they could ever get back by an easterly course. Maybe they were injured or just too many zombies and holed up somewhere until...” he sighed “Hell, I don’t know, but they might see the messages.” he pointed to an old faded billboard “Why not start now? Leave a coded message.”

Lea smiled at her love “Thank you baby, that’s a great idea and I like the idea of going into the future now that I have you. Somehow I think it will make whatever we’re going to face a bit easier.”

The usually panned-faced Waco smiled as he watched the road ahead. “Guardians of the future...I guess all our parents would have been so proud of us. And having you by my side will...”

From behind them came a tiny little voice as Twig walked behind them and plopped an arm on either seatback.

“Pay attention to the road! Just because the zoms around here aren’t around anymore, you two better stop with all that kissy-face talk watch out for broken roads...and then there could be some wild animals around we could run into...and maybe...”

Lea and Waco both looked back at the rambunctious lass.

**“TWIG!”**

**THE END.**

The Zombie Slayer

**Bonus story.**

# Zombie Proof Island.

A short story by

**Robert A. J. Turnbull Jr.**

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*Chapter 1*

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Through the cloudy skies of Michigan a sleek, modified Seahawk helicopter roared over the mass of undead as it screamed toward its destination. Inside sat two men, the pilot Jim Cox and his new employer, Theodore Lewis. Lewis was one of the richest men in the world that no one had ever heard of...and that was the way he wanted it. He leaned against the window of the co-pilot's seat and snorted ironically.

"Look at them down there Mr. Cox, running like they think they can actually run from those undead bastards."

Jim looked over briefly to the gray haired man as he stroked his neatly trimmed Van dyke. "Don't get me wrong sir, but those people down there are survivors and..."

"Nonsense! Those survivors down there are dead and just don't know it yet. Those zombies never run out of breath, just their stamina. Where a human would wear out, they can run fifty percent longer. They run and then just stop when expended, but never slow down as a human would." he looked over to the pilot and shrugged "Like I said, they're dead."

"We could put down over in that parking lot and flag them down."

"You're getting free admission to my community just to fly my chopper to my island Mr. Cox, not try to save every remaining survivor you see." he softened his tone slightly "Consider yourself lucky that Mr. Weathersby took ill and you were next on the list."

"Tom Weathersby? Jesus, I didn't know he was the one I was replacing. Mr. Lewis, call me Jim...please." he glanced over to his new boss "Is Tom ok?"

"I'm sorry to tell you Jim, that your friend is one of those things down there. He was bitten when ChemKo pharmaceuticals was overrun back in Georgia. It's a long story, but I'll explain more when we get to my island." Mr. Lewis pointed to the hundreds of humans fleeing in all directions and the packs of zombies running after them. It was hell on Earth below, but Jim was willing to risk saving anyone that he could...if he were to be allowed to.

"Not exactly like the zombie movies of old, is it Mr. Cox...er Jim?"

"Not like I remember." he slowly turned toward his boss "Sir, it would help if..."

The gray haired employer jerked at his seatbelt and glared at the pilot. "YOU IDIOT! WATCH THE ALTIMETER!"

Jim snapped his attention back to the controls and lowered the chopper to just about tree level.

"Sorry sir."

“I hired you because you were supposedly the best chopper pilot, or so your friend told me before he turned. He said you could do whatever I needed you to do...DO NOT GO ABOVE 200 FEET AGAIN!”

Looking straight ahead Jim wryly smiled “So you want to stay below the radar.”

“That’s why I had you drop to two hundred feet when we crossed the Ohio, Michigan border. It’s possible that some of the military installations haven’t fallen yet. My island is designed for a fixed number of people and the last thing I need is a shit load of armed soldiers pulling up in boats.”

Having been in the Marines, Jim was about to say something about his new boss’s apparent lack of humanity, but Lewis pointed to the west.

“That direction now Mr. Cox. When we hit the shoreline head north and for God’s sake stay below the radar.” he paused “On second thought go out west far enough so we can’t be seen from shore, I don’t want anyone trying to find out where we’re going should they see us. And here in the chopper you may call me Ted if you wish.”

Jim was beginning to become a bit angered at the complete lack of caring for any survivors and his slow burn was picked up on by Ted Lewis. “Easy there Mr. Cox, you don’t have to like me, just obey me.” he chuckled “At least you’ll be alive and safe when we reach our destination.”

Jim frowned and watched the ground below as it rushed by. All around were plumes of smoke from burning houses or vehicles. Some burnt by accident, some trying to stop the horde of zombies with fire, but from the air they could see there was nowhere to hide. Packs of undead ran through the streets, climbing over cars and trucks, several quickly climbed a high stone wall and attacked the panicking humans from above. He scanned the horizon for any signs of... Jim didn’t really know what he expected to see, but what he did brought his worst fears to light. As far as he could see in all directions, there were plumes of black smoke from burning towns and crashed airplanes. He was glad to soon be over the water, what he saw below made him sick, his mind...couldn’t get it out of his head...all those people... “AIRPLANE!” he screamed as he slammed the chopper into a steep right as a burning 747 screamed by him from below and to the left. “Jesus! That idiot is on fire...why the hell did he even try to take off?”

Ted leaned back in his seat “Because fear does horrible things to people Mr. Cox.” he looked over to Jim “Maybe he figured he could get out to Lake Michigan and ditch.”

Jim shot a glance over his shoulder and sighed sadly as a huge fireball rose to the heavens. “Well he didn’t make it.” Jim managed to level the chopper as it clipped the top of one tall pine and watched the top branches explode as the blades hit it. He quickly scanned the gauges and sighed, finding nothing was wrong, another close escape. “Man that was close,” he glanced back at the fireball “I can’t believe that there was anyone around that could fly a 747 off a small runway like that one below. They must have been trying to save someone down there.”

Below them was a moderately sized airport with one small single engine Piper Cub trying to taxi. A large pack of undead ran around from the side of a hangar, and the tiny plane swung onto the taxiway and started its takeoff from there as the runway was clogged with undead. The poor fool had panicked and Jim could see it as the small plane zigzagged down the tarmac, slammed propeller first into another pack of zombies. There was a burst of red as the small plane veered sharply left and crashed into a row of like-sized airplanes. There was no movement and after several seconds, it burst into flames.

As Jim watched in horror he could hear his new boss snort...

“Like I said, fear will do horrible things to someone that isn’t prepared.”

Jim looked over to Ted “Like you?”

“Exactly Mr. Cox, exactly.” he pointed forward “And there is the coast of Lake Michigan, go out two miles and then due north. If you see any ships stay out of their sight.”

“What about radar? Ships have radar and...”

“The radar I have installed in this, is the military’s best, if you don’t see ships, they don’t see us.”

Jim nodded to the fuel gauge “Well boss, I sure hope it isn’t too much farther. Seems like we drained the extra fuel bladders you had installed and now we’re close to empty in the tanks.”

“About an hour more at these speeds.”

“An hour? Christ, Mr. Lewis that will be cutting it a bit too close...” he did a quick bit of figuring in his head “If I only knew how far...”

“I had some of my best people figuring the fuel load and...”

Jim looked over to his employer and slowly shook his head. “I hope to God that you told them that we’d be flying low from your plant in Georgia to nearly the Mackinaw Bridge. Flying low like this burns fuel much faster than if we didn’t have to keep zigzagging around obstacles.”

Ted grinned “Not quite that far Mr. Cox...not quite that far.” and as the chopper zoomed over the clear blue waters of Lake Michigan, they left the horrors behind them...or so Jim hoped.

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*Chapter 2.*

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As the fuel gauge was far too close to the “E” and as Jim was about to think about ditching, the low fuel light came on and he frantically began switching the small valves from the bladders to the main tank praying that perhaps the smallest amount of fuel would flow into the small belly tank that had been added in the floatation chamber.

Seahawks had been designed to land in water for naval operations, but his boss saw fit to install an extra bladder in the space that was meant to keep them afloat. It was this bladder they were now sucking dry...which was good if they ran out of fuel. However Jim was rushed to the rotating chopper and never had a chance to preflight his chopper. For all he knew the floatation chamber was riddled with bolt holes or unsealed vents...that was bad if they had to land in the water. He wasn't even sure that their chopper would stay afloat and upright long enough for them to get into the raft...

“Uh...sir? You didn't have them remove the raft did you?”

“Of course Jim, we'll only be over water for a little while.” The smug business mogul snorted “Too much weight.”

“Great...” Jim muttered as he listened to the steady drone of the jet turbines “Come on baby, just a little further old gal.”

No sooner had Jim finished, Ted pulled a device out of his briefcase and plugged it into the socket on the chopper's instrument panel. A flick of a switch and the helicopter's radio beacon pointed slightly east.

“My island is only a mile or so from shore, but well out of the range of the zombies gathered there. We do not have to fear them as the zombies dissolve when submerged in water for about ten minutes.”

“Huh?” Jim turned to his boss “And you know this how? This plague just happened this last week.”

Mr. Lewis roared with a strange laughter.

“Because Mr. Cox, my labs created them.”

For the first time in his life James Cox was stunned. He had been in several helicopter crashes; three were when he was shot down during combat, and once due to an engine malfunction over L.A. He had seen horrendous things in war but this was beyond comprehension.

“You...you created...”

“Relax Mr. Cox, it wasn't on purpose...well, not exactly that is.” Lewis chuckled at the confusion and revulsion in Jim's voice.

“You see about twenty years ago, we were doing some heavy research in communicable

diseases. Uncle Sam wanted us to do some research with Ebola to see if it could be weaponized and if so, could we also find a cure.” he laughed “The grant money was good, but even I knew better having a masters in genetics...well, at least not without a chance of infection of our own troops. As it turned out one of my people came up with an idea of combining the spread of the measles virus, with the infection rate of the deadliest flu virus, with the death rate of Ebola.”

“Good God...all to keep your money?” Jim asked.

After snorting a laugh the old mogul looked at Jim.

“Why not? They pay me, or someone else...” there seemed as if for a moment he sounded genuinely remorseful, which quickly vanished as he chuckled again.

“Only I was more successful...sort of. You see Mr. Cox, something happened while we were doing all this gene splicing, and we to this day still don’t know what. You see my people failed until someone suggested that we use the rabies virus as a host, from there things just seemed to fall into place...the perfect new virus. We essentially created a completely new life, the virus was like nothing that ever existed.” he sighed “Of course it had one small drawback.”

Jim snorted “You mean the becoming a zombie part?”

“I like you Mr. Cox, you grasp the reality very quickly...good for you. Our first test subject was a condemned prisoner. He got very ill and recovered. It seems that something in his system made him immune and for nearly a year we studied him. He had the virus in him, but never showed signs of...well, anything. One of the lab techs got a small pinhole in his suit when he snagged it on a pair of carelessly placed scissors.

Within seconds and as he dashed from the sealed room to the hatch he died...or if you prefer became a zombie. He just spasmed, never fell, it was strange. We watched the video over and over...he stabbed his leg somewhere near his hip, just enough to poke through his pressurized suit. He ran for the door and as he put his hand on the handle, stopped, twitched a few seconds and froze. Miss Deidre, his assistant, ran over to him to see if he was all right, he ripped off his head gear and attacked her. Let me tell you Mr. Cox, Doctor Barber was a small man and he ripped her suit nearly in two to get to her. He ripped into her shoulder near the neck and as the other doctor in the room grabbed him, she scurried off to a space between two medicine cabinets.”

“Jesus, didn’t you send someone in to help?”

Mr. Lewis nodded slowly “Remember this subject had been studied for almost a year. We took precautions with him having this unknown virus in him, but nothing ever happened to this point. Barber turned on the other male doctor, but he managed to beat Barber over the head with a fire extinguisher and grabbed part of a metal stand that had come apart when he attacked his assistant. As soon as the metal bar slammed into and through Barber’s eye socket several inches, he died. However Doctor Washington had been bitten as well. By this time security was suiting up and as Washington stumbled toward the door, Deidre attacked him, she had changed that quickly, yet Washington had not.

Oh, he held her off for several minutes and security restrained her to another table in that room. All the time our original subject cowered in the corner of the room. He watched over her as

they moved Washington into another room...and he survived the bite and all, not even a fever.”

“So not everyone gets it?” Jim asked hopefully.

“Exactly, I won’t go into details, but we found out anyone with A positive blood is immune to the ZV. Sorry...Zombie Virus. Again we aren’t sure why, but during a routine check on the once lovely Ms. Deidre, we discovered that she had no vital signs, no brain waves, nothing we could detect, yet she constantly tried to bite anyone near her and fought the restraints that held her down. Both our A positive patients were fine...another puzzle. Now the government wanted answers and provided us with more test subjects and funds. We found that if exposed to the airborne virus, a person only needs to be exposed for less than a second to become a zombie, and about thirty if bitten.”

“Good God!” Jim felt himself tremble as if someone had touched him with an ice cube and had run it down his back “How...I mean...”

“I know Mr. Cox, I know.” Lewis sighed as he remembered back “We all felt the same as you back then...” he snorted a chuckle “even worse. You see our lab became contaminated, the virus had become airborne outside of the containment rooms and within seconds the closed ventilation system spread it throughout the entire wing of underground labs. Of course we sealed it off and contained the virus.” The older man turned to his pilot “For years we took air samples and the virus remained viable as did the infected humans. We sucked out all the air, they continued to survive, we dropped the air temperature as low as we could, to near freezing, and they were fine, we introduced nearly every communicable disease known to man, they were unscathed.

We managed to construct a safe way to get in with safety seals and the like. We found they have better stamina than we, they do not breathe, nor affected by hot nor cold. We managed to garner so little information, but what we do know is the following...

They are for all intents and purposes, zombies. They are obviously dead by our standards, but are fully functional as predators. They’re fast, can climb, jump, and even think to some primitive degree. They do not need to eat, but kill using teeth and hands to rend and tear. We believe they think they need to eat, thus to living humans, we see them eating.” he sighed “But what they are actually doing Mr. Cox, is creating more zombies...perhaps some humans that are partially immune to the strain of the airborne virus. However no one is immune to the form of virus transmitted by being bitten by a zombie.

We also found by accident, that they dissolve if submerged in water, fresh or salt, for more than ten minutes...” he chuckled “and sink like a rock.”

“Ah, therefore the island.”

“Correct Mr. Cox, like I said you’re very bright...not as bright as I of course, but you do ok. We did find out that they can be killed...if killed is the correct word,” he smiled as if some inside joke had been told “by burning enough of their flesh to destroy the way they function. You can electrocute them with enough amperage, or the usual way, destroy the brain or sever the head from the body. You see Mr. Cox, something happened to change their genetics where

they seem to have created their own bio-electrical energy to keep themselves going literally forever, no need to eat or drink.” he laughed “If they drank it might start to dissolve their stomachs. Rain doesn’t bother them as we turned on the sprinkler system, however in one set of labs that were air tight, we allowed it to fill up to see if we could drown them, and found they dissolve when completely submerged. Another we had fire protocols and burnt them until most of the muscle tissue was destroyed, they ceased to function.

We managed to draw the water out of the lab and using plasma ovens sprayed the water into 3000 degree heat;” he sighed “sadly we couldn’t do it to all the other labs. To make a long story short, both we and Uncle Sam decided this was too dangerous to work with and poured concrete over every vent, doors, and access shafts, sealing the labs forever; after all they were built fifty feet below Georgia. After that we bulldozed everything and built a brand new complex directly over the old sealed labs to make sure no idiot would try drilling a well there.”

“But it got out.”

Mr. Lewis nodded sadly “Christ all mighty, they even installed a nuke in the basement of the new complex, just in case.”

“No one set the nuke off?”

Lewis sat back in his seat “We overlooked one tiny thing. The nuke was to be set off manually whenever someone set off the ‘outbreak alarm’. The problem with that Mr. Cox, was that however it got out, it did so, and apparently horribly mutated. From the first report to the outbreak in nearby communities was barely twenty minutes, and of course everyone at the complex within minutes. No one had time to trigger the alert. I, and others, that were all A positive were at the other end of the complex and sealed ourselves in to that area that had been secured for just such an occasion.

Within an hour it had spread through Georgia, parts of the surrounding states and then we realized that it had to be multiplying in the atmosphere...it was unstoppable.”

“How long before it spreads worldwide Mr. Lewis?”

“I’d guess another sixteen to twenty hours, there is no escape. This thing actually multiplies and once in the jet stream...” he sighed “it’s a good thing there are others that are immune as well, that aren’t A positive.

“We’re alive...holy shit! I’m A positive.”

His boss smiled “As am I Mr. Cox, as am I...” he chuckled again “as are all the people that live on my island. Not everyone contracts the ZV, but we can’t be sure unless you’re A positive, so those people that had the right skills and had A positive blood; those are the people I hired.” he leaned back further in his seat and chuckled “So you can see that I have thought of everything Mr. Cox, and you are alive because of it.”

“Alive because of my blood type? Ok, fine, but I could survive out there without your island.”

## The Zombie Slayer

Mr. Lewis grinned and pointed ahead of them “Ah, no doubt you could survive for a while...” he pointed ahead of the chopper “but Mr. Cox, but can you do it like that!”

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*Chapter 3.*

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In the distance, and just as the emergency low fuel alarm sounded, Jim could see the island. A huge commercial wind turbine was sticking out of an island in the blue waters of Lake Michigan. Off to the east he could see Michigan soil, Lewis was right his island must be a little over a mile from shore.

“No, no Mr. Cox, it’s a bit farther northeast and has its own lake; this one’s just for my wind turbine and to grow more food on...again let me proclaim that I think of everything.”

Jim muttered under his breath as he made sure his mike wasn’t on.  
“But how to keep viruses from spreading.”

“What was that?” Ted asked as he pulled his ear piece out to hear his pilot “Your mike wasn’t on.”

“Oh...sorry.” Jim muttered back as he looked at the island they flew over. It wasn’t huge, but had an industrial wind turbine and plowed fields in the interior with heavily treed areas all around for wind breaks to protect the fields.

Within another minute Jim could see the second island and it was larger, and with a lake in the center. As they closed on the island more crops could be seen, many structures, smaller turbines and on every structure, solar panel arrays, and some small industrial looking structures.

“One hundred and sixteen people Mr. Cox.” Mr. Lewis proudly proclaimed “Everyone has a specialty, and everyone has a second job to do as well. I’ve gathered machinists, chemists, doctors and nurses, people that can repair, shoot...” he laughed “everyone needed to make my survival assured, like you Mr. Cox.”

“I’m a pilot.”

Another laugh “And a soldier with battle experience, a strategist, and a security expert. You will be a welcome addition to my family Mr. Cox.” he chuckled in what was becoming an unsettling chuckle to his new pilot “Thus you insure your own future in this new world.”

As Jim dropped in altitude, he could see a large landing pad and hangar.  
“Only one chopper? No planes?”

“Planes can be obtained if needed, but pretty much useless here as we’d still need someplace safe to land them on the mainland. My boy, we can make any part that breaks and we have other transportation.” He pointed to a large yacht and several smaller and faster boats. “They use less fuel than the chopper and our small refinery can only make so much fuel. So all our vehicles are diesel, as well as the boats. We have an underground pipe line to the nearest

oil field, it's small, but we can pump our own oil and natural gas..." he grinned "and as I said, I've thought of everything." he sighed loudly "I had to, I knew this was coming."

"Murphy's Law?" Jim snorted.

"Pretty much Jim, pretty much. The government refused to allow anyone but their people to arm and fire the nuke and there were so many safeguards in place."

"But I have a sneaking hunch that you went and drilled into the block of concrete that covered the virus anyway."

Ted chuckled "That didn't go well. Of course my plan to destroy the virus was perfect, but unfortunately those that worked for me were not."

Jim bit his tongue and didn't say what he was thinking, but he had questioned his new boss's way of thinking when he was hustled aboard the chopper and he ordered him to take off at gunpoint. Once in the air he explained that the extra weight would cost them fuel. The two he left behind appeared as if they had expected to leave with them...Mr. Lewis obviously had other plans.

Now close to landing on the pad, Jim realized this island must have taken years to build, his boss had known about this for years, had planned for years, this bastard knew what was coming, he had to have known to plan all of this. Lewis, knew he was going to drill for the virus years in advance and prepared.

"Looks like all this has taken a lot of time and money to build."

Ted proudly grinned "It has! I knew at some point in time that I'd be going after that virus. If not me, then someone in our government." he laughed again in that strange laugh "Hell, as we were pouring the concrete to seal the labs, one General was musing if a timed life expectancy could be built in, what a great weapon it would be. I knew then this ZV would never get to rest."

"So you figured that if someone was going to profit from ZV, it should be you."

Mr. Lewis cackled like a maniac "Of course Mr. Cox...I created it, I owned it, not those bastards that paid me to create it. ZV is mine and if I could control it I could own the world."

The wheels of the Seahawk touched the pad and Jim decided that this was not a good time to tell his new boss that he was mad as a Hatter. He had seen him leave two of his men behind in Georgia, fly over some they could have saved, and...  
The engines fell silent before he could shut them down.

"You see Mr. Cox, again I was right. If I would have allowed you to wait for my men or pick up those survivors, we'd be in the drink rather than sitting on solid concrete. I plan for everything and I've noticed some of the looks you've been giving me." He shifted his position around to look at his pilot.

"Mr. Cox...Jim, I don't really care if you like me or my methods one bit. I'm guessing that you like the others want to survive and here is your best bet. I have thought of everything, built

everything, know everything.” he waved his arm around “I understand the zombie’s weaknesses, hell, we don’t even need a fence; we have Lake Michigan to keep them out.” Again he laughed as one of his men opened the chopper’s door.

“You see Mr. Cox, we have the world’s largest moat and no bridge to cross it. That’s what the boats are for...and of course you. I have the world’s highest recorded IQ and used it to build this place, you’re safe here.”

Ted Lewis slid out of the seat and turned back to his pilot “Of course you will be expected to train several of my people to fly this thing and you will learn your way around the boats.”

“I’ve owned boats before, even handled some yachts. But I...”

Ted grinned and turned as he walked off he shouted over his shoulder “Good, then we are all set.” he paused without turning he added “From now on you’ll address me as Mr. Lewis, boss, or sir, we must maintain formality here...and a chain of command that you’ll soon learn.” and with that he walked off accompanied by several of his people.

Jim waited for the blades to coast down and got out to do a post flight on the chopper that had been placed in his care. He closed the cowl after the last bag was removed.

“Jesus Christ, two hundred pounds of clothes and personal stuff? Hell, I could have taken on at least one more person if we’d left this...”

“It’s not your job to question the boss.”

Jim spun to see a pretty woman standing behind him wearing mechanic’s coveralls that were covered in grease and oil. Her red hair pulled back into a ponytail and a smile on her smudged face as she extended her hand.

“I’m Katrina Marks...Kat, if you prefer. I’m the mechanic and your first student.” She chuckled softly as she shook Jim’s hand and he finished introducing himself.

“Seems we’re the only ginger’s on the island.” referring to their bright red hair as she tossed her ponytail “Guess we’ll have to stick together.” With a wink she spun and headed toward the hangar and as she walked she musically giggled “Guess we’re stuck with each other, bring your bags and...”

“Bags?” Jim snorted “Boss made me leave them behind, too much weight.”

“Yeah, daddy is like that...”

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*Chapter 4.*

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Jim dashed after Kat “Daddy?”

“Oh, I’m sorry Jim, my husband died in an auto accident about seven years ago. He was one of the architects here on the island.” she smiled softly “We met here, daddy had me keeping an eye on things.” She softly laughed a laugh that to Jim sounded so musical that his heart melted “We worked so close together...I guess it was inevitable that we’d...well you know.”

“So you and he were what? I mean you are a mechanic and wanna be chopper pilot...”

She smiled and answered in a voice that made Jim feel strangely attracted to her. “Pretty much what he wanted to be, he was the sweetie of the boss’s little girl. I mean once this complex was built, there wasn’t much need for architects so daddy just asked him what he wanted to do. He said he’d like to return here to the island and work on a more efficient way to farm, and...” she gave a girlish giggle “it wasn’t the ground he was plowing. We married shortly thereafter.”

She stopped and turned to look at Jim “I can fix damned near anything, and we have the manuals to that baby you flew in on. We can machine just about any part we need, but the hard part will be going and finding the material...” she nodded toward the mainland “out there. Of course it would be impossible to store every part for everything we have here.”

Jim nodded “You don’t have to preach to the choir Kat, I know.” Jim had stopped but now Kat took several steps toward him and locked her arms around his neck, looked questioningly into his eyes and gently put her lips to his. The startled Jim’s mouth caught still partially open accepted her warm tongue and his heart started beating wildly.

Just as the handsome pilot was beginning to enjoy this encounter, Kat pulled away, swept her ginger bangs away from her forehead, and winked “You’ll do!”

“I’ll do what?”

She laughed “You’ll do for my mate silly, everyone on this island other than daddy and myself have been paired up, or were selected as a married couple. Daddy figured that this way, with everyone paired up...”

Jim sighed “...there would be less problems.”

Kat laughed in her musical way “Daddy thinks of everything.” She turned and headed toward a door in the rear of the hanger.

“Yeah,” Jim muttered under his breath “I’m sure getting tired of hearing that.” and quickened his pace to catch up to the lovely Katrina.

Over the course of the next hour Jim was given the nickel tour of the island. The machine shops, the power stations, and so much that he doubted that he'd remember half of it.

Kat put her arm though his and led him down to the docks.

"Out there is what's left of Michigan." she lamented as she nodded toward the distant stretch of land "It used to be a beautiful place...I often went ashore, but never stayed because of the cold. We used local construction and we didn't bring the people that are here now until late this spring."

The wind changed and from over a mile away they could hear the moans, and cries of the undead.

Jim could feel her shudder and as she pulled him closer, she was actually trembling.

"My God, Jim, you'd think I'd be used to this by now."

"By now? This plague has only been around..."

Katrina looked into Jim's eyes as tears formed in her eyes.

"I used to hear them when I went to daddy's labs, even through the thick walls and locked doors," she shuddered again "now the virus is free..." she looked at the mainland, and then back to Jim.

"You know my father is completely mad, don't you?"

"Uh...I mean, I..."

She managed a slight smile "All this has pushed him over the edge, the guilt, the..."

Jim looked at the beautiful woman and frowned "Guilt? Jesus! You mean greed don't you? No one forced him to drill into the goddamned concrete to get the virus. So he could..."

The color drained from Kat's face as her eyes darted back and forth over Jim's face looking for any indication of a lie.

"You take that back! My father is a good man...how...how..."

"He told me in the chopper on the way here, Jesus Kat, I thought you knew, I'm sorry."

She slowly turned to face the mainland again as tears trickled down her cheeks.

"I suspected as much." she wrapped her arms about her chest and shivered "Since my mother died, daddy started to change and when he told me about the zombies..." she looked at Jim "I began to suspect the way others spoke about mom, that...she...committed..." Kat slowly pushed herself into Jim's chest and buried her face as he wrapped his arms around her.

"I'm sorry." he softly muttered as he held her close. She had played with him when they first met a few hours earlier, but now this self-assured, strong-willed mechanic, sobbed in his arms. Over the distant moans and the watery moat that protected them, Jim knew she needed to feel safe and he softly told her everything would be all right. He was just surprised that things were happening so fast, he had barely arrived and now he held what might be the last single woman on Earth.

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The weeks passed and Jim and Kat had become inseparable. During the day, he taught her to fly, at night they'd walk hand in hand along the lapping waters of Lake Michigan. He knew there was something between them, but after that more than playful kiss that first day, Kat always backed off anytime that he'd move too close to her lips.

She looked over the moonlit waters and sighed. "Look, more fires tonight, more buildings burning." she sighed again as she looked at the scattered fires that made the distant skyline glow "Haven't heard any shots in week, guess everyone is one of those things now...or dead."

Jim nodded sadly "I know, this virus spread so fast, few had little time to run and hide, let alone prepare." He gently grasped her arms and turned her slowly "Speaking of which, I think you're ready to take your first flying lesson tomorrow when we go after those things your dad said we needed."

"Really?" she sounded like a little girl she was so giddy "I can skip the books and actually do something other than sit in the cockpit and fake it?"

Jim laughed "Only once we're in the air missy. This is the only bird we have as your dad said, the others didn't make it to Georgia for the evacuation." he chuckled softly "I can't have you trashing it yet. However once we're up and headed toward the mainland, you can take the stick for a while to get the feel."

Kat threw her arms around his neck and kissed him deeply and soon the kiss slowed, her body pressed tightly against his and he could feel her warm breath in his ear as she softly moaned. Fall had come and the cool winds gently blew as Kat slowly pulled Jim to the lush grass, and out of sight of the lit areas along the shore. Pulling him on top of her she kissed him again, grasped his hands and pressed them against her breasts as they strained at the material to reach him.

"Maybe we should go inside?" he whispered fearing the cool breezes would end this moment, but Kat quickly pulled her knit top off to reveal that she wore nothing underneath. Lying on her back, she grasped Jim's arms to pull him on top of her once again. Her tongue darted along his outer ear as she softly whispered... "I have you to keep me warm."

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*Chapter 5.*

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The flat black painted Seahawk roared over the waters of Lake Michigan. As the very capable Kat deftly handled the controls through several maneuvers that Jim had given her, he smiled. Now and then Jim would shoot a look back at the nervous armed men that accompanied them as they nervously tightened their harnesses. Jim would smile and look at the lovely Kat and her nicely tailored flight suit.

As they were the only ones on the headsets, Jim looked over at his beautiful co-pilot and grinned as she leaned forward to flip a switch “Have that unzipped a bit too far down don’t you? Christ I can just about see your nipp...” she banked the chopper to the port side and then did a fast recovery.

She laughed “You should be watching what I’m doing not...” she chuckled softly and zipped her flight suit up to a more reasonable height “That was just for your eyes only baby, but it seems that...”

Jim snatched the controls and shouted as he did a steep bank and the chopper roared toward the dark blue waters before recovering. He panted a few relieved breaths and looked back at the near panicked guards. “It appears that the geese are flying south early.” he grinned as he glanced around the horizon “Must be going to have an early winter this year. Ok honey, take us back up to 4000 feet and ease off the power, we don’t want those things down there to take notice of us.”

Ted’s people had secured an old warehouse and added a chopper landing pad large enough to hold the weight of the Seahawk. Even so, Jim was glad to get back into the air once they got the parts that were needed for the wind turbine.

Kat pointed toward the east.

“We got the parts we needed and the metal for the new castings, but now we head on over to the pumping station we use to get our natural gas from.”

Jim just nodded as Kat told him it was six miles inland and also secured by a high concrete wall, and again, a large chopper pad. Kat smiled sweetly, “Daddy had a pipeline run underground to this natural gas pumping station that sucks gas from two wells. Of course the wells are large enough to supply our island for decades. Our biggest problem is the distance we have to pull the gas from the wells. Six miles to shore, another mile or so to the island, it became impossible to pump that much very long before we lose needed pressure in the well. So once every two months, we have to come here and turn off one well and turn on the other. This gives the spent well time to build up a bit more pressure because as we suck out the gas, the pressure drops slightly and we have to pump harder and...”

Jim chuckled “Ok, ok, I get it...every other month we come here to switch pipelines.”

Kat smiled “I know, it confused me at first too, still not sure I have it correct or not. I guess the important thing is knowing which two valves to open or close.” She pointed to the moderately sized pumping station with a concrete landing pad. Jim deftly set the Seahawk down on the small pad that was obviously designed for a smaller helicopter. Kat nodded to the men and they dashed out, guns drawn, and dashed to the pump building to unlock the steel door. Five minutes later three men ran out as the other two covered them, and then they followed. Someone had trained these men well. “So they just leave us here in the chopper? What if...”

Kat chuckled “Silly, if the worst happens we simply take off, that’s why we keep the rotors going. Assuming there is a breach, the men can climb up through a hatch in the roof and we can winch them up and worry about retaking the building at a later date...” she winked “after all we have two months to think on it and react.”

Again Jim was stunned when Kat told him not to worry about the undead and just fly back to the island by the most direct route.

“I’m guessing that they already suspect we’re out here.” Kat teased as they flew over a horde of gawking zombies that must have numbered in the thousands.

“Seems like there are more every day. First they saw the boats and we noticed that they always stayed where they saw us last. At first we tried to lead them away, but daddy, as usual, was right.”

She looked over to her lover and smiled “You see, if we lead them somewhere else, then they may wind up somewhere where we might want to land a boat in the future. Back there on the mainland directly across from the island, there is nothing, so we leave them there and now that the chopper is here we will always fly back this way.”

She chuckled softly “Plus should anyone want to get to us at the island, they have to go through thousands of undead first. Daddy...”

“Yeah I know, thought of everything.” Jim snorted almost not caring if he offended his new love or not “I’m sorry babe, but seriously...” he turned to look at her as the chopper touched down on the island’s concrete pad “I am so sick of hearing how well your daddy thought things out.”

Kat giggled softly “I know, but as crazy as he is, you have to admit he has thought of everything.”

Jim shrugged, on that point he had to cede. He hated to admit it, but ‘daddy’ had done one thing right, he had raised Kat well. For a filthy rich, spoiled, billionaire brat, Ted Lewis had raised Kat nearly from birth by himself. Watching her interact with the ground crew, he had to admit, Ted had done a great job of it. She was a strong, self-assured woman, and sure wasn’t afraid to lead. Jim smiled as he finished his shutdown check list, could he really be falling for this woman?

In her arms at night there seemed to be little question, but during the day, she seemed so very distant. “Daddy mustn’t suspect,” she’d caution him “Let him think we’re seeing each other, but not sleeping together...My God if daddy knew, he’d blow a gasket.”

Jim settled on having Kat slip into his quarters through the back door each night, and leave before dawn each morning. Being completely honest with himself, it was all a bit too confusing. Even more so when Jim told Kat that he'd be willing to go talk to her father and ask his permission to...and that was as far as he ever got with his prepared speech. Every time Kat would cut him off there and remind him that daddy controlled everything and that things would take time, and then quickly change the subject.

A little after five one morning Kat slipped out of Jim's quarters and crept down the back stairs and jumped into an awaiting electric golf cart. His heart skipped a beat when he noticed a shadowy figure was driving it. As Kat buttoned up her blouse, the cart drove away.

Angered by the thought that someone had found out and appeared to be taking her to daddy, Jim bolted from his back door and ran after the much faster cart. Panting and desperately trying to catch his breath he slowed to a trot as he saw the cart pull up to the main house. As he got to the rows of silage corn for the livestock, he could see Kat getting out of the cart, her clothes disheveled and only partially tucked in. She held her shoes in her hand and tried to straighten her long red hair with her fingers. From around the front of the cart a man appeared, the one that had caught her, Jim's heart went into his throat...it was Mr. Lewis!

Ted grasped Kat's hand and they vanished through the front door. By the time Jim reached the house, the light in Kat's room went on and Jim feared the worst. He dashed to the double French doors that led to her small veranda and leapt over the short railing. He paused to take a deep breath and tried to imagine what he might say to an irate father. He looked through the transparent lace curtains and saw Kat standing at the foot of her bed. Her father approached her and she threw up her hands...and put them around his neck...and worse yet, kissed him deeply. He reached behind her and pulled her skirt up over her waist and caressed her buttocks and pushed her closer to him. Suddenly she tore away from him and stepped back and Jim knew whatever sick game Ted was playing, he had to end it. His hand went to the knob and as he looked in Kat ripped her blouse open, grasped Ted's shirt and pulled it over his head. She grasped him and together they fell back upon her bed as she wrapped her legs around him. As if they had been doing this for years, Ted, in one swift move, slipped out of his pants and tore Kat's panties off as she screamed for him to... Jim turned away and with his back to the wall, slid to the cold patio floor...she had been playing him.

The things she yelled left no doubt this wasn't all Ted's doings. A good fifteen minutes passed and Jim finally got over the shock enough to get to his feet. He started to walk away, but forced himself to look in one last time. The completely naked couple sat on the edge of the bed as Ted handed her something, she took it and put it on her finger...it was a set of wedding rings. They were husband and wife! Jim's head reeled...

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*Chapter 6.*

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Jim staggered back to his quarters and sat on his bed until after dawn. What a fool he'd been, how she had played him like a fiddle. More disappointed, than mad that he had allowed her to trick him, he was about to go and confront the two of them. He dropped that thought when something that had been bugging him found its way to the front of his head... If Kat was playing him, and Ted knew about it, then why? If this wasn't civilization coming to an end, perhaps some sick little game, but now?

Still reeling for being taken by a pretty smile and shapely hips, his well-trained mind snapped him back to reality. He laid back on his bed and stared at the ceiling as he muttered softly aloud.

"Ok, so Ted must have figured I'd be trouble and set Kat on me to learn the chopper. But why then didn't Kat just learn the chopper before the plague?"

No...Ted must have had some pilots lined up, didn't need Kat to know back then, just repair. Soooo, figuring at least two pilots and choppers, one must have been delayed and Ted never said what happened to... Jesus, he was one of the few friends I had! Did Ted do something to cause Tom not to make it?" again he frowned "Can't think about that you dummy, need to think about...Kat. Jesus, how do I act like there is nothing wrong when I see her next?"

With that and the fact that it had been a long and sleepless night, Jim slept.

His well-deserved day off ended ten hours later when the lovely and deceitful Kat rapped on his door. Still dressed in the same clothes he groggily opened the door.

She pushed through and slid into his arms once she closed the door, but Jim pulled back.

"Baby...is something wrong?"

Jim wiped the sleep from his face and forced a smile as he slowly pushed her back away from him.

"I'm sorry honey...I mean Kat." he gently sat her on his bed "Look baby...uh, Kat, it's our relationship. Aw, honey, as much as it hurts me, we have to end it until I get you your wings. I mean, I've been far too easy on you as an instructor. You should have already been soloing by now. Baby, I've been too protective of you, and if something happened to me, all of you would be without a pilot and I realized the other day you need a pilot to survive."

"Oh well, then I guess that we could go change valves by land," she chuckled "but using the boats, we'd have to take the long way around...and probably lose a lot of people, or go without gas." A relieved look crossed her face "You know baby, as much as it will hurt me, our island's well-being comes first." She rose from the bed and walked over to Jim, she gently kissed him on the cheek and smiled.

"Mr. Cox I will see you tomorrow for class."

Again Jim forced a smile “Ok, but Mr. Cox is a bit much, your...father might suspect something is amiss if...”

“Ok Jim, see ya tomorrow.” She smiled sweetly and started to leave as Jim chuckled and told her to let herself out and that he was going to take a nice long shower.

Jim partially closed the bedroom door, hurried in and turned on the shower. He hurried back in time to see Kat close the rear door to his quarters. He slid quietly over to the window to see if he could learn anything...he did!

Beneath the partially open window Kat pulled her radio. “Baby, I have great news, I don’t have to fuck that anti-authority asshole you brought to the island anymore.” The stunned Jim listened as she explained everything to her husband that was forty years her senior. He replied something that Jim couldn’t understand and Kat quickly left as Jim sat on the floor under the window.

“Asshole? Me?” he grinned “Oh shit! My record.” He chuckled as he headed toward the shower. In the military he had cussed out some Admiral for sending several choppers on what turned out to be a suicide mission. Also that he spent six days running from the enemy and lost all but one man, the other choppers and crews never returned.

While flying for the state police, he flew over an airport to stop a rapist from getting away in a private plane. He stopped the plane and the rapist was apprehended, but backlogged flights in and out of the airport for hours. Thirty days without pay and a mention in his record about disregarding authority, he resigned and went into private business. His first civilian job Jim broke the rules by taking the company helicopter away from the assigned job to search for a missing child as there were no choppers available, he was fired, his boss wound up with a broken jaw, and once again Jim was in trouble...and got thirty days of community service instead of jail. After that he decided to buy his own helicopter and go into business for himself.

Things went well, until he was arrested for assault on the vice president of a local bank that refused to give him a thirty day extension and he lost his chopper...to a company that wanted to buy him out and he had refused. Jim was fined hospital costs and sixty days community service...flying state surveys for the new owners of his old chopper. The banker saw him in the street and demanded loudly that he make a public apology...Jim punched the vice president again and the local judge gave him two options, to leave the state, or go to jail...Jim left.

Jim laid his head against the shower wall and muttered ironically. “Yeah, so my lack of respect for assholes has made me one. Now this asshole that’s running this place doesn’t trust me...” he snorted “and has his wife has been fuc... WAIT A MINUTE!”

Jim straightened so fast he nearly fell. He shut off the water, wrapped a towel around him and walked over to the mirror.

He slowly wiped the steam off the mirror and stared at the guy in the reflection.

“Unless he gets his rocks off thinking about it...just exactly why would someone that is crazy like a fox and doesn’t make mistakes, send his beautiful wife to sleep with someone her own age? I mean, it’s the end of the fuckin’ world, right? She might fall for someone younger and

unless he's into humpin' zombies, he could lose her for good." he looked in the mirror and started to dry off. "So they want me to teach her to fly, not reason enough to get your wife to sleep with another man. Even Kat thought it was critical enough to do so." he sighed "Plus she hated the thought apparently; so why then?"

Jim had the rest of the night to ponder the thought, but eventually just figured that he had played his hand the best he could for now and it was up to the other players to show him what they had. Jim stepped back from the mirror and looked at his rock-hard body.

"Humph! And that bitch hated sleeping with that?" he snorted a small laugh and walked into the bedroom to get dressed. As he removed his towel, it hit him.

"Awww crap! If everyone is paired up on this island..." he glanced at himself in the full length bedroom mirror. As his eyes drifted below the waist he grunted "looks like you're going into a long dry spell old pal." Slowly he crawled into bed and drifted off.

Morning came all too quickly as he splashed cold water on his face he wondered what this day would have in store for him.

His quarters reminded him of a mobile home, long and slender like a box and from his spare room he could see his chopper through the slightly parted curtains.

"Man, I sure wish I was a mind reader." he muttered as he pulled the curtain open so he could see Kat and the ground crew fueling the chopper; but something was different this time.

After watching for a good ten minutes, it dawned on him "Good God!" he turned and sat on the spare bed "Those bastards are filling the bladders."

To Jim this meant a long trip, it also meant that maybe Ted and Kat figured that she knew enough to fly the chopper back...by herself. He laid back on the sheet-less bed and sighed.

"Man that would suck big time."

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*Chapter 7.*

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The following day Kat showed up for class and nothing was said about the refueling. When Jim said they should go to the Seahawk for some instruction, Kat kept steering him to other topics and he played along. Something big was up and all this just served to strengthen his theory.

The weather had changed to much colder temperatures and Jim knew that fuel couldn't set in the fuel tanks very long or condensation could begin to form in them. Water in the fuel was not what he wanted, but for now he just intended to carry on with her schooling as if he suspected nothing.

As class wound down Kat smiled and looked at Jim.

"Ted...daddy...wanted to talk to you this evening. He invited you to have dinner with us and with that she headed toward the door as she shouted over her shoulder "About sevenish...casual."

A glance at his watch told him he had a few hours, so he watched the ground crew working on the chopper. Things were being taken out and it was obvious wherever they were going, it would be a long distant flight. Lightening the chopper as much as they were and the extra fuel bladders meant it could fly over a thousand miles before needing to refuel. Figuring that there was plenty of fuel all over, and assuming that where the fuel was, zombies were not, refueling would not be a problem. Jim frowned, he had hoped that he might guess where they were headed and he could not. Jim slowly moseyed over to the chopper as if he had something to do, but was turned back by the guards.

Just before seven Jim headed up to the main house and had made up his mind to ask Ted why the guards wouldn't let him near the chopper. Of course he guessed the answer, but was curious as to what reason Ted would give. As he was about to push the doorbell he heard shouting from the side of the house and saw a window that was cracked open a few inches. He slid between the house and high bushes and listened. Kat shouted loudly at Ted "Jesus Ted I fucked his nuts off, what more could I do? Look, he wanted to call it quits and no matter how hard I tried, he insisted that we keep it platonic, at least until he teaches me how to become proficient at the controls. I think he's worried about you."

"Look baby, this was your idea from the start and I'm not going to argue with you, but do you really think you are good enough to fly the Seahawk? I mean it is much larger than that little chopper you trained on back in Georgia."

Kat's voice calmed a bit and as Jim peeked into the window she walked over to Ted and hugged him.

"I'm sure baby, I can handle that chopper easily. I've just been acting like I had trouble. When

we get to our destination, I'll have the knowledge to navigate my way back here, that's the only thing that I'm lacking and Jim showed me some of it already on our last trip..." she turned and walked away from Ted and slipped off her robe and started dressing.

"Just the thought of him...fu...uh, touching you..."

Kat smiled wryly "Oh baby don't get jealous now, I won't have to fuck him anymore..." she laughed raucously "well, sexually that is. Once we get to our destination, I'll put one in his head and you won't have to be jealous anymore." She zipped up her dress and walked back to Ted and kissed him. As she slid her arm through his she chuckled "Now come on daddy, your little girl's boyfriend is coming for dinner, and you approve...remember?"

Jim hurried back to the door and rang the bell as the 'bullet to the head' thing echoed in his mind. The door opened and Kat stood there in that flimsy little dress she had thrown on. She glanced over her shoulder, leaned in to Jim and kissed him and tried to part his lips with her tongue, but he refused.

"Daddy's in the other room." She cooed in his ear as she pressed his hand against her breast "Besides it excites me knowing that daddy might come in any moment."

With that Jim had no doubt that she was telling the truth as he could feel her braless nipple getting rock hard as she squeezed his hand tightly against it.

"Whoa..." Jim wrenched himself away "look Kat, keep it slow and let your father get to know me. After all you're the one that said he wants us to pair up eventually." he patted her hand softly "Let's play it the way we planned, I don't want to tick off your dad."

She smiled, grasped his hand and led him into the dining room where her 'father' sat. She walked over to her daddy, kissed him on the forehead and looked at Jim.

"Daddy, you remember Jim of course."

Ted nodded as he shook Jim's hand "Been taking good care of my baby?" he asked and Jim swore that he reddened even though he knew Ted knew what had been going on.

"Yes sir, we've been taking it slow, but getting to know one another as I train your lovely daughter.

Ted motioned for them to sit and they all did as the first course was served. He smiled at Jim "You know at some point that you're going to have to decide if you are going to get serious with my daughter...or maybe you prefer male companionship to women? If, so I'm afraid everyone is paired up and..."

"Oh no sir! I'm all for the ladies." Jim was doing a slow burn; Ted was playing with him and he didn't like it. Finally figuring that making him uncomfortable was just Ted's way of getting even for having sex with his wife, he realized he'd have to put up with it or let on he knew who Kat really was. But it bothered him that Ted was digging at him.

"I'm just the 'slow and get to know' type I guess. Your daughter is beautiful and sexy sir and I have no doubt we'll give you some wonderful grandchildren with flaming red hair to run around this island. Imagine a whole gaggle of redheaded Cox's running around calling you

grandpa” he smiled back at Ted as it was now Ted’s turn to do a slow burn. It was obvious that Ted was fighting to keep his composure as the veins in his forehead were growing rather large.

“DADDY...uh, why don’t you tell my boyfriend all about our little trip?” Kat quickly sputtered out as she was also aware of the veins in Ted’s forehead puffed out in anger, but Ted kept up his role.

“Ok honey.” he looked back at Jim “I’ve had the Seahawk stripped down according to the manual so we can make a long trip, well you and Kat and a couple of armed techs. They are proficient at their weapons and will help protect you two as well as disassemble the electronics we need.”

“Electronics?” Jim asked.

“That my friend is my little secret, even...my little girl...doesn’t know, but it is for the good of our settlement and its future. All I need you to do is get Kat there safely...oh, and of course the others as well. The safety of the mission is your number one priority.”

“And back daddy, don’t forget getting back.” Kat smiled nervously “We all want to get back safely, don’t we Jim?”

“Yeah, back safely.” Jim replied with a sigh.

“Something wrong baby?” Kat laid her hand on his.

“Uh...no, it’s just now that Ted has told me part of it, my mind is running at full speed.” He smiled at the two as his mind scolded him *“Idiot, don’t blow it now.”*

Ted went back to smiling “There is a military base to the southwest that did some experimental work, that’s all you need to know. I’ve prepared the maps and coordinates, but due to security even my people don’t know where you are going, only Kat does and she’ll tell you each leg of the journey, and you can program it in...and teach her at the same time. When you arrive, my techs will take it from there, and you and Kat will keep the chopper safe during that time on the ground.”

“Gotcha boss.” Jim smiled as he was realizing that Kat had to have set this part up to learn. He admonished himself for not picking up on her deceitful ways long before he saw her and Ted in her bedroom. She had played this to the hilt and still was.

The evening passed and he worried that Kat was getting a bit too playful as he could see the growing anger in Ted’s face and tone when he spoke. At the table she had been running her hand along his thigh and places north, but he pushed her hand away as she laughed and Ted seemed not to notice.

As they had sat in the living room having drinks she kept her hand mid-thigh and now and then would squeeze it...and the veins in Ted’s forehead would swell.

Finally Jim figured Ted’s next step would be to have him shot on the spot...he yawned.

“This has been a lovely evening, thank you both for accepting me into your lovely home.” He leaned over and kissed Kat on the cheek.

“I’ll see you in the morning for the preflight Katrina.” He smiled and she walked him to the door as Ted followed.

“Come on son, surely you want to give your girl more than a kiss on the cheek?” Ted said in almost a teasing voice as he figured that Jim wouldn’t as he didn’t want to anger him further.

“You’re right sir.” And with that Jim grasped Kat and pulled her to him and kissed her deeply...and her tongue met his as she pressed herself tightly against him.

“Ok you two that’s enough.” nothing... “HEY! I’m standing right here!”

Jim released Kat and smiled “Sorry sir, thanks again for the lovely evening...and I’ll see you in the morning.” and out the door he vanished.

Shouting could be heard and then silence as a door slammed back in the bedroom he had seen them in earlier. As Jim peeked in both were stripping down as quickly as they could. “Jesus Kat, watching you with that pilot actually turned me on.”

“I know baby I could feel your hard-on under the table.” and with that they fell onto the bed locked in each other’s embrace, and Jim slipped away toward his quarters.

“*Jesus Christ, she was playing with me...AND her husband’s at the same time?*” he walked into his place as he muttered “You conniving bitch!”

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*Chapter 8.*

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Morning came all too fast as Jim actually had no plans made. No destination, no idea what they were after, he frowned at the clueless guy in the mirror as he shaved.

“You don’t have any plan to get out of this either do ya?” he snorted to his reflection. He dressed and decided that once again in this life of his, he’d be playing it by ear.

As he walked around the hanger he saw the lovely and deceitful Kat waving at him as well as the three armed techs with her. He sucked in a deep breath and forced a smile.

“Hi Kat...guys...” he stopped and looked at the three men with M-16’s and body armor “Geez, you guys look more like guards than techs.”

“Don’t be silly baby,” Kat muttered “You know we’re all double trained. As techs of various sorts have to go on missions now and then, well, they’re trained as combat troops.”

“Good to know.” Jim grinned and then as he looked away the grin faded and that old fear of being trapped returned. He climbed into the cockpit and as Kat took the co-pilot’s seat the men climbed into the rear and buckled in.

As they finished their check list, Kat smiled “Ok baby, I’ll take off...you did say I was ready.”

Jim nodded “Sure why not?” and with that she started the engines and once at speed, lifted off with barely a wobble. He looked over at the woman with little expression.

“I have a confession,” she said over the headsets “I’ve flown copters before...or as you call them choppers. I took lessons on a tiny little one in Georgia. But nothing this complicated.” Kat batted her long eyelashes playfully.

“However, thanks to my baby, I’m now able to fly with the big boys.” She leaned forward and reached for Ted’s special autopilot and course tracker...and made sure that her flight suit opened enough to let Jim know that again she was braless.

“Now show me how to do this thingy.” she chuckled musically and Jim knew once again she was toying with him.

“Uhhhh...remember let’s keep it clean, we don’t want these guys running back to daddy and telling him what they’ve seen.” Kat nodded with a frown and zipped her suit up to a decent height.

The first leg was entered and Kat followed the heading. They switched off as the second city was laid in and Kat took a break to stretch her legs and chat with the men in the rear. All the time Jim wondered when she’d reach into the backpack that she’d brought along and shoot him in the head. He figured that she wasn’t wearing a sidearm to throw him off, to put him at ease...and then when he wasn’t expecting it...WHAM! The down side was that Jim knew that backpack within arm’s reach had a hidden pistol she was never without.

“OH MY GOD!” came a shout from the rear as Kat dashed back into the cockpit and belted in “Look below!”

Jim leaned over to look at a small Midwest town they were flying over. From one end of town to the other was wall to wall zombies. More zombies even farther than they could see to the south, and they were at five thousand feet.

The massive horde of undead stretched southward until they vanished into the haze of the cool fall day. Even slightly overcast Jim knew there had to be hundreds of thousands below. He glanced over his shoulder to the three in the back that were staring out of the windows and switched the intercom from ‘Cockpit’ to ‘All’.

“Well guys, tis a good thing that you have a great pilot right about now...” he chuckled and then frowned at Kat “as your co-pilot had forgotten to switch from the reserve bladders to the main tanks and we were about to run out of fuel.”

Kat snapped her attention from the window to the fuel gauges, flipped the switch to ‘main’ and nervously grinned as she mouthed the word ‘sorry’. The look in her eyes told him that she was not faking the horror that she felt.

Jim was more worried about where they were actually headed, as they had reached various legs of their trip, so far each turn had been in the general direction of the horde of zombies they now saw below them. He was also relieved as Kat’s trembling hand pointed at the mapping device and she muttered off a series of map coordinates. She weakly smiled “That is the final destination, I really don’t want to screw things up this late in the game you take it from here.”

Jim entered the destination and smiled. Kat was truly so frightened that she had forgotten to switch the tanks, now she was uncertain of entering the coordinates; this could mean a reprieve.

While Jim flew, Kat moved her backpack from between the two of them, to between her and her side of the cockpit wall and he began to wonder as she rummaged through the bag...she produced a tube of lipstick.

“A million zombies behind us and you’re putting on lipstick?”

She smiled as she pursed her lips “Just want to look good for you baby.”

He looked out the window on his side and rolled his eyes “*Man she’s gonna play this for all it’s worth.*” Jim thought fighting the urge to end this charade and force her hand. He opened his mouth to speak...

“LOOK!” Kat shouted loud enough for the guys in the back to hear her over the drone of the rotors “That’s the complex, I’d recognize it even after all these years!” she grinned at Jim and then pointed off to her left.

“On that building in the distance is the landing pad on the roof. There’s a generator and pump to fuel up for the return trip.”

With the deftness of his years of experience, Jim came in quickly and landed. As he had done so he noticed that this inner building had a concrete wall and a short fence on top of that. The best part...not one zombie could be seen within that area. However, outside of the wall

was another story as hundreds milled around until they heard and saw the chopper as it landed; they now became focused on the interlopers.

They quickly disembarked and as Jim looked over the short wall on the roof he muttered to Kat and the rest “It’s a damned good thing that...”

A gate to the far north side of the wall burst open as a surge of zombies had pressed up against it trying to get to the noisy Seahawk.

“Let me rephrase that, we might need every gun, machete, or whatever we can use to kill those things.”

Kat nodded “Especially if those things find a way into the building.”

One of the man looked at Kat “Boss said that the building is sealed, it was confirmed before he left Georgia.”

Kat reached into her bag as Jim shouted “Kat, you’d better get that generator up and running, then get the fuel flowing...and squeeze in every drop, I’ll go with the guys in case those zombies get in the building.”

One of the armed techs nodded “He’s right Ma’am. Someone could have broken in since it was sealed and if that’s the case, then we’re in for a fight.” he glanced down at his plans “Once we’re in, close that bolt on the steel access door. When we return, we can access the roof from a skylight at the other end.”

Kat’s hand came out with her automatic...and she slipped it into her waist band. “Agreed...Jim, get them back safely, we need...” she paused “just get them back safely.”

The four dashed through the door as Kat slammed and locked it behind them. They flicked on their headlamps and Jim was wishing that they would have given him some of that great looking body armor for protection. Two floors down and in the center of a large room was a huge walled area. One flick of a remote in the tech’s hand and a panel opened to reveal a safe. The one tech looked at Jim and shrugged, “Well, now we’ll see if bribing that AEC guy was worth it or not.”

“AEC? You mean Atomic Energy Commission?” Jim sputtered “What’s in that safe?”

“Two suitcase sized nukes Mr. Cox. From what I hear the combination cost the boss a few million, but that was before the outbreak...” he laughed loudly “and before money became worthless.”

The other laughed “But then Mr. Lewis knew money was going to be worthless, so really it didn’t cost him anything.”

The third laughed “Mr. Lewis thinks of everything.”

One of the guys turned and chuckled “But Williams and I knew something was up and when Mr. Lewis pulled us aside and asked us if we’d rather have money or our lives, we knew what he was talking about.”

## The Zombie Slayer

The other tech nodded as he twirled the tumbler on the safe “Yeah, we knew about him wanting to disarm the nuke in Georgia, just in case someone got to it.”

Jim was stunned again “So all this wasn’t an accident?”

“Nope!” the leader chuckled as he pulled and swung his pistol toward Jim. “Kat said for us to finish the job, guess she has a soft spot for you and couldn’t do it herself.” Jim might have thought that to be a sweet thought, but all could think of was that huge black bore in the pistol and heard the click as the leader pulled the hammer back...

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*Chapter 9.*

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“You see Mr. Cox, Kat and I are planning to kill her daddy and...”

“DADDY?” Jim roared with laughter “Holy shit...she’s played you too? Mr. Lewis isn’t her daddy, he’s her husband! You’re as big of an idiot as I was! Christ if I hadn’t followed her back to their house early one morning as she slipped out of my bedroom...”

“SHUT UP YOU FUCKING LIAR!” the guy screamed as he stepped off to one side so the vault door could swing open “Get those safeguards disabled and get those cases out of there.” He never took his eyes off of Jim...and that’s what saved Jim’s life as he watched four zombies amble slowly through the open double doors to one side of the room. He realized that they must have heard them from below and came up the stairs to see what the sounds were, and that last shout was all they needed to head them in the leader’s direction. Jim slowly moved toward the outside wall of the vault while keeping his hands up.

“Uh, you might want to turn around and...”

“I said shut the fuc...” the closest zombie grasped the leader’s free arm and chomped down on his neck. He tried to swing his pistol around to the zombie’s head, but the second closest zombie took a huge bite out of his cheek on the other of his head and the leader screamed in pure agony as the other men turned blood gushing from their leader. Both techs in the vault jumped out and began firing as two zombies fell and six more ambled through the door. The men began firing and one tech quickly ran out of ammo and tried to reload, he too fell to the mass of undead that now swarmed him as more streamed from the doors.

Jim ducked into the vault, grasped the two suitcases and while the last tech was busy backing away from the door. Jim froze as the pack of zombies passed by without a glance into the dark vault interior and went after the movement they could see.

Once past, Jim bolted out into the room and shoulder slammed one slower zombie over a desk as shots rang out.

“Help me kill these things!” the tech shouted as Jim reached the far end of the room as more zombies came through the center door and Jim knew the horde had gotten into the building.

Jim laid one case on the floor to open the door and held it open with his foot. “Sorry...you all didn’t trust me with a gun remember?” he shouted back and gave the screaming man a grin. The tech decided that he would not be die this way and as he put the weapon to his temple and pulled the trigger... **‘Click!’**

Jim slid one case in the next room and grabbed the other as several new zombies entered the center door and headed toward him. With one hand on the door and the other grabbing the last case, he pulled it in and slammed the steel and glass door as dead grasping hands pawed at

the other side. The hapless pilot prayed that the door would hold, but to make sure he pushed a set of double filing cabinets in front of it.

It seemed that Jim was doing a lot of praying as he now prayed that there were no zombies in this section as well.

In his mind he tried to bring up the diagrams he had glimpsed when he watched the tech thumb through them on the roof. Hurrying through two more offices and up the rear stairs he could hear the pounding on the steel entry doors to the emergency stairwell as he carried the cases up another level.

Hearing nothing on the top floor he cracked the door and listened. There was a sigh of relief and a sudden concern, why did Ted and Kat want this disaster just waiting to happen? It was the end of civilization as we knew it...and this bastard wanted nukes? For what?

As Jim headed toward the series of large skylights in a large office full of cubicles all sorts of things ran through his mind.

Did Ted plan on using them and if so, on who? Ted did think of everything, Jim had to admit, but he also seemed really unstable. Was he going to use these on the zombies...he didn't want to think about any other options.

In the service Jim had some nuclear training and knew these devices could easily take out several blocks and contaminate the land for miles around, too close to use on zombies on the shore near his island. This plague that he had unleashed upon the world was indeed worldwide, so two little nukes wouldn't make a bit of a difference...but what if Ted knew something that others didn't? What if Ted had some way to use these to turn this plague off? Jim stopped and put the cases down.

If the latter was true, then would Jim have to let Kat kill him to end all this? Worst yet, if he left the nukes and Ted could stop this...if there was the slightest chance to end this...

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On the roof the nervous Kat finished refueling the helicopter's tanks and restarted the engines. Now she impatiently paced the roof in the area of the helio-pad as she waited the return of the men. She so desperately wanted to run to the other end of the building, or at least around the series of taller structures that held the mechanics for the elevators, the air conditioning systems, and whatever else she couldn't see around.

"Hi baby." Jim shouted above the slowly rotating blades and the idling engine "Didn't go well for the rest of the guys, damned zombies got in. I'm guessing that whoever your dad paid didn't secure the building all that good."

Kat looked at Jim and smiled as he put the cases into the rear of the chopper one at a time and joined her back on the roof as she impatiently kept glancing back the way Jim had come. "Maybe one of them will..."

"They're all dead Kat, I saw them all go down." He nodded to the ground where hundreds of zombies were now streaming into the fenced in area and into the building.

“Won’t be long before one of those doors below give way and they flood into the stairwell we went down.” he turned to stare into the barrel of Kat’s 9mm.

“I am so sorry baby, I did so want to jump your bones one last time. You see if it was safe, we were going to spend the night here.” she sighed “One last roll in the hay, er...roof...would have been nice.”

Jim snorted “Like you did that bastard I left down there? Like the guy you were going to have kill me? Or maybe to please your husband Ted?” Jim found himself chuckling “Jesus Christ, Kat, and just how many guys have you double crossed?”

She smiled “So you know...aw, guess it really doesn’t matter now does it? Billy down there, well, he was just a lousy fuck, but was necessary because of his knowledge of the vault’s security systems and his reluctance to retrieve the nuke. Poor Billy helped design the security protocols. You however are going to be a waste of manhood, lover of mine.” She sighed as she toyed with the pistol that was pointed directly at Jim’s chest.

“And your husband?”

“Ted, my God, he’s a genius...and rich, and powerful, and a good lover.” Kat giggled a sinister giggle that sent chills down Jim’s spine. “Of course not as good as you, but then again, thanks to you, you completed my mission to get the bombs.”

“And just who the hell are you going to nuke?” Jim waved his arm around toward the edge of the roof.

“There’s nothing left out there to nuke.”

Again Kat chuckled, but this time Jim thought she sounded nearly as mad as her husband. “Au contraire lover of mine, do you really think our government was completely blind to the fact that this could spread, that the nuke they planted would be used? Just as Ted was busy building his island of solitude off the coast of Michigan, good old Uncle Sam was building two lab complexes that would not only work on a way to stop these things, but survive should the virus ever get out. Hell Jim, I guess good politics went into play. Uncle Sam couldn’t just nuke a part of Georgia, so they built bunkers under some guise or other. Then there are ships at sea, but we’ll have to deal with them as needed.”

“That’s good to destroy the zombies. So why...”

“Don’t you see Jim...if they figure out a way to kill all the zombies, they know Ted was responsible for releasing the outbreak and disabling the containment bomb, they’d come after him. Each knew about the other’s zombie escapes, but we cannot take a chance, so Ted had a plan ‘B’.

“B?”

“He also has an aeronautics division. So just before drilling into the sealed complex, he had two drones they use to bomb terrorists, sent to the island.” she grinned “Some of those crates

stored in the third hangar are the disassembled drones. Billy created a trigger to detonate the bombs when they are one hundred feet off the ground and over the government complexes, boom, and no more problems for Ted. All we have to do is program in the GPS coordinates.” she smiled sinisterly “The GPS system still works you know, we need to act before they eventually go down.”

“Christ all mighty Kat, they might come up with a way to save humanity.”

“We can’t risk it lover. Ted had thought of everything, we will be the only survivors, and you however...” she sighed loudly.

Kat’s 9mm clicked and as she glanced down at the gun and then to Jim, he produced the magazine from the pocket of his flight suit.

As she looked at his hand he shook his head slowly.

“I had so hoped that you’d never be able to pull the trigger...lover.” he smiled sadly “But I see replacing the clip with an empty one while you were back talking to the techs, paid off big dividends. It seems that I get to live.”

“And now you’re going to kill me?” Kat slowly unzipped her flight suit all the way down to her navel and smiled seductively “And lose all of this? You know baby, I could come with you. After all we really were great in bed together.” She stepped closer to him, but it was Jim’s turn to pull a weapon that had flown across the floor as one tech met his doom.

“Let me seriously think about it...uhhh, no!” Jim pointed the weapon at her head and she stepped back and put her arms in the air.

“Guess you figured out that I’m taking the chopper and leaving you here, but just to let you know, there are no hard feelings...” he reached into the chopper and tossed the two suitcase sized bombs out onto the roof.

“These are filled with books and manuals from below. I pulled the mechanisms out and disabled the ability to use them as weapons. I also loosened the lead housings so as I threw them the material fell out...oh, and left a note on the doors to the room about exposed nuclear material.” it was Jim’s turn to laugh “And added that the room would be safe to enter in about 10,000 years.”

“So I’m to meet my death here on a roof in the middle of nowhere, didn’t see that one coming.” Kat actually grinned.

“I’m not that heartless, lover.” he pointed back the way he came.

“Down there and to the south a half mile or so, there is a small single engine plane and short runway. You should be able to make it there and it looks safe, and well fenced. You’re resourceful enough to figure out a way to get there and take off. I showed you how to navigate and I know you’re checked out on small aircraft as well. I also hope that you remembered those little landing strips that I pointed out and mentioned that they most likely had fuel. At the time we passed over them they had few if any zombies wondering around.”

He sighed as he slowly backed toward the Seahawk.

## The Zombie Slayer

“Being the cold hearted, calculating bitch, that you are, I have no doubt that you’ll make it back just fine, but you’d better hurry.”

Kat looked puzzled “Why?”

“Winter’s coming lover, you all are from the south, Michigan can be a bitch in the winter. You know the winds off the lake can toss a little plane around, sleet, snow...” he chuckled “you’ll want to hurry before the first snows.” Jim wiggled the gun toward the chopper “Go ahead and get in, hell, I’ll even take you to the plane, but be fast...you know how much zombies love the sound of this thing.”

Kat waved both arms “No way, I’ll take my chances getting there on the ground, that sound will draw them like flies to a pile of...”

Jim nodded “Ok, tell ya what...I’ll fly around over to the other side of the complex and draw off the zombies. When it’s clear, you go down the fire escape and head for the plane, I’ll fly low and give you time to get it started and taxi.”

“Why Jim?”

“Hell if I know Kat, hell if I know.”

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*Chapter 10.*

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Jim scrambled into the chopper and leaned out of the cockpit window as Kat shouted over to him.

“See I told you that you were a good guy.”

Jim snorted and nodded as he lifted off the roof. Kat quickly headed toward the fire escape. Swinging low and loud Jim slowly took the huge Seahawk around the building as the packs of fast moving zombies chased after this noisy interloper. They poured from the buildings of the complex and followed the low flying Seahawk.

Over the broken gates he flew and eventually the packs joined into one huge horde and just as he had planned, they followed. Looking at the screaming mass below Jim chuckled, it sure wasn't like the old zombie movies of yore, some of the undead were jumping up as if they thought they could jump the few hundred feet he was at, and pull him down.

Jim checked around to make sure there were no obstacles that he might hit and slowly backed out of the area flying nearly sideways he could see the petite Kat running to the fence and climbing over and not one zombie noticed.

He flew a bit higher to clear a much taller building in the complex that blocked his way...and a dozen undead ran off the roof trying to reach the unreachable helicopter, it was almost comical. By the time he got to the other side of the structure, he could see the small red and white single engine aircraft leaving the runway and he gained altitude to match the airplane.

At 5,000 feet Jim cruised along-side of the small aircraft and Kat nodded held up several fingers to let him know what radio frequency she was on. Just as he switched, he could hear her.

“...and had a full tank of gas, with these winds I should be back in less than a day and a half. All I need is one of those small airstrips to be free of zombies to refuel.” she chuckled softly into her mike “This thing you did is one thing that ‘daddy’ didn't figure on.”

“You do know that you all won't be going back for those bombs, right?”

“I know lover, and I'll tell Ted just that.” she chuckled into the mike “Your ability to get things done is beyond question as far as I'm concerned, there'll be no returning.”

Jim laughed loudly into his mike.

“I know...” he nodded back toward the building and Kat looked over her shoulder to see heavy black smoke pouring from various windows.

“I took precautions.” he laughed again “Now not only will someone have to find the material, but dig through all the rubble of a five story building and that my ex-lover, will be nearly impossible to bring enough people and equipment to do that. Even if you did the circuitry has been destroyed and your electronics geniuses are dead.”

There was a long pause and then Kat's musical voice came back. "Didn't see that one coming either. Baby, you are amazing, but you aren't 'daddy'." She waved and smiled that wonderfully sexy smile that Jim would miss. "Safe trip lover." and with that she banked to the northeast and moved away from Jim.

Jim gave her a little salute and a smile as his Seahawk swung southeasterly. His radio crackled.

"So baby, where you flying off to?"

"Oh thought I'd try the Caribbean for a while." he chuckled "Have enough fuel to reach Gitmo, hell who knows, if I find some place to refuel, maybe I'll try for one of those islands you always read about."

Kat's voice came back soft and almost believable "Go for the less populated ones baby and you're right, they are beautiful. We always loved the south, spent all of our lives there." she chuckled "Don't know a lot about Michigan, but Ted knew the water would protect us, so we'll adjust. Don't think this radio is very...owerful...bes...of...uck..." there was nothing but static.

Jim knew they were both headed away from each other as quickly as they could and he would not hear from the lovely and sexy Kat ever again.

The sun was now overhead and he hoped that he could find a large building with a helipad on it to spend the night. It had been a long and trying day for the handsome pilot and he could feel it in his bones.

One last glance off toward the direction he knew Kat was flying in and Jim slowly formed a smile as he muttered aloud.

"Well lover you were a great lay, but gotta give it to ya, you were loyal to your husband..." he chuckled "sort of, not counting me...or your Billy."

He looked below and saw no humans running for their lives and knew that everywhere else whatever humans were left had been killed or found shelter.

Endless miles passed below and just before dark, Jim found a skyscraper with a helipad on the roof, and more importantly it was high enough for him to land after one circle to make sure the roof was not just clear but secure.

Seeing the roof entrances both blocked from the outside, he knew someone had gotten off after blocking the doors and wondered where they had taken off to. Maybe he could find them someday.

Upon landing he checked the heavy bracing and a note stating that they were going to try to make the gulf and that they had heard that several of the islands were fighting to take back their islands from the undead and that was good enough for Jim, a place to start.

He settled into the chopper's floor for the night and even this deep in the south, he had to close the doors to keep out the chill of the approaching winter.

Jim choked down the last food bar and the second to the last bottle of water and curled up on some tarps.

## The Zombie Slayer

“Sure hope I find one of those islands tomorrow,” he muttered aloud “sure would suck if I got this far to starve to death. Hell, maybe even some ship with a landing pad on it.”

He remembered what Ted had told him about the zombies seeming to sense where large populations of humans were located and thought about the thousands of zombies standing on the lake shore grunting and groaning in vain at Ted and his people.

Then his thoughts turned to the treacherous Kat and her overly confident abilities. He chuckled softly...

“Poor girl, if she got to either of those little air strips in Ohio and flies through the night, she’ll be home by dawn. Something else she never thought of, tailwinds, won’t take her a day and a half, probably refueled already. Wonder what else Ted has in mind when he finds out this plan failed?”

Jim Cox looked as the setting sun played long dark shadows on the walls of the chopper. He snuggled into the tarp and shivered slightly.

“Going to be a cold winter this year.” he laughed softly “Just like the last four or five winters. Too bad all those people are from the south...”

Jim Cox rolled over and closed his eyes as he sighed...  
“or they’d know that Lake Michigan always completely freezes over in that area...” he smiled and pulled the tarp over his head.

“Bet daddy never thought of that.”

**The End.**